

Part 4

Higher Education & Teacher Education and Training

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Higher Education as a Field of Study: An Analysis of 495 Academic Programs, Research Centers, and Institutes across 48 Countries Worldwide

Abstract

The field of higher education studies has expanded dramatically in recent years. Notably, research centers/institutes and academic programs devoted to the field of higher education (tertiary education) has increased worldwide to now include peer-reviewed journals, books, reports and publications. Utilizing secondary data from 277 higher education programs, 217 research centers/institutes, and 280 journals and publications from *Higher Education: A Worldwide Inventory of Research Centers, Academic Programs, and Journals and Publications* (2014), this paper examines the policy actors and scholars engaged in higher education studies across 48 countries. The finding of this study suggests that people living the world's wealthiest countries occupies a position of significant privilege and power with regards to access to higher education research, analysis, and trained human capital. As higher education research centers, programs, and journals around the world expand their understanding of their place in a wider global network of similar entities, supporting one another and particularly under-resourced colleagues around the world deserves increasing attention.

Keywords: international and comparative education, higher education, tertiary education, globalization, internationalization, academic profession

Introduction

Around the world, the number of both research centers/institutes and journals focused on matters of higher education and degree-granting programs in the field of higher education (tertiary education) is growing (Tight, 2012; Tight, 2018a; 2018b). Today, higher education research centers/institutes and journals are perceived as a normal and necessary part of the higher education enterprise to compete in an increasingly competitive market (Altbach, 2016). While research in the field of higher education studies has grown along with the massification of postsecondary education worldwide (McKenna, 2014; McKenna, Quinn & Vorster, 2018; Salmi, 2017), little has been written on this emergent phenomenon, particularly framed in the realities of the contemporary market pressures on higher education institutions. This study fills a distinct gap in the literature by studying the broader phenomenon

of higher education research centers, academic programs and journals, recognizing it has now expanded beyond the West.

The concentration of higher education research centers and programs in a small number of wealthy countries presents a stark geographic divide between those with access to research and training relevant to the increasingly important field of higher education and those without (Altbach & Engberg, 2000; Rumbley et al., 2014; Wright, 2004). People who seek access to higher education scholarship between the West and the East has been extremely unequal (Rumbley, 2015). In addition, there is growing inequality around the world for people to understand the patterns of privilege and wealth when it comes to research and training in the field of higher education (Altbach, 2014). Given these challenges, this paper explores the broad spectrum of policy actors and scholars engaged in the field of higher education studies across 48 countries. This paper attempts to review the role and value of higher education academic programs, research centers/institutes, and journals and publications to provide sound recommendations for policy and practice that will enhance their effectiveness.

Literature review

The emergence of higher education as a field of study began in Europe in the 11th century, with the establishment of universities in Bologna and Paris (Fife, 1991; Fife & Goodchild, 1991). Higher education (or tertiary education) as a distinct scholarly field began to play more significant roles in economic development and were encouraged to make tighter linkages with businesses and industry (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974). However, institutions devoted to the study of higher education did not fully emerge until the early 20th century when several key scholars such as Burton Clark, Martin Trow, Clark Kerr, and Seymour Martin Lipset began to investigate the field of higher education studies as a result of increasing roles and responsibilities given to faculty members (Freeman et al., 2013). Altbach (2014) once noted that there were “no institutions devoted to the study of higher education or educating those who are responsible for university leadership or management until the 20th century” (p. 7). The latter is now necessary, he contends, as higher education has moved from universities that served an elite and small age cohort of students to massification and, along with it, increased responsibilities (de Wit et al., 2017).

For instance, during the 1920s and 1930s, distinguished scholars Floyd W. Reeves, A. J. Brumbaugh, and John Dale Russell from the University of Chicago heavily examined the business practices of selected universities and outlined policies for “establishing principles of administration and finance” for other educational institutions (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974, p. 7). These principles allowed for a standardization of business practices that could be duplicated across the American higher education system. The early framework of institutional research (IR) developed around the same time under the leadership of Werrett Wallace Charters at The Ohio State University. Charters was credited with formulating principles for systematically collecting and organizing university data for in depth examination. With the demand of increasing enrollments, declining faculty resources, and the need to attract more external funding to institutions, the development of institutional

research techniques became necessary in order to provide “empirical evidence upon which some of its generalizations could be based” (Dressel & Mayhew, 1974, p. 8).

Townsend (1989) noted that prior to the early 1950s, only six universities offered a few courses in the study of and higher education rather than a full doctoral degree program. It was only after World War II, with the assistance of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, otherwise known as the G.I. Bill, that the “field of higher education began to appear as a graduate program of study to provide formally trained administrators for the new colleges and universities” (Townsend, 1989, p. 4).

