

Boston College

Lynch School of Education and Human Development

Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Center for International Higher Education

Exploring Institutional Commitments and Perspectives on Higher Education Regionalization  
within East African Community: An Embedded Single Case study of Rwandan Universities

Master's Thesis

By

Janvier Nduwayezu

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in International Higher Education

April 01, 2022



**Exploring Institutional Commitments and Perspectives on Higher Education  
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**Abstract**

Internationalization, understood as the strategic integration of intercultural and international aspects into the function and process of higher education, has been of interest to nations and higher learning institutions worldwide for the past two decades. One area of particular focus within such efforts is regionalization, as exemplified by the European Bologna Process. However, regionalization is not simply a part of internationalization. There are significant differences between regionalization and internationalization in terms of objective, approach, and implications. These differences are arguably particularly salient in post-colonial contexts, yet few studies have examined the two phenomena within any African system of higher education. To address this gap, this thesis examined the factors affecting the internationalization and regionalization initiatives adopted by universities in Rwanda, paying particular attention to how the two phenomena intersect and how stakeholders perceive the potential benefits. The findings reveal that institutional representatives strongly recognize the benefits of both approaches but also experience tensions between the two. The study also highlights a number of challenges affecting the ability of Rwanda universities to adequately take advantage of the potential benefits of regionalization.

*Key words:* Rwanda, East African Community, Internationalization, Comprehensive internationalization, Regionalization, Rwandan Higher Learning Institutions, FOPA model

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## **Acknowledgments**

The completion of this academic research study has resulted from several people, and only God knows how much they deserve for their immeasurable contribution. First and foremost, I gratefully acknowledge the value of the financial assistance received from Boston College to complete my graduate program at the Lynch school. My warmest gratitude goes to my supervisor Dr. Rebecca Schendel for her continuous support during the process of this thesis writing and since my enrolment and presence at Boston College. I wholeheartedly appreciate her diligence, patience, insights, and suggestions that helped me achieve all my academic goals and enriched my graduate experience.

My thanks are equally expressed to all of the faculty affiliated with the Center for International Higher Education and the Lynch School of education, especially Dr. Geraldo R. Blanco, Dr. Michael J. James, Dr. Clair Johnson, Dr. Michael Cassidy, Dr. Ellen Hazelkorn, and Dr. Angela Boatman for their enlightening lectures, constant encouragements, and guidance during this academic undertaking.

This thesis would not have been completed without the support and love of my parents, brothers, sisters, and precious friends. I am thankful for all their help and support. Thanks to Fr Marcel Uwineza, S.J., for his kindness and support throughout this academic journey.

I also want to dedicate this thesis to the late Fr Denis Wheatly, o.f.m, who, in silence and love, introduced me to this great Country.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Across the world, internationalization has become an important trend in higher education and a strategic agenda of institutional, national, and international education entities (de Wit, 2019). It has been defined as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (de Wit, 2019). Internationalization helps higher education institutions to achieve their education missions, especially in equipping students with global skills needed for the global knowledge economy (Jowi, 2009).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2012) argues that despite dramatic variations between countries and institutions, there is a consensus that internationalization can offer students, faculty, and institutions valuable benefits. It can stimulate strategic thinking leading to innovation, provide benefits for modernizing pedagogy, encourage collaboration between students and faculty, and inspire new approaches to learning assessment (OECD, 2012). Similarly, de Wit (2019) states that internationalization is nothing more or less than a way to improve the quality of education, research, and service to society.

The two past decades have seen internationalization taking considerable developments and reforms worldwide with a particular focus on regional harmonization efforts. One of the flashy efforts has been harmonizing policies and structures of the education system in Europe through the well-known “Bologna process.” In fact, in 1999, 29 European ministers signed the Bologna declaration and agreed to harmonize their national higher education systems. The Bologna declaration led to the creation of the European higher education area (EHEA), and 47 nations have been associated with that area (Sintayehu, 2019). This reform inspired countries in other regions to pursue the same reforms by creating regional higher education areas (Sintayehu, 2019; Trines, 2018). As a result, the



regionalization of higher education became an essential aspect of internationalization. Therefore, the regionalization of higher education has been defined as an intentional process to build relationships, connections, closer collaboration, and alignment among higher education actors and systems within a designated area or framework called a “region” (Knight, 2017).

In Africa and particularly in East Africa, internationalization of higher education has taken place at the same time with efforts to adopt regionalism as a strategy for economic development and integration in the global market (Jowi, 2009). Fortunately, internationalization and regionalization are connected (Oanda & Matiangi, 2018; Ogachi, 2009). Regionalization can be seen as a part of internationalization initiatives that emphasize regional level collaboration, partnerships and cooperation, and reform initiatives among different higher education actors (Knight, 2017).

Drawing from the context of East Africa, Knight (2017) affirms that higher education regionalization can help in the following: to promote peace, harmony, and mutual understanding within a region and among different cultures and countries; to enhance economic competitiveness at the global level by increasing scientific and knowledge capacity within the region; to develop human resources capacity and mobility; to foster economic growth and diminish the divide between developing and developed countries within the region; to foster closer collaboration among knowledge communities to address regional and global issues that can only be solved through cooperation; to further develop a sense of regional identity and trust among nations; to facilitate stronger political and security alliances (Knight, 2017).

Besides, the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA, 2019) indicates that several factors have prompted higher education regionalization efforts in East Africa Community (EAC). First, there is a need to establish a framework to facilitate comparability

of higher education quality standards. Second, it is vital to allow students mobility, promote regional and international competitiveness and comparability, and ipso facto promote labor mobility. In this way, higher education regionalization becomes a way to advance the quality of higher education and an instrument for strengthening national, sub-regional, and Pan-African development (Knight, 2017; Ogachi, 2004).

The African Union (AU) has officially initiated regionalization through its Higher Education strategy launched in August 2007. The purpose was to create a harmonized higher education system across the continent. The idea was to bring together previously diverse systems resulting from colonial legacies and realize mutual recognition of qualifications, improve the quality and relevance of programs, and enhance the mobility of students and academics across the continent (Knight, 2017). In 2017, the summit of the East African heads of state declared the East Africa Community (EAC) a “Common Higher Education Area” (IUCEA, 2019).

Therefore, this thesis seeks to understand how internationalization and regionalization intersect with African universities and how stakeholders perceive regionalization as a potential benefit within or separate from internationalization. For that purpose, the study has taken Rwandan universities as a case study. Many reasons explain why Rwanda is appropriate to explore this subject. Over the past two decades, Rwanda has dramatically strengthened its higher education system. After the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, in the vast program of rebuilding the nation, the government of Rwanda opted for human capital investment as a foundation for its resilience and development (Ministry of Education [MINEDUC], 2008). Higher education has been given particular attention and was considered a pillar in achieving the country’s vision of becoming a nation founded on core human values within a knowledge-based and technology-led economy (Habarurema, 2019).

The government of Rwanda has expected higher education to be internationally competitive, meet the demands of Rwanda and the regional economy for skilled and educated workers, and deliver research, innovation, and knowledge transfer to support social and economic development (MINEDUC, 2008). This vision instigated the government of Rwanda to spend a higher proportion of its budget on higher Education (Schendel et al., 2013). Along the same line, the country aspires to achieve upper-middle-income status by 2035 and high-income status by 2050 (World Bank, 2020). Therefore, the country has decided to continue investing in human capital development by making the tertiary education sector one of the main priority areas to achieve those ambitions (World Bank, 2020). In 2007, Rwanda joined the East African Community (EAC) and adopted all community regionalization initiatives. Besides, the country has stayed tuned to other forms of internationalization activities beyond the region (United Nations Educational, scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). However, there is no study that investigated what internationalization/regionalization initiatives Rwandan higher learning are taking and how they synergize the two strategies.

### **Problem statement**

Internationalization and regionalization of higher education is a relatively uncharted area of study in Rwandan literature. Since the integration of Rwanda into EAC in 2007, no study has explored the extent to which Rwandan higher institutions are engaged in internationalization and particularly their regionalization efforts within the East African Community. This study sought to fill that gap.

In addition, critics against African internationalization/regionalization initiatives have indicated that, rather than focusing on what is specific and appropriate to their context, these African initiatives only copy and imitate western forms and approaches of internationalization without the capacity of ownership. Besides, those critics indicated also that most of those African internationalization efforts are” scattered” and dominated by selective and expensive

Western and Asian partnerships and directions. As a result, internationalization has become a way of westernization and perpetuating inequalities among countries (de Wit, 2019; Teffera & Knight, 2008). Rather than improve the quality of education, internationalization initiatives have led to negative outcomes such as promoting arrogance, victimization, brain drain, and increased inequality, academic privileges, and dominance between the global north and the global south (Ogachi, 2009; Stier, 2004).

Many reasons have been associated with this situation. For some, on the one hand, internationalization and regionalization initiatives in Africa, in general, are driven by many and competing actors who do not necessarily put academic interests on their first agenda (Ogachi, 2009). On the other hand, stakeholders fail to articulate clear and coherent rationales, objectives, outcomes, relevant content, and programs for different regionalization initiatives (Knight, 2017). Scholars identified other factors that affect the development of internationalization and regionalization of higher education in the East African Community. These may include historical legacies and political contexts, a top-down approach to decision making, the lack of financing and agreement to realize political commitments and support to institutions' initiatives, the reliance on foreign donors to fund policy reforms and new programs, the African universities' dependence on western partnerships that are highly unbalanced, among others (Knight, 2017; Ogachi2009). But no study approached these issues in the context of Rwanda. Therefore, this study sought to contribute to the literature by understanding and mapping what initiatives Rwandan higher institutions are undertaking, their characteristics, motivations, and challenges.

### **Purpose, Objective, and Research question of the study**

The purpose of this study is to understand factors that affect internationalization and Regionalization initiatives of Rwandan universities. Through analysis of documents and interviews data collected from higher institutions leaders, this thesis aims to provide insights

on how stakeholders make sense of the benefits of higher education regionalization in Rwanda. Also, by mapping and analyzing initiatives undertaken by higher learning institutions toward internationalization/regionalization, the study aims to add to the literature on the Rwandan internationalization/regionalization experience. Besides, analyzing these initiatives will allow recognizing areas of priority and gaps, drivers and challenges, which can help stakeholders and policymakers to formulate informed decisions. Therefore, four specific objectives guided this study:

- Identify internationalization and regionalization initiatives undertaken by Rwandan universities;
- Identify best practices, drivers, and impediments of those initiatives;
- Identify benefits of prioritizing regional collaboration and partnerships for Rwandan higher learning institutions
- Identify key practical implications for higher learning institutions, policymakers, and regional collaboration networks and stakeholders

In order to achieve these objectives, three questions directed this study:

- What regionalization/internationalization initiatives are undertaken by Rwandan universities: characteristics, areas of priority, and challenges?
- How do universities stakeholders perceive the benefits of regionalization/internationalization for Rwandan higher education?
- How do these initiatives relate to the perceived benefits of such programming?

The first question helped to achieve the two first objectives of identifying internationalization and regionalization initiatives. It also helped to identify best practices, drivers, and impediments. The second question helped accomplish the third objective of determining how stakeholders perceive the priority of regionalization over internationalization. The third question helped to identify critical implications. It is worth

mentioning that supplementary research questions helped examine the subtopics of internationalization and regionalization (Creswell, 2007). These subtopics included the meaning of internationalization, regionalization, challenges, barriers, implementation structures, benefits, and opportunities. Therefore, as mentioned above, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on internationalization and regionalization in the context of developing countries. It also contributes to filling the research gap on internationalization in the Rwandan literature and provides avenues for future research.

This thesis is organized into six chapters. In this chapter one, the context of the study has been introduced. The purposes, the research objectives, and questions have been highlighted. Chapter two reviews the existing literature. It focuses on the main concepts in definitions of internationalization and regionalization. It also reviews the benefits, characteristics, risks, and challenges of internationalization and regionalization. Chapter three presents the context of this study. It examines the historical background and the challenges affecting internationalization and regionalization in the East African Community. In addition, it discusses the context of Rwanda, mainly offering the Rwandan higher learning system, its governance, some challenges, and an overview of internationalization. Chapter four presents the theoretical framework and justifies the adoption of a qualitative, embedded single case study approach used to carry out this study. This chapter also discusses the broader research methodology and design, including the ethical considerations. In chapter five, findings will be presented and discussed. The concluding chapter provides an overview of the thesis and examines how the findings answer the research questions. It also outlines the limitation of the study and provides avenues for future research in the same area of study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The preceding chapter outlined the general topic of the study and presented its purpose, scope, objectives, and research questions. This chapter introduces important themes found in the literature that can help understand internationalization and regionalization practices, their relationships, benefits, and challenges. This review will serve as a general basis to analyze initiatives undertaken by Rwandan higher learning institutions. The chapter is subdivided into three important parts. In the first part, after defining the key concept of internationalization, it reviews what the literature provides on internationalization, its benefits, and its challenges in the context of Africa. The second part will concentrate on regionalization, especially its definition, approaches, characteristics, benefits, and challenges. The third part will analyze the relationship between internationalization and regionalization.

### **Concept of internationalization**

#### ***Definition***

Internationalization has become a strategic agenda for institutional, national, and international education entities throughout the world (de Wit, 2019; Jowi, 2009; Knight, 2017). First of all, internationalization has been defined as the purposeful process of integration of international, intercultural, or global dimensions into the purpose, functions, or delivery of formal and informal curricula for all students within domestic learning environments (de Wit, 2019, Knight, 2004). Jowi (2009) emphasizes that internationalization has become one of the major drivers of change in higher education worldwide, including in developing economies such as Africa. It helps higher education institutions to achieve their education missions, especially in equipping students with global skills needed for the global knowledge economy. Internationalization includes both campus-based and cross-border activities that are often referred to as ‘internationalization at home’ and ‘internationalization abroad’ (Jowi, 2009).

### ***Rationales driving internationalization.***

Rationales allow answering the ‘why’ question. They are driving forces explaining why nations, organizations, and higher education institutions invest or engage in internationalization. Scholars have traditionally identified four important rationales for internationalization: social/cultural, political, academic, and economic (de wit, 1995; Jowi, 2009; Knight, 2008). Under cultural/social are classified national cultural identity, intercultural understanding, citizenship development, social and community development rationales (Knight, 2008). Under political rationales, one found foreign policy, national security, technical assistance, peace, and mutual understanding, national identity, and regional identity rationales (Knight, 2008). Economic rationales refer to economic growth and competitiveness, labor market, and financial incentives (Knight, 2008). The academic rationales encompass the extension of the academic horizon, institution building, profile and status, enhancement of quality, international academic standards, and international dimension to research and teaching (Knight, 2008).

However, knight (2008) underscores that there has been a fundamental shift in higher education institutions' rationales. She argues that international branding and profile, quality enhancement and international standards, income generation and commercial trade, student and staff development, strategic alliances, and knowledge production mostly drive internationalization (Knight, 2008). However, the areas of focus are sometimes different due to every context. For example, while European higher institutions focus more on economic rationales, African institutions concentrate on academic rationales (Jowi, 2009). The present study will also investigate what motivates Rwandan institutions in their pursuit of internationalization and regionalization.



### ***Internationalization strategy at the institution level***

To benefit from internationalization, institutions must approach it strategically and comprehensively. Two works offer clear strategic orientations for internationalization at the higher learning institution level. First, Knight (2008) identified academic and organizational strategies that are important to achieve internationalization at the institutional level. Second, American Council on Education (2020) developed a comprehensive internationalization strategy that can lead to successful internationalization.

Therefore, according to Knight (2008), on the one hand, the academic strategy should be subdivided into four elements: academic programs, research and scholarly collaborations, external relations, and extracurricular activities. First, academic programs include student exchange programs, foreign language study, internationalized curricula, area or thematic studies, work/study abroad, international students, teaching/learning process, joint and double degree programs, visiting lecturers and scholars, and a link between academic programs and other strategies. Second, research and scholarly collaborations include areas and themes related to joint research projects, international conferences and seminars, published articles and papers, international research agreements, and research exchange programs. Third, external relations (domestic and cross-border) may include domestic programs such as community-based partnerships, projects with non-governmental groups and community service, and intercultural project work. It also includes cross-border programs such as international development assistance projects, cross-border delivery of educational programs (commercial and non-commercial), international linkages, partnerships and networks, contract-based training and research programs and services, and alumni abroad programs. Forth, extra-curricular activities include student clubs and associations, international and intercultural campus events, liaison with community-based cultural and ethnic groups (Knight, 2004)

On the other hand, Knight (2004) identifies four elements of organizational strategy: governance, operations, services, and human resources. First, governance refers to expressed commitment by senior leaders, active involvement of faculty and staff, articulated rationales and goals for internationalization, recognition of an international dimension in institutional mission statements, planning, and policy documents. Second, operations refer to integrating internationalization into institution-wide and department-level planning, budgeting, and quality review systems. They also refer to appropriate organizational structures and systems (formal and informal) for communication, liaison, and coordination. Third, services refer to support from institution-wide service unit: student housing, fundraising, alumni, information technology; involvement of academic support unit (library, teaching and learning, curriculum development, faculty, and staff training); student support services for incoming and outgoing students: orientation programs, counseling, cross-cultural training, visa advice. Fourth, human resources refer to recruitment and selection procedures that recognize international expertise, reward, and promotion policies to reinforce faculty contributions, faculty and staff professional development activities, and support for international assignments and sabbaticals (Knight, 2004).

American Council on Education (2020) proposes six vital areas to comprehensively strategize internationalization, namely institutional commitment and policy, leadership and structure, curriculum and co-curricular, faculty and staff support, mobility, partnership, and networks. These areas can help to examine and understand all stakes of internationalization. First, institutional commitment and policy refer to an explicit commitment by institutional leaders through an organizational self-reflection and a clear strategic plan that provides a road map for implementing goals and policies that align with institutions' response to internationalization. Second, leadership and structure refer to the appropriate administrative and reporting structures for internationalization. These structures should be a task force that

leads internationalization strategy, internal leadership committee that interacts regularly and advises the institution's top leadership, and adequate human and financial resources. Therefore, this requires setting up and empowering offices designed to coordinate internationalization initiatives, enrollment management, finances, community and alumni relations, and other important initiatives.

Third, curriculum and co-curriculum refer to the fact that the curriculum is internationalized and ensures that all students are exposed to international perspectives so that they can build global and intercultural competence at home regardless of their study focus. Besides, co-curriculum programs address global issues and reinforce international and intercultural competencies. Among co-curriculum programs, one can include foreign language, regional studies, global issues, intercultural interaction, and identity exploration

Fourth, faculty and staff support are essential for internationalization because faculty and staff are the primary drivers of teaching and knowledge production. They have the opportunity to teach, conduct research, collaborate, and participate in international initiatives and conferences. Therefore, the institution should support faculty and staff by providing them the opportunities to develop intercultural competencies and maximize the impact of these experiences on student learning, research, and services. Fifth, mobility is also a key area of internationalization strategy at an institutional level. It refers to the outward and inward physical movement of people (students, faculty, and staff), programs, projects, and policies to other countries to engage in learning, research, and collaboration. Sixth, partnerships and networking bring new ideas essential to comprehensive internationalization. They provide global and intercultural experiences for faculty, staff, and students, expand research capacity, enhance curriculum, generate revenue, diversity knowledge production, and raise the visibility of institutions domestically and globally. Partnership and network activities should

include student exchanges, education abroad arrangements, and curriculum collaboration (American Council on Education, 2020).

The above-described strategies can serve as a mirror to recognize internationalization initiatives at the higher learning institution level. In the context of this study, these strategies informed our research questions and subtopics of our interviews with leaders. They were also used in the data analysis when the researcher was reflecting on themes and creating similarities with what is being done in the Rwandan context.

### ***Benefits of internationalization***

Different scholars have extensively documented the benefits of internationalization (de Wit, 1995; de Wit, 2019; Knight, 2008; OECD, 2012). Rather than being an end in itself, internationalization aims at improving the quality of education, research, and services to society. The benefits of internationalization may be depicted at different levels, including individual, institutional, national, regional, international, and transnational efforts (Craciun, 2018). As this study focuses on institutions' initiatives, one can mention some student and institution benefits here.

At the institutional level, on the one hand, internationalization helps higher to achieve their education missions, especially in equipping students with global skills needed for the global knowledge economy (de wit, 1995; de Wit, 2019). More specifically, it improves student preparedness, internationalizes the curriculum, enhances the institution's international profile, strengthens research and knowledge production, stimulates the mutual exchange of know-how, utilizes competencies and resources strategically, and diversifies its faculty (OCED, 2012; Stier, 2004).

On the other hand, internationalization help students to obtain a quality of education, pursue research, find pathways of collaboration, the opportunity of learning in different contexts, exposure to different cultures and languages, new ways of thinking and learning,

and opportunities for employment in the global markets, among others (Jowi, 2009; Knight, 2008; OECD, 2012). However, these benefits may differ and contrast between students or institutions due to the context of the development of their countries (OCED, 2012; Tahira & Masha, 2015).

### ***Risks of internationalization***

Even though internationalization presents significant benefits, different scholars pointed out that it can also bring considerable risks that can affect a region, a country, an institution, or individuals (Jowi, 2009; Stier, 2004; Tahira & Masha, 2015;). Stier (2004) argues that internationalization may be approached with precaution because it has ideological and contradictory underpinnings. Some debates on the topic mentioned that rather than improving the quality of education, internationalization has led to negative outcomes such as promoting arrogance, victimization, brain drain, increased inequality, academic privileges, and dominance between the global north and the global south (Ogachi, 2009; Stier, 2004; Tahira & Masha, 2015). In the context of Africa, the most cited negative aspects of internationalization are the brain drain phenomenon, commodification and commercialization, new colonialism, loss of cultural identity, homogenization of curriculum, and promotion of global north dominance (Jowi, 2009).

### **Key concept of Regionalization**

#### ***Definition***

Scholars use different terms to describe the ‘regionalization’ of higher education. The terms such as regionality, regionalization, regional integration, interregional cooperation, and regional harmonization are most used. Knight (2017) tried to offer a comprehensive definition of the term ‘regionalization’ in the context of higher education. Therefore, Knight (2017) argues that the suffix “ism” relates more to an ideology or set of beliefs, an “ization” focuses

on the process of becoming, and ‘tion’ reflects a condition. Therefore, these terms lead to four lines of inquiry in the higher education sector:

- The impact of regionalism on higher education which focuses on how the changing notion and increasing importance of a region is affecting higher education. It can lead to a type of trend analysis study where higher education is seen in more of a reactive position to the increasingly significant influence of the ideology of regionalism;
- Higher education regionalization which introduces the process of intentionally building connections and relationships among higher education actors, structures, and systems within a region. Regionalization attributes more of a proactive role and agency to higher education;
- Higher education as an instrument for regional integration which takes a more tactical approach to how higher education can be used to achieve regional integration. Given the importance of the knowledge economy, higher education is perceived as a tool for the overall goal of regional economic integration. Higher education can be seen as a means to an end, and the end is often stated in political and/or economic integration terms
- Inter-regional cooperation in higher education which introduces inquiries that involve interactions between two regions. (Knight, 2017)

It is important to remind here that this study will focus on the second line of inquiry which considers regionalization as an intentional process to build relationships, connections, closer collaboration, and alignment among higher education actors and systems within a defined area or framework called a “region” (Knight, 2017).

### ***Regionalization Vs. Harmonization, Collaboration, and Integration***

Harmonization is a term that is often used interchangeably with regionalization in the literature. The grey literature from African Union and East African community uses mostly

the term “harmonization.” Reference is made here to the African union’s strategy for harmonizing higher education programs and the East African Community’s strategy for harmonizing higher education programs (IUCEAC, 2015).

Muhamedbhai (2017) also agrees that the terms regional collaboration, regionalization, and regional integration are often used interchangeably in African higher education discourse, but all need to be nuanced. He, therefore, tried to make some clarity on their meaning, objectives, and overlap. First, regional collaboration refers to joint activities between two or more institutions in the same region that try to share resources and achieving results that a single institution may not attain on its own. Second, regionalization of higher education denotes harmonizing education systems in the region to facilitate collaboration between the institutions and promote activities that would benefit the whole or a large part of the region and not just one country. One question that arises is whether regional collaboration between institutions can be considered regionalization even if it does not have harmonization as a specific objective. Muhamedbhai (2017) argues that, in principle, it should, just as an academic collaboration between institutions in different countries is considered internationalization. Third, regional integration signifies removing barriers among countries within the region so that institutions can effectively collaborate, operate and undertake joint activities seamlessly. This has economic and political implications and can only be regarded as a long-term objective. Although the three terms have different objectives, they are closely linked, and there may be overlap between them, especially between regional collaboration and regionalization (Muhamedbhai, 2017).

In the same line, Knights (2017) argues that the analysis of the ‘process of higher education regionalization’ involves many terms such as collaboration, harmonization, and integration. She has shown that the above terms are used interchangeably in some situations, whereas in others, they have a very different meanings. The terms and concepts mostly linked

to regionalization include the following: cooperation, integration, harmonization, convergence, collaboration, community, coherence, partnership, and alignment. Most of the time, using one term or another indicates the intended objectives and anticipated outcomes. For example, some actors use the terms ‘alignment’ and ‘collaboration’ rather than ‘harmonization’ and ‘convergence,’ while others make ‘integration’ the ultimate goal. (Knight, 2017).

**Table 1:** *Mapping of terms related to regionalization*

Terms	Relationships among different actors
Cooperation Collaboration partnership	Open, voluntary and informal types of relationship among actors (pan African initiatives or subregional initiatives: inter-university council of East Africa (IUCEA), Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l’enseignement superieur (CAMES) and the Southern African Regional University Association (SARUA).
Coordination Coherence alignment	Interactions among higher education actors in the region are complementary and productive! This includes organized networks, joint education programs, or research partnerships among higher education institutions and systems
Harmonization and convergence	It involves stronger and more strategic links. It can also include systemic changes both at institutional and national levels. It can consist of developing regional quality assurance schemes and academic credit systems with a common currency for determining credit or workload, similar interpretations of degree levels, regional citation index, or compatible academic calendars.  African Union (AU) and the East Africa Community (EAC) use harmonization and convergence to label their regionalization strategies.



Integration Community area interdependence	More formalized, institutionalized, and comprehensive levels of connection and relationships. This would involve regional level agreements and bodies that aim to facilitate a more robust and sustainable type of regional work such as ‘a common higher education and research space.’
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Source: Knight, 2017

### ***Characteristics of higher education regionalization***

Regionalization has multiple features. Knight (2019) offers a better way to understand characteristics, as displayed in the following:

**Table 2:** *Variable characteristics of higher education regionalization*

Factors	Variable characteristics	description
Stages of the process	informal	The spectrum could be represented by bilateral and multilateral activities initiated and managed by higher education institutions and organizations within the region
	formal	This involves policy making or regulating bodies that apply a more organized or institutionalized dimension to the regionalization process
Approach of intervention	Bottom-up	Initiatives come from the higher education institutions
	Top-down	Initiatives coming from regional (and in many cases national) level bodies or legally binding or regulatory agreements
Motivations	Ad hoc	Initiatives are more reactive to what is being done globally or in the region
	intentional	More planned, more strategic initiatives

Key actor	Internal	The higher education sector itself is driving regionalization. The education sector manages the process to improve the quality and relevance of education, research, knowledge, and service to society.
	external	The process is being promoted and managed by external factors such as trade, geo-political, immigration, and industry-related bodies, which all have their agenda. Higher education regionalization is being used as a political or economic integration tool.
Continuum of progression	Gradual Incremental progression approach	The process is evolutionary, with critical mass and changes gradually being built over time.
	Quantum leap approach	The process is more or less a revolutionary approach and involves a breakthrough often catalyzed by a top-down intervention or formalized declaration.
Way of intervention	Reactive	When higher education actors such as institutions, organizations, national government agencies, regional or inter-regional bodies are reacting to external factors and mandates to promote regionalization;
	Pro-active	When higher education actors are proactive in seeing the benefits of increased collaboration and alignment for higher education research and education
	strategic	Stakeholders' initiatives are strategically based on a clear vision that regionalization is about improving the quality of higher education for a better contribution to society.

*Source: Knight, 2017*

As the study focused on initiatives undertaken by Rwandan universities toward regionalization, these concepts allowed the researcher to find, examine and analyze their characteristics, motivations, and approaches.

### ***Benefits of regionalization***

Benefits help to apprehend the expected outcomes when an institution pursues regionalization strategies. The regionalization of higher education has significant advantages nationally, regionally, and globally. Scholars have indicated that regionalization embraced strategically can help higher learning institutions to achieve their three core missions, namely, teaching/learning (knowledge production), research, and service to society (community engagement) (Knight, 2017; Kotecha, 2011; Rugumamu, 2004; Soongsawang, 2018;). Knight (2017) identified five significant benefits of higher education regionalization. First, regionalization helps to promote peace, harmony, and mutual understanding within a region and among different cultures and countries. Second, regionalization enhances economic competitiveness at the global level by increasing scientific and knowledge capacity within the region. Third, regionalization plays a pivotal role in developing human resources capacity and mobility to foster economic growth and diminish the divide between developing and developed countries within a region. Forth, Regionalization also fosters closer collaboration among knowledge communities to address regional and global issues that can only be solved through cooperation. Firth, regionalization can help develop a sense of regional identity and trust among nations to facilitate stronger political and security alliances.

More specifically, regionalization can facilitate comparability of higher education standards in the same region. As a result, it allows the mobility of students, competitiveness, and labor mobility (IUCEA, 2019). It can also remedy the negative effects of internationalization (Oanda & Matiangi, 2018; Ogachi, 2009; Steyn & Mpofu, 2021). In sum, regionalization pursues four important objectives outlined by Knight (2017) as follows:

- to ensure that the quality of higher education programs and research is strengthened through sharing of best practices and capacity building within the region,
- to address pressing national, regional, and world issues through regional research networks, clusters, and knowledge co-production,
- to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation in students, scholars, and academics of the cultures, languages, values, histories within the region,
- to educate and prepare students for citizenship and a career enhanced by critical perspectives and understandings of their role and contribution at the local, national, regional, and global levels.

It is worth noting that the analysis of stakeholder perceptions of the benefits of regionalization provided insights into why institutions are undertaking regionalization initiatives in the context of the East Africa Community.

### **Internationalization and regionalization**

Regionalization and internationalization are connected and are taking place concomitantly in Africa, especially in the East African community (Oanda & Matiangi, 2018; Ogachi, 2009). Understanding the connection and the relationship of the two processes can help to know which related orientation institutions are taking. Some scholars argue that regionalization occurs in concert with the internationalization of higher education activities (Knight, 2017; Oanda & Matiangi, 2018; Ogachi, 2009). In this line, regionalization can be seen as a part of internationalization that emphasizes regional level collaboration, partnerships, and cooperation (Knight, 2017). Internationalization and regionalization do not exclude each other.

While they acknowledge the relationship between internationalization and regionalization, Ndofirepi et al. (2017) indicate that regionalization can take three different

forms. In the first form, regionalization is seen as a component of globalization (convergent trends). In the second form, regionalization is considered a challenge or response to globalization (divergent trends). Finally, regionalization and globalization are perceived as parallel processes (overlapping trends). Therefore, regionalization and internationalization don't mean or share the same thing (Schoole & de Wit, 2014). Analyzing the trends that orient regionalization helped to understand strengths and gaps in pursued initiatives.

### ***Challenges affecting higher education internationalization and regionalization***

In the general context of Africa, Teffera and Altbach (2004) indicated that higher learning institutions function under difficult circumstances in terms of social, economic, and political problems facing the continent. Most of these problems are related to funding and financing, governance, excessive non-academic staff, management issues in universities, private higher education, gender, research and publishing, academic freedom, the brain drain and the issue of capacity building, and language of instruction. The two authors argue that colonial legacy remains a central factor in African higher education (Teffera & Altbach, 2004). In the same line, other factors that affect the development of higher education regionalization and internationalization include the reliance on foreign donors to fund policy reforms, new programs, and research agendas (Knight, 2017; Ogachi2009).

Because of these challenges, rather than focusing on what is specific and appropriate to their context, higher education institutions in Africa copy and imitate western forms and approaches of internationalization and regionalization without the capacity of ownership (de Wit, 2019). Consequently, internationalization and regionalization become a way of westernization and perpetuating the same adverse outcomes of internationalization mentioned above, such as brain drain, increased inequality, academic privileges, dominance between the global north and the global south, and the loss of regional identity (de Wit, 2019; Teffera & Knight, 2008).

Moreover, implementing internationalization along with regionalization has also brought many challenges to African countries. Ogachi (2009) made a critical analysis of that situation by arguing that internationalization poses challenges that undermine the spirit and the capacity of regionalization approaches. He claims that internationalization initiatives in the region have failed to address relevant challenges of African higher education and still deepen the relations of dependency of local higher education institutions on higher education institutions in industrialized countries. Furthermore, although scholars agree that internationalization has introduced new forms of higher education, such as e-learning, cross-border education initiatives, student mobility, off-shore campuses, academic programs from foreign universities, joint research, and development, among others, they regret that these new forms of education have not provided relevant content and programs that meet Africa's development needs (Ndofirepi et al., 2017; Ogachi, 2009). The risk is that the current regionalization efforts can take the same methods, objectives, and goals, leading to the same negative outcomes outlined above (Ogachi, 2009). The analysis of the relationship between internationalization and regionalization helped the study understand where Rwandan higher institutions stand when synergizing the two processes.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a body of knowledge and conceptual tools essential for subsequent analysis. Rationales driving internationalization, benefits, challenges of internationalization/regionalization, and characteristics of regionalization constitute the lens through which Rwandan regionalization initiatives are analyzed. In particular, the chapter provides an understanding of the relationship between internationalization and regionalization and how this relationship affects institutional orientation, which is vital for examining and analyzing the situation in which the two processes are embraced simultaneously by institutions. Therefore, this chapter informed this study's conceptual

framework and methodological strategy. Even though the chapter draws mainly from literature in the general context of Africa and East Africa in particular, no study focused on the Rwