

# Regional Higher Education Reform Initiatives in Africa: A Comparative Analysis with the Bologna Process

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## Abstract

Europe's Bologna Process has been identified as a pioneering approach in regional cooperation with respect to the area of higher education. To address the challenges of African higher education, policymakers are recommending regional cooperation that uses the Bologna Process as a model. Based on these recommendations, the African Union Commission (AUC) in 2007 developed a strategic document on higher education harmonization. As higher education reforms are context-specific, the question arises as to how the policy of harmonization of higher education systems in Africa can be implemented in a way that fosters greater regional integration, taking into consideration the context of African higher education systems. This research, which is based mainly on a review of European and African official documents, focuses on the reform issues proposed by the AUC in the harmonization process and compares them with those of the Bologna Process.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Regionalization, Harmonization, Africa, Bologna Process

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## 1. Introduction

In the age of globalization major economies are knowledge-based and characterized by high levels of skills and education, lifelong learning, and innovation (Babes, 2009). According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), human capital has been "the single-most important engine of growth in OECD countries in the past three decades" (OECD, 2002, p. 17). Globalization has also spread the concern for quality and relevance in the higher education sector, beyond national borders since issues of mobility and employability of graduates, transferability of credits, and comparability of qualifications across borders, have become a priority for higher education reforms in many countries (Teichler, 2004). Various countries have initiated different kinds of higher education regional policy reforms through regional integration forums (Knight, 2013). A prime example of a pioneering process in regional cooperation on higher education is Europe's Bologna Process, launched after the adoption of the Bologna Declaration (1999) which was signed by 29 European countries on 19 June 1999 in Bologna, Italy. The Bologna Process was introduced to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and had four basic objectives, namely: i) to adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees (two cycles: bachelor's and master's degrees); ii) to set up a system of credits (European Credit Transfer System; ECTS) to promote the mobility of students and researchers; iii)

to ensure European cooperation in quality assurance; and iv) to introduce a European dimension into higher education. Most regional organizations including the African Union Commission (AUC) are using the Bologna Process as a model for higher education integration schemes (Woldetensae, 2009). The difference in the functional, organizational, and political contexts of integration in the European and African regions, however, has prompted discussions among scholars on the feasibility and effectiveness of policy transfer among countries.

The Bologna Process was implemented in the context of the European Union (EU) which has a long history, (dating back to 1950), of progressive industrial, political, legal, economic, social, and cultural integration among states. This has culminated in the highest form of integration, with a single currency, a unified foreign and security policy, and common citizenship rights, as well as cooperation in the area of immigration, asylum, and legal affairs (Charlier & Croché, 2009). However, even though the Bologna Process gave formal recognition to integration within higher education, most European universities already had a culture of intra-regional academic mobility and higher education cooperation prior to the Bologna Process being adopted. The structural contexts mentioned above, which very much favor harmonization of higher education systems in Europe, do not exist in the African context. Moreover, previous policy harmonization and regional integration initiatives in Africa have encountered challenges of institutional inefficiency, inadequate funding, lack of political commitment, and weak coordination among different actors (Westerheijden et al. 2010). Thus, in the light of these challenges, an important question to consider is how to implement the current policy of harmonization of higher education systems in Africa so as to foster greater regional integration.

Although in-depth research has been conducted on the impact of the Bologna Process on the European higher education system (see, for example, Witte, 2006 and Westerheijden et al. 2010), little systematic knowledge has been generated about the implications of such a process to other regions. The objective of this paper is to conduct a comparative document analysis of the Bologna Process and the African harmonization strategy in order to conceptually analyze the similarities and differences between the two.

## **2. Method**

As methodology we use a comparative thematic analysis to conduct a comparative document analysis between the Bologna Process and African higher education harmonization strategies. This is a qualitative analytic method that aims at “identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns [themes] within data. It minimally organizes and describes data set in detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). According to Braun & Clarke (2006, p. 82), “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.” In this regard, the comparative thematic analysis will provide us with a perspective to address more specific research questions that have been identified for analysis. These are: How is the policy of harmonization of higher education systems in Africa intended to be implemented within the regional context? What are the similarities and differences between the Bologna Process and the African harmonization strategy?

## **3. Conceptualizing Regional Higher Education Reforms and Policy Harmonization**

As globalization gradually diminishes the role of both virtual and physical boundaries, the demand for free movement of people and the exchange of values and policies across borders have become more visible. Marginson & Wende (2007, p.11) define globalization as “the processes of world-wide engagement and convergence associated with the growing role of global systems that criss-cross many national borders.” The notion of interconnectedness implies growing interdependence between, and convergence of, ideologies, values, policies, and procedures with the aim of achieving common goals. Interconnectedness as an aim also implies the free flow of technology, capital, knowledge, people, values, and ideas across borders, as well as the creation of new forms of interdependencies between actors, institutions, and states. In response to the demands of globalization, various higher education institutions (HEIs), national governments, and regional organizations are engaging in different kinds of higher education reform to facilitate both bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The response of HEIs with reference to globalization is termed internationalization, which refers to “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education” (Knight, 2008, p. 2). When the responses to globalization take place on a regional level (for example, Europe’s Bologna Process or the African harmonization strategy), the process is called regionalization of higher education (Knight, 2008).

In conceptual discussions of higher education integration and regionalization, Knight (2013) and Woldegiorgis (2013) both argued that there are different levels and intensity of convergence or policy integration; these can be explained using different terminologies that subsume integration, cooperation, collaboration, and harmonization, to mention a few. Furthermore, integration is a process that may require various steps, depending on the degree of commitment of

the different actors. As argued by Woldegiorgis (2013, p.14),

The history of European integration can be a good example of such a process of integration which has passed through various stages of cooperation starting from European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to the European Economic Community (EEC) and then to European Union.

For the purposes of this paper, the term “harmonization” will be used as a concept that describes policy integration in higher education. This is because the concept of harmonization includes the notion of voluntary intergovernmental integration, which brings together diverse policy systems and creates commonalities. The higher education integration schemes in Europe and Africa also use the term harmonization in policy documentation that describes higher education integration processes. The term was created in the EHEA and is a central element of the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) which was conceived and signed as the architecture for the European higher education system. The African Union (AU) has also developed a framework to harmonize the higher educational system in the region; its policy document clearly refers to the process as harmonization, which is described as:

the agreement, synchronization and coordination of higher education provision...whilst developing and agreeing to minimum standards and ensuring equivalency and comparability of qualifications between and within countries...to enhance quality across the sector and facilitate processes that lead higher education systems to be able to inter-operate more effectively to the benefit of development (Woldetensae, 2009, p. 3).

It should also be noted that harmonization is not synonymous with standardization, creating uniformity, or achieving identical higher education systems. Rather, harmonization refers to the coordination of educational programs that have agreements on minimum academic standards and ensure equivalence and comparability of qualifications between and within countries (Woldegiorgis, 2013). Thus, harmonization can be understood as the process of establishing benchmarks for qualifications, program delivery, and certifications. It might include synchronizing of credit systems, quality assurance mechanisms, accreditation, recognition of qualifications, quality control, and language uniformity. The general purpose of harmonization is to facilitate comparability and compatibility of qualifications so as to promote employability across regions. At policy level, it implies a process to establish regional regulatory mechanisms and thereby create common values that promote the competitiveness of the regional higher education arena (Hoosen et al., 2009).

To analyze regional higher-education policy-harmonization initiatives, a conceptual and analytical framework is needed that provides a comprehensive explanation and analysis of policy processes. In this regard, the analytical framework developed by Knight (2013) as a functional, organizational, and political approach to higher education is a crucial tool for analyzing both the Bologna Process and the African harmonization strategy. According to Knight (2013), the ways in which harmonization of higher education systems can take place are best explained through their functional, organizational, and political processes, as shown in Table 1 and detailed in section 4.

Table 1. Analytical Framework of Higher Education Harmonization Process

<i>Approaches</i>	<i>Issues</i>	<i>Thematic areas</i>
Political	Documents (strategic, treaties, etc.)	Harmonization policies
Functional	Quality, credit system, degree structure, student mobility (etc.)	Harmonization instruments
Organizational	Networks; government and nongovernmental bodies	Harmonization actors

**Source.** Adapted from Knight (2013)

The above three approaches can be framed through the regional integration theory of neofunctionalism. Neofunctionalism was initially developed by Ernst Haas (1958) in *The Uniting of Europe*. It asserts the notion of incremental integration which implies that one integration action leads to another in a slipover effect. According to the theory, in this process, the decision-making power is shifted to the resulting new center in the political community. Neofunctionalism is founded on the liberal tradition of international relations which emphasizes the role of nonstate actors and supranational regional institutions like the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) in the process of policy harmonization. It is premised on the assumption that interdependence between states becomes a prerequisite as economic interest shifts from exclusively nation-state control toward the supranational level (Wiener & Diez, 2009). Neofunctionalism explains regional integration not as a static action but as a continual process which is interlinked across various sectors. The theory can also be instrumental in explaining the process of regional policy formulation as either bottom-up or top-down, revolutionary or evolutionary, and internally or

externally driven. Application of the neofunctionalist theory of integration makes an important contribution to explaining the policy trends of regional higher education policy harmonization processes because it basically explains policy harmonization from the process and actor perspective. The process perspective explains policy formulation and implementation processes as either bottom-up or top-down, formal or informal, revolutionary or evolutionary. The actor perspective, on the other hand, looks at the nature and role of actors in integration processes.

#### **4. Regional Higher Education Integration and Policy Harmonization in Europe and Africa**

Within the various regional higher-education policy-harmonization initiatives in Europe and Africa, there are differences and similarities in terms of policy formulation, actors involved and their roles, and the organizational settings of the process. This section compares the European Bologna Process and the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy on the basis of the approaches discussed in Table 1.

##### *4.1 Political Approach*

The political approach emphasizes the ideological justification for policy objectives. Policy objectives can be revolutionary in the sense of being outcomes of a one-time policy decision, or evolutionary if they are outcomes of a process of various policy decisions. In this regard, regional higher-education integration initiatives both in Europe and Africa are not simply outcomes of a single policy declaration but products of evolutionary processes of various policy initiatives or sequences of declarations and conventions. For instance, even though it is the Bologna Process that is believed to have brought the issue of higher education integration to the regional levels in Europe from 1999 onwards, other specific initiatives since the 1950s have also led to the current process being developed. Several instruments brought issues of common quality-assurance frameworks, transferability of credits, and comparability of qualifications to the region before the adoption of the Bologna Process. These are: the European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1956); the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the Europe Region (1979); the European Commission proposition on the adoption of the ECTS (1989); and the European Convention on the General Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1990) (European Treaty Series - No.21, 1956).

The same holds true for the basic principles of the harmonization of higher education programs for the African Union (AUC, 2007); these are also outcomes of various policy initiatives in the realm of higher education cooperation and resulting from intergovernmental conferences of African ministers of education since the 1960s. Various initiatives raised the main issues of harmonization of higher education in Africa before the 2007 strategic document. These include: the Regional Conference of University Leaders in Khartoum, Sudan, in 1960 and its subsequent document on inter-African cooperation in higher education development; the 1961 Addis Ababa and 1962 Madagascar conferences of African ministers of education and the resultant 20-year higher education development plan for Africa; the 1967 conference in Rabat, Morocco, of African ministry of education and university leaders which led to the establishment of the Association of African Universities (AAU); the 1969 conference of university leaders in Kinshasa; and the 1972 workshop in Accra, Ghana, on creating an African University (Lulat, 2003) and the resulting document on the challenges of African universities.

Specific legal documents serve as a legal basis for the current Bologna Process and the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy and are crucial as a foundation for the processes. The 1997 Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications, commonly known as the Lisbon Convention, and the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration, for example, are considered to be the architecture of the Bologna Process, which was set in motion in 1999 through a declaration by the education ministers of 29 countries. These documents established a qualification recognition framework (The European Treaty Series, n°165, 1997), as well as a shared understanding with respect to the mutual recognition of academic degrees through gradual convergence toward a common framework of qualifications and cycles of study, increased student mobility, and the integration of graduates into the European labor market.

The legal foundation of the African higher education harmonization process was laid down by the Arusha Convention adopted in 1981 in Arusha, Tanzania (UNESCO, 1981). The Convention provides a legal framework for the recognition of studies and degrees of higher education in Africa. It aims to promote close cooperation among the higher education initiatives of African countries; it adopts criteria that guarantee the comparability of credits, subjects of study and certificates, diplomas, degrees, and other qualifications (UNESCO, 1981). It was on the basis of the Convention that the AUC developed the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy in 2007 to facilitate mutual recognition of academic qualifications and enhance intra-African academic mobility. Thus, consistent with neofunctionalist theory, the higher education harmonization efforts of both the Bologna Process of Europe and the Higher Education Harmonization Strategy of Africa did not devise completely new policies to harmonize higher education provisions; they are products of the progressive evolution of objectives enshrined in

various policy documents that gave birth to the current higher education integration schemes.

The early initiatives of higher education cooperation or policy harmonization, discussed above, both in Europe and Africa aimed simply to facilitate the mobility of students and comparability of studies. They were not intended to create a common degree structure and cycle, lifelong learning, employability, develop student-centered learning outcomes, and create a regional higher education research area. The EU and AU were not even directly involved in most of the earlier initiatives. The spillover effect of other regional policy initiatives with the gradual transformation of Europe into the European Union and the Organization of African Unity into the African Union brought issues of higher education reform on to the regional agenda. Since the 1980s the role of higher education has thus expanded in the developed world into a process of transformation from an industrial to a knowledge society (Hoosen et al., 2009). This has basically changed the overall philosophy relating to higher education; the latter has increasingly been infused with additional elements focusing on economic competitiveness, relevance of studies, and employability of graduates. It was this that brought about the involvement of the EU and AU through their respective Commissions.

The Lisbon Agenda, for example, is an EU initiative along the lines of the Bologna Process that aimed to improve the competitiveness of Europe in terms of innovation and the knowledge economy (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2010). The AU has also stressed the relevance of HEIs in the knowledge-based economy for furthering development in its initiative entitled the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The NEPAD document provides an action agenda for higher education focusing on funding, governance and management, quality assurance, and public-private partnerships (NEPAD, 2001). As stated in paragraph 28 of the NEPAD document, the main idea behind it was to be competitive in the expanding global knowledge economy: "while globalization has increased the cost of Africa's ability to compete, we hold that the advantages of an effectively managed integration present the best prospects for future economic prosperity and poverty reduction" (NEPAD, 2001, p. 4). Thus, the current initiatives of both the Bologna Process and the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy go beyond promoting student mobility and comparability of qualifications to incorporating issues of quality, competitiveness, and relevance of qualifications for the knowledge economy.

Apart from the evolutionary nature of the harmonization process in both regions, the principles and objectives of both the Bologna Process and African harmonization strategies are also formulated incrementally. When it was declared in 1999, the Bologna Process did not become a fully fledged document in the sense of documenting the entire objectives of the process. It was meant to strengthen the competitiveness and attractiveness of the EHEA and had the following basic objectives, namely: i) establishing easily readable and comparable degrees (two cycles – bachelor's and master's); ii) establishing a system of credits (ECTS); iii) promoting mobility of students and researchers; iv) ensuring European cooperation in quality assurance; and v) introducing a European dimension into higher education (Bologna Declaration, 1999). Since 1999, however, the objectives of the Bologna Process have expanded every two and, later, every three years when communiqués have been issued by the ministerial meetings.

The Prague Communiqué (2001), for example, introduced the idea of lifelong learning as a Bologna Process objective and also emphasized the role of students and HEIs as stakeholders in the process. The Berlin Communiqué (2003) incorporated the issue of quality assurance at institutional, national, and European level; the inclusion of doctoral level as a third cycle; the recognition of degrees and periods of studies (Diploma Supplement); a European framework of qualifications; and creation of synergies between the EHEA and the European Research Area (ERA) by forging closer links between education and research. Two years later, the Bergen Communiqué (2005) added new goals and acted to reinforce the social dimension; adopted standards and guidelines for quality assurance; committed to elaborating national frameworks of qualifications; and sought progress in the award and recognition of joint degrees and in creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education. Since 2009 the Bologna document has not incorporated additional objectives but has emphasized the full implementation of the above objectives so as to achieve the EHEA by 2020 (London Communiqué, 2007).

After the endorsement of the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy document by the third Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMEDAF III) in 2007, African higher education ministers also started meeting every two years to evaluate the progress of the harmonization process (AUC, 2007). But unlike the Bologna Process which incorporates new objectives every two years by communiqué, the COMEDAF meetings basically pass recommendations and action lines that need to be observed by the AUC. In the Mombasa, Kenya, Communiqué of 2009, for example, COMEDAF IV urges the AUC to expedite the implementation of African Quality Rating Mechanisms. The 2009 Communiqué also endorses the adoption of a database of all agencies and institutions working on education in Africa to speed up operationalization of an African Cluster of Education Development. In the Abuja, Nigeria, Communiqué of 2012, COMEDAF V discussed the implementation path of the

harmonization strategy, including the Pan-African University. Thus the core objectives of the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy have not been expanded since 2007 (AUC, 2007).

In terms of general objectives, both the Bologna Process and the African harmonization strategy are comparable, as both documents took as their main objectives the creation of a regional higher education area, mutual recognition of academic qualifications, promotion of student and staff mobility, provision of a framework for the development of effective quality assurance mechanisms, and transferability of credits. These general objectives, however, are stated more specifically, through various communiqués, in the Bologna Process than in the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy. The African Higher Education Harmonization Strategic Document, however, sets six principles as the ideological foundations for the whole process, namely: i) harmonization should be an African-driven process; ii) it should be a true, mutual partnership of all the key players; iii) it should be enhanced with appropriate infrastructural support and funding; iv) it should involve the mobilization of all stakeholders in governments, institutions, civil society, and the private sector; vi) it should not disrupt, but should enhance, national educational systems and programs; and vii) it should involve improvement of quality through appropriate funding and infrastructural provisions in each country (AUC, 2007). However, even though the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy document clearly stipulates the principles of the process, there is no indication as to how these principles should be operationalized.

In the process of policy formulation in both regions, differences regarding the ownership of the initiatives can also be observed. The higher education harmonization initiatives of Europe are internally driven, as they are initiated, implemented, funded, expert-advised, and process-owned by Europeans themselves. The African higher education cooperation initiatives, on the other hand, are externally driven, as most of the reforms are initiated, funded, expert-advised, and process-owned by external actors like UNESCO, the World Bank, and donor countries. Because of this excessive external dependence for funding and the lack of ownership of most of the programs for such a considerable period since the era of African independence (1960s), education ministers and governments of Africa have not felt equal commitment to regional higher education cooperation or any urgency in achieving it. For instance, the first regional harmonization initiative in Africa through the 1981 Arusha Convention was initiated and funded by UNESCO without the adequate engagement of African HEIs; since then, only 19 of 54 African countries have ratified the Convention, and it has never been implemented (UNESCO, 2011). Among the reasons for the slow implementation of the Convention has been lack of political commitment to putting the Convention in force, excessive external dependence on foreign sources for funding, poor coordination among participating parties, and lack of sense of ownership of the program, according to AU officials (AU, 2013). The challenges of achieving regional higher education harmonization in Africa also have a historical context. As most African universities inherited their academic structure from their European colonizers, their systems became segregated along colonial lines (Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone), facilitating more south-north cooperation than south-south (Oyewole, 2007). We elaborate these issues further when we look into the functional and organizational processes of higher education harmonization in both regions.

#### *4.2 Functional Approach*

The practical measures taken to put the political objectives, aims, and decisions into action are called the functional dimension of the policy process. Various strategies are used by both the Bologna Process and the African harmonization process to achieve harmonization of higher education systems in their respective regions. The AUC harmonization process, for example, has put in place four major harmonization instruments to try to bring African higher education systems together. The main programs being implemented to promote the harmonization strategy are: The Nyerere Mobility Program; African Quality Rating Mechanism and Accreditation; Pan-African University; and Tuning Africa (Woldetensae, 2009). In the same way, the Bologna Process also has functional elements to put into effect its own aims and objectives. The main ones are, among others: the adoption of the Diploma Supplement; the ECTS; the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); and the Erasmus mobility program (Tempus Office Armenia, 2010).

##### *4.2.1 Mobility*

The functional elements embedded in the African higher education harmonization process are comparable with the Bologna Process at the theoretical level. In implementation terms, however, the functional elements of the Bologna Process are already in place in Europe, while they are only in the process of implementation in Africa. The Mwalimu Nyerere mobility program, for example, was initiated in 2007 by the AUC to facilitate mobility of African students among African universities in the areas of science and technology; the aim was to promote intra-African mobility of students and retention of high-level African human resources. The program provides scholarship grants conditional

upon beneficiaries working in any African country for at least two years after graduation (Woldetensae, 2013). The program was launched in 2011 and intended to provide scholarships for 250 postgraduate students for a four-year period. The Nyerere mobility program is comparable to the European student Erasmus mobility program, the EU's education and training program which focuses mainly on student and staff mobility, in that it is a functional process designed to promote student mobility. The main objective of this functional element is to encourage European students to spend at least six months in other European HEIs apart from their home country, thereby having an enriched study experience and exposure to different cultures. An estimated three million students have participated in the program which began in 1987 (Schuetze, 2012).

Student mobility is, however, a function of various variables, mainly of visa procedures, border security, and viable credit transfer systems, among others. In this regard, the Erasmus Program has utilized the structural benefits of the EU which, through the Maastricht Treaty, has already harmonized visa procedures to facilitate the free movement of European citizens across member countries. Thus, student cross-border mobility is much easier than in Africa where regional integration has not yet reached that level. Moreover, the Erasmus Program is financially stable, receiving an annual budget of €489 million from member countries (Schuetze, 2012). In this sense the program is internally driven, as most members show their consent by funding the project. The Nyerere mobility program on the other hand is externally driven, as the project is mainly funded by the EU Commission and is thus not financially sustainable from internal sources. For the current four-year phase which began in 2011, for example, the EU has committed €35 million to finance the expenses of the Nyerere mobility program (Makoni, 2010) but there is no sustainable financial plan for the future. Erasmus and the Nyerere mobility program, however, are expected to show that the students involved in the mobility program may not be evenly distributed across regions. In Africa, for example, South Africa has the lion's share of student mobility in the region. In 2011 in terms of share of student mobility, Spain, France and Germany were both the biggest senders and receivers of exchange students. Britain ranks fourth, but it sends only half as many Erasmus students as it receives (Schuetze, 2012).

#### 4.2.2 Quality Assurance and Accreditation Mechanisms

The other functional element entrenched in the harmonization of higher education systems in both regions relates to quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms. The basic principles and objectives of these functional elements in both regions are comparable, as they were established to improve higher education provision in the region. Both regions advocate a bottom-up quality assurance approach where HEIs are encouraged to develop their own quality assurance system based on regionally agreed standards that are then coordinated at national and regional level. The African Quality Rating Mechanism and Accreditation (AQRM) system, for example, was introduced to facilitate self-evaluation by institutions and programs. It is designed to allow institutions to benchmark progress in quality development in higher education provision and research, thereby helping them achieve international standards that make them competitive in the global knowledge market (Woldetensae, 2009). Institutional quality standards focus on issues of governance and management, infrastructure, finances, research, publication, innovation, and societal engagement. Program-level standards on the other hand focus on program planning and management, curriculum development, and teaching and learning. In the same way, the Bologna Process also adopted quality assurance mechanisms as a functional element of the higher-education harmonization processes. This functional element was launched when the European ministers of education adopted the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)" in 2005 (ENQA, 2009). What makes the European quality assurance initiatives unique, however, is that they incorporate specific mechanisms of qualification recognition called qualifications frameworks. The European Qualifications Framework is intended to describe qualification profiles in terms of level, workload, and learning outcomes; in so doing it aims to make higher education systems more transparent, give them common reference points, and strengthen the links between qualifications and learning outcomes (ENQA, 2009). In the Bergen Communiqué (2005), ministers also adopted the overarching qualifications framework for the EHEA and committed to making their qualifications framework compatible with the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA by 2012. "We aim at having them [National Qualification Frameworks] implemented and prepared for self-certification against the overarching Qualifications Framework for the EHEA by 2012" (Louvain Communiqué, 2009, para. 2).

It should be remembered, however, that although both the Bologna Process and the African higher education harmonization process established mechanisms of quality assurance process in their respective regions, the context in each is quite different. Basically, the European higher education quality assurance mechanism was established in the context of member countries already having set up some sort of national quality assurance structure. Thus, regional quality assurance system works essentially through coordinating national initiatives. The African regional quality assurance initiative on the other hand was started in a context where only a few member countries had actually

established national-level quality assurance structures. Most higher education structures in Africa do not have quality assurance systems, which makes setting up a continent-wide initiative challenging. Moreover, education systems in most African countries suffer from flaws that are completely inconsistent with quality, particularly educational corruption such as bribing teachers for grades or buying diplomas (Rumyantseva, 2005). Recently, however, more African countries are establishing quality assurance institutions, even though the number is still insignificant; currently 21 countries (Note 1) have national quality assurance mechanisms (Shabani, 2013) Most of them are not yet operational because of lack of adequate funding, expertise, and institutional autonomy to act. Establishing a regional quality assurance mechanism without a preexisting functional national quality assurance instrument is an inadequate approach.

There are also quality assurance initiatives at subregional levels along colonial and geographical lines in Africa. For instance, the francophone countries have their own subregional quality assurance system called the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) quality assurance mechanism. The East African countries have also established the Inter-University Council for East Africa which also aims to ensure quality and to start promoting quality assurance systems in public and private HEIs in five East African countries. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Qualification Framework also came up with guidelines which set minimum standards for quality assurance in the SADC region through the Higher Education Quality Management Initiative for Southern Africa (HEQMISA). The Association of Arab Universities and the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) set quality criteria for North African countries. Thus, unlike the European initiative, there are fragmented subregional processes in Africa sometimes with incompatible standards (Knight, 2013), and this makes harmonization more complicated. In January 2012, however, the AUC decided to establish a Continental Accreditation Agency for Higher Education to harmonize subregional and national quality standards toward a continent-wide framework. No AU initiatives regarding quality assurance have yet been implemented (Woldetensae, 2013).

#### 4.2.3 Pan-Regional Post-Graduate Training and Research Networks

A functional element that clearly distinguishes the AUC strategy from the Bologna Process is the establishment by the AUC of a pan-regional postgraduate training and research network of university nodes across the region called the Pan-African University. The network consists of 55 universities, selected based on their excellence, across all subregions of Africa that provide joint postgraduate training for African students. The establishment of the Pan-African University was proposed by the AUC in 2008 and adopted in 2010 in Kampala, Uganda (EX.CL/579[XVII], 2010). The main objectives of the Pan-African University are promoting the continent's research and innovation capacity in science and technology and producing world-class human resources at the Master's and PhD levels in key areas (EX.CL/579[XVII], 2010). Five major subject areas have already been identified based on a study carried out by AUC on the relevance of subject areas for the current global knowledge economy and subdivided into five regions as East, West, North, South, and Central Africa. The subject areas identified are Basic Sciences, Technology and Innovation hosted by East Africa (Jomo Kenyatta University, Kenya); Life and Earth Sciences hosted by West Africa (Ibadan University, Nigeria); Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences hosted by Central Africa (Yaoundé II, Cameroon); Water, Energy Sciences and Climate Change hosted by North Africa (Tlemcen University, Algeria); and Space Sciences hosted in southern Africa (the host university has not yet been identified) (Woldetensae, 2013).

Each host hub university is linked up with ten "satellite campuses" located in different African countries. The host universities are selected based on eight criteria which are: i) excellence in teaching and research; ii) high caliber and available academic staff; iii) quality infrastructure and scientific equipment; iv) relevance of curriculum to the thematic areas; v) facilities for supporting foreign students, academic, and administrative staff; vi) quality and quantity of scientific publications and patents; vii) experience in international partnerships and joint research projects; and viii) willingness of host country to support the university as a continent-wide program. The program started by recruiting around 100 students in 2012, and by 2015 the number is expected to reach 1,500 students across all disciplines (Woldetensae, 2013). The Pan-African University uses English and French as the official languages of instruction.

Having sustainable financial means to carry on the program is one of the biggest challenges that the AUC is currently facing. Initially, the Pan-African University was intended to be financed by the AU, the host country, and partner countries, but the commitment from member countries does not meet the expectation of the program, which has left it largely dependent on external sources. (Note 2) If properly implemented, this functional element will facilitate mobility of academics, exchange of technology, and provision of quality education.



#### 4.2.4 Program Tuning

The other process adopted as a functional element to facilitate curriculum harmonization at institutional and program level is called “Tuning,” developed in Europe in 2001. The higher education harmonization processes of both Europe and Africa have passed through Tuning. “Tuning” implies that universities are not expected to unify their degree programs into a prescribed set of regional curricula but to look for points of convergence and common understanding based on diversity and autonomy. Thus, Tuning is basically a bottom-up program-level harmonization process that needs to be carried out by HEIs. The AUC adopted Tuning as a pilot program to facilitate program-level harmonization through specific methods of curriculum integration, credit accumulation mechanisms, and transfer systems. Since 2001 over 175 European universities have participated in the process (Education and Culture-EU, 2013). The AUC used the experience of Bologna Process after the harmonization strategy document was endorsed by COMEDAF III in 2007, introducing Tuning to the political discourse of the African ministers of education which widely welcomed it. The pilot process started in 2011. The Tuning pilot initiative in Africa involves 60 higher education institutions, divided into five subject groups of 12 universities each; Medicine, Teacher Education, Agriculture, Civil Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering (Teferra, 2012).

Though universities are selected based on clear criteria through open competition, the specific programs are chosen because of the general understanding among European consultative groups that these subject areas already have fundamental commonalities across the region, making it easier to start with them (Teferra, 2012). The Association of African Universities (AAU) is identified as the implementing agency under the guidance of the AUC. However, Tuning by its very nature involves various actors in the process of curriculum harmonization—such as administrators, ministries, higher education and quality assurance agencies, policymakers, employers and the public sector, students, regional bodies, intermediary actors, and university associations. Thus, without close consultation with all stakeholders within a reasonable time period, coordination of curriculum harmonization at continent-wide level in a short period of time could be challenging. A consultation forum that brings together all stakeholders does not exist in the African case at this time.

In general, the functional elements established to execute higher education harmonization policies in both regions are structurally comparable. Most of the initiatives developed by the AUC, however, remain predominantly on paper. Among the major challenges mentioned by AU higher education harmonization experts for the slow functioning of harmonization processes in Africa are: the various fragmented initiatives across the region; inadequate finance; limited infrastructural provisions in AU regional integration settings; disparity in the level of commitment among members; incomplete processes; lack of ownership; and poor networking among stakeholders (AU, 2013). This brings us to the organizational setting of higher education harmonization processes in both regions, as functional elements will not bear fruit without sound organizational settings.

#### 4.3 Organizational Approach

There are various actors and organizational settings that interact at different levels to give the process of higher education harmonization initiatives an institutional character. The major actors of the Bologna Process are: i) ministers of education, responsible for political decisions like the Bologna Declaration; ii) the Council of Europe, which provides support for other actors; iii) the European University Association (EUA), which represents Europe’s universities in the Bologna Process; iv) the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), which engages in applied and profession-related research within the Bologna cycles; v) the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA); vi) the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and; vii) BusinessEurope (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2010). On the same level, the major actors in the African higher education harmonization process are: i) the Council of Ministers of the AU which is mandated to make political decisions; ii) the AUC, which provides strategic directions for the process and coordinates the whole organizational settings; iii) the AAU, which is in charge of facilitating the implementation processes of the program; iv) the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa (UNESCO/BREDA), which plays an advisory role for the effective organizational setting and implementation process; v) the Association for the Development of Education in Africa Working Group on Higher Education (ADEA-WGHE), which provides support for the technical team; and vi) the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (Knight, 2013).

Identifying actors and exploring their roles is vital in organizational analysis because their pattern of participation, level of coordination, decision-making processes, and degree of autonomy has implications for the success of policy execution. When we compare the organizational structure of the Bologna Process and the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy, we might find similarities in actor composition. But when we see the various roles they play and their level of coordination and autonomy we find strong organizational differences. For instance, both the

Bologna Process and the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy incorporate university associations as stakeholders. However, the role these play is quite different in each process. EURASHE, for example, plays a consultative role representing universities in the Bologna Follow-Up Group to ensure that the concerns of Europe's universities are understood and taken into account in the development of the process. The Association of African Universities, on the other hand, is mandated to coordinate the implementation process of the African harmonization strategy in addition to representing member universities in the process (AUC, 2007). The context of university association in itself is quite different, as there are diverse subregional university associations across Africa in addition to the continent-wide one. These subregional university associations include the Southern African Regional University Association (SARUA), the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES), the Organization of the Francophone Universities (AUF), and the Association of Arab Universities (AARU). This fragmentation of university associations mainly leads to multiplicity of membership, duplication of roles, and overstretched resource bases in Africa. As these subregional university associations are not structurally linked, there is also no formal coordination mechanism among them that can be used to further the harmonization process.

Though various actors are considered stakeholders in the regional higher education harmonization processes, accomplishing integrated policy process may not be easy unless there is a sound coordination mechanism. As argued by neofunctionalism, the policy integration efforts of one actor should have a coordinated spillover effect on other policy integration efforts if regional integration as a whole is to be successful (Haas, 2004). This implies the importance of close coordination among various actors if policy harmonization is to be achieved. Coordination in the Bologna Process is accomplished by a support structure called the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG). The BFUG is composed of all actors mandated to oversee the implementation of decisions of the ministerial meetings and meets every six months (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2010). As all stakeholders are represented in the BFUG, the chance of a country deciding to pursue a discrete process is minimal. The fact that the BFUG meets regularly (every six months) also gives actors a chance to check and balance their respective roles in the policy implementation process. As the BFUG is cochaired by the country holding the EU Presidency and rotates every six months, it would not be possible to centralize authority across just a few actors.

There is no formal support structure like BFUG in the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy. The Council of African Ministers of Education gave the mandate of leading the harmonization process in the continent to the AUC. The AUC delegated the implementation processes to the Association of African Universities (AAU), but to date there is no formal support structure that coordinates the actors on a regular basis. Moreover, actor composition in the case of the AUC is not comprehensive enough in the sense of incorporating major stakeholders like students and business communities. The European Students' Union (ESU), for example, is a member of the BFUG, but no student association is a stakeholder in the African harmonization strategy. The same goes for the business community which is a member of BFUG through BusinessEurope (Benelux Bologna Secretariat, 2010). Thus, in terms of actor composition, the Bologna Process is more comprehensive than the African higher education harmonization process. More relevant stakeholders need to be brought on board for the effective implementation of the African harmonization strategy. Even though the participation of different actors as stakeholders in the process is important, the process may fail to achieve its intended objectives unless there is proper coordination.

African universities feel pressure to align themselves with the Bologna reforms so as not to isolate themselves from their cooperation partners. Thus, the introduction of the Bologna Process in Europe in 1999 initiated various fragmented bilateral and multilateral higher-education reforms along the same lines across Africa, even before the introduction of harmonization process in 2007. For instance, Portuguese-speaking African countries, namely, Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe, adopted the Bologna Process to create a Lusophone Higher Education Area through the "Fortaleza Declaration" (*Declaração-de-Fortaleza*, 2004) in 2002, before the AU harmonization strategy was endorsed. Some francophone African countries also adopted the Bologna degree structure: licence (three years), master's (two years), doctorate (three years) (LMD) system in 2005 (Knight, 2013) through the *Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur* (CAMES) before the AU harmonization strategy. The members of Southern African Development Community (SADC), in collaboration with the Southern Africa Regional University Association (SARUA) and the South African Qualifications Association (SAQA), have been in the process of harmonizing their higher education systems along the principles of the Bologna since 2001 (Knight, 2013). On the same level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also established its Education Sector strategy in 2003 to facilitate harmonization of academic programs and recognition of qualifications before the continent-wide initiative (Hoosen et al., 2009). The Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) also put in place a system of cooperation among universities in the region, thus facilitating academic

mobility and recognition of qualifications prior to the AU harmonization strategy (IUCEA, 2012).

These isolated reform attempts on the part of subregions along the lines of the Bologna Process contributed to duplication and fragmentation of harmonization efforts. Thus, the major organizational challenge of the AU harmonization strategy since its inception has been how best to coordinate all these fragmented initiatives across the region. The AUC considers subregional economic communities as important stakeholders in bringing all these initiatives together. One of the strategies adopted by AUC is the benchmarking of various processes to create the standards to be followed by subregional organization and allow the best practices to be capitalized upon.

## 5. Conclusion

Globalization has boosted the mobility of goods, services, and people and the intensive use of information and communication technologies to bridge time and space in unprecedented ways. Globalization has thus also shaped the landscape of higher education reform issues.

The increasing mobility of ideas and academic staff that has come with globalization provides wide possibilities for collaboration and global dissemination of knowledge in higher education, as well as issues over quality, relevance, recognition of qualifications and comparability of degrees, all of which have become policy concerns among nations. To address common challenges, various regional policy harmonization efforts have been initiated at regional level in the field of higher education. The Bologna Process at the level of the EU and the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy at the level of the AU are among the most prominent initiatives in this regard.

This paper looked at the policy documents of the two processes to discover the commonalities and differences between the processes, using the political, functional and organizational approaches provided by Knight (2013). Even though both the AU harmonization strategy and the EU Bologna Process are evolutionary processes that have many common elements in terms of structures, actors, and organizations, the contexts are different. Though both policies are at different levels of implementation—the African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy is still in its infancy—the political, functional, and organizational processes are less coordinated in Africa than in Europe. In Africa, different implementation schemes are still ongoing to achieve the very objective of the strategy. Slow implementation in Africa is attributed to factors like poor top-down communication of the policy, excessive dependency on external funding, poor political commitment, fragmentation and duplication of processes, and the less participatory nature of the policy in terms of bringing all stakeholders on board. By looking at both the European and African policies through a comparative lens, the paper goes beyond the academic perspective and opens a debate on the type of forces involved in globalization and higher education and also their complexities.

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## Notes

Note 1. Botswana, Burundi, Cameroun, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe have established structured national quality mechanisms (Shabani, 2013)

Note 2. Initially, the World Bank has granted five million dollars as a start-up funding. Germany allocated 20 million Euro grant support for the Water, Energy and Climate change institute in Algeria (German Information Centre Africa, 2013). Sweden is the leading thematic partner for Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences and thus the Swedish International Cooperation Agency provided 552 000 Euro as start up funding for the program (Olsson, 2012). Japan also becomes thematic partner for Basic Science and Technology while India is engaging in Life and Earth Sciences. The African Development Bank is also committed to finance 45 Million US Dollars to realize the process (African Development Bank, 2013)