Consequently, higher education as a distinct scholarly field of research has become an integral part to most education schools across the world and has expanded to other departments and colleges across college campuses (Freeman et al., 2013; Tight, 2018b). The emergence of higher education as a field of study is thus of great interest for teacher-scholars and practitioners (McKenna, 2014).

Data sources

This conference paper investigates the contemporary practices, challenges, and emerging models of higher education research centers/institutes and academic programs across 48 countries. Utilizing data from *Higher Education: A Worldwide Inventory of Research Centers, Academic Programs, and Journals and Publications*, 2014 by Laura E. Rumbly, Philip G. Altbach, David Stanfield, Yukiko Shimmi, Ariane de Gayardon, and Roy Y. Chan, this paper presents an updated analysis of the existing landscape of higher education as a field of study, policy analysis, and research globally. This inventory provides a basis for highlighting trends in the higher education publishing sector, as well as identifying necessary development to ensure equal sharing of knowledge in the field. It is also a useful guide to the trends in research and analysis in the rapidly expanding field of higher education studies in the twenty-first century.

Examples in the dataset include a history and current trends in the field of higher education, the positioning of the field of higher education around the globe, with a particular emphasis on its steady growth and prominence in China, followed by growth in the United Kingdom, Africa, Japan, and Latin America, and a focus on the importance of increased understanding of the critical role that higher education plays in the economic and social development of countries around the world.

In total, the dataset comprised of 277 graduate-level higher education programs, 217 education research centers/institutes, and 280 journals and publications. Some of the journals and publications – including country, focus, language(s), frequency, publisher, and Web site – was mostly obtained from the journal Web sites. Newspapers and magazines concerning higher education also appear as they are of great importance to the field. When such data collection was impossible due to language barriers or the absence of a Web site, the help of experts from the country of publication was sought.

For example, data from the ASHE Council for the Advancement of Higher Education Programs (2013) and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) Graduate School of Education (GSE) database were combined into this study with the help of experts. Specifically, in China, Rumbley et al. (2014) chose, with the assistance of Chinese experts at SJTU’s GSE Center for World-Class Universities (CWCU), to

include slightly fewer than 30 journals circulated nationally, excluding publications that are mainly distributed at the local university level. Additionally, in countries that did not have academic journals specific to higher education, Rumbley et al. (2014) opted to include a few publications with a broader focus but that constitutes a reliable source for higher education researchers.

The criteria for data inclusion in the Rumbley et al. (2014) inventory are:

- a) Academic Programs
 - 1) Focused on teaching and offering a formal degree,
 - 2) At least one full-time faculty member,
 - 3) Award a graduate-level degree;
- b) Centers or Institutes
 - 1) Primarily focused on higher education research, policy analysis, or other activities,
 - 2) Have at least one full-time staff,
 - 3) Have a budget;
- c) Journals/Publications
 - 1) Primarily focus on issues of higher education,
 - 2) Recognized as a credible source of information.

It is important to note that Rumbley et al.'s (2014) work builds on two past inventory projects and their resulting publications (Altbach et al., 2006; Altbach & Engberg, 2000). When compared to Altbach et al. (2006) inventory, Rumbley's et al. (2014) revised inventory report found 293 more centers and programs in the 2013/2014 data collection exercise; and 26 more countries were found to host centers and programs compared to 2006. And while these findings may point to more energetic data collection efforts, there are clear signs that the higher numbers are reflective of real (and dramatic) growth (Rumbley, 2015).

Results

This study found the field of higher education between the West and the East is extremely unequal globally. Specifically, higher education scholarship is accessible in mostly English-speaking developed countries, with significant expansion in Europe and Asia. Of the 450+ programs/centers globally, nearly 66 percent of higher education programs/centers are in the U.S., China, and the U.K. Many of the research centers (100 of the 217) have been established since the year 2000 (Rumbley et al., 2014). Furthermore, Mainland China is the most active developer of higher education centers/institutes, with 28 new research centers/institutes established between 2000 and 2012. The United States, however, has the largest number (70 percent) of higher education academic programs; though there are several hundred Chinese universities providing education in the field of higher education today. Only 6 programs were identified in Africa (4 in South Africa, 1 in Mozambique and 1 in Uganda), 3 in Latin America, and 1 in Egypt. It is worthwhile to note that 60 of the identified degree-granting programs in higher education worldwide were launched since 2000, and 33 of these have been established even more recently, since 2006 (Rumbley, 2015). Although the United States is admittedly overrepresented in the inventory and China is underrepresented, together these two countries are home to 81 percent of the 277 identified academic programs

in the field. Only 6 programs across the whole of Africa were identified, 3 in all of Latin America, and just 1 in the Middle East and North Africa region.

To operate efficiently, effectively, and creatively in contexts of uncertainty and change, the higher education sector worldwide also needs a growing corps of academic and administrative staff, with training and education specifically in this field (Altbach, 2014). While student affairs programs seem to dominate in the United States, when looked at from a global perspective, Rumbley et al. (2014) found that they are listed among the least commonly cited specializations or expertise area, with comparative or international studies at 42.9 percent; administration, management or leadership at 41.9 percent; economics, financing or funding of higher education at 33.6 percent; quality assurance, assessment, or accreditation at 25.8 percent, and student affairs or student development at 9.7 percent. Furthermore, a key finding from the dataset is that 1 in 5 (20.7 percent) of the inventory respondents indicated that curriculum and instruction, or teaching and learning, was a particular area of interest or expertise for their center. This result is significant because the need for deeper understanding of the higher education enterprise, beyond personal experience in academia, is crucial for the current (and rising) generation of institutional leaders, managers, and policymakers.

In terms of higher education journals/publications, a significant proportion is produced in the United States – 36.1 percent, followed by the United Kingdom (12.1 percent), China (9.6 percent), Japan (9.6 percent), Australia (3.2 percent), and Canada (3.2 percent). The countries of publication are dominated by the United States with 101 journals (36%), and the United Kingdom (12%). These two Anglophone countries are followed by Japan, China, Canada, and Australia. However, Rumbley et al. (2014) found that 53 journals/publications (19%) have an international focus. Somewhat fewer publications are aimed at a regional audience: 3 in Africa, 2 in Asia, 7 in Europe, 5 in Latin America, and 1 in the Middle East and North Africa region. In total, twenty of these journals are multilingual – being published in English and at least one other language. Other major languages of publication include Chinese (27 journals), Japanese (26), Spanish (15), French (8), and German (7) (Rumbley et al., 2014).

Limitations

This study was limited to only the Rumbley et al. (2014) inventory data of which identifies programs, research centers, and journals devoted to the field of higher education (or tertiary education). For example, if an institution did not complete the 2013/2014 survey to include their directory information with the Boston College Center for International Higher Education (CIHE), the academic program, research center, or journal was not included in the dataset. Additionally, the study was limited in comparing mission types historically, since the original work of Dressel and Mayhew (1974) did not include a comprehensive list of each of the 67 institutions with their designated mission types. Further, the identification and accuracy of mission type was limited to the responses provided by each institution. No further analysis was conducted to verify the accuracy of the reported mission type. The assumption was that the reported type was accurately provided and represented by the participants (Rumbley, 2015).

Discussion

Mapping the global landscape of capacity for, and attention devoted to, research and training in the field of higher education is surprisingly complex work. What is most surprising from this study is that the publication landscape is dominated by the English-speaking world, as evidenced by the languages and the countries of publication. This is a source of concern, as most of the research therefore follows the orientations of a small subset of the global population, emphasizing characteristics of a higher education system that might not be valid for all 48 countries. More importantly, this domination prevents knowledge from spreading in remote places where English language is seldom used or where publications are not available. Efforts have to be made to disseminate research in higher education more widely, by encouraging open source publications as well as appropriate translations.

In many countries around the world, higher education has not emerged as an important area for academic inquiry, and many developing countries are lacking reliable knowledge that can inform policymaking. Regionally, Latin America, Africa, Middle East and North Africa are highly underrepresented, as well as Asia, except for Mainland China and Japan. Efforts should be made to help researchers in these regions and enhance regional collaborations to strengthen the knowledge-based production and transfer of higher education studies (Gayardon, 2015).

Conclusion

The higher education centers, programs, and journals and publication sector is quite uneven worldwide, as some countries can count on numerous entities with diverse focuses, while others do not even enjoy a single entity focused solely on tertiary education. The need to make sure that knowledge is shared more equally around the world is pressing, an effort that should be undertaken by researchers, publishers, policymakers, and advanced practitioners (Proctor & Rumbley, 2018).

Indeed, this paper recognizes the diverse scholars and networks involved in this work globally and provides a greater understanding of these research centers, academic programs, and publications communities. Not surprisingly, very real imbalances are found in terms of the geographic distribution of these organizations and activities, and English dominates as the language of communication in the field. As such, more work needs to be done in order to refine understandings of the higher education network. Examples put forth include a better sense of the role of research centers in shaping the scholarship of teaching and learning; the varied groups of organizations increasingly offering leadership training; and the hybrid fully online higher education professional development courses across the world.

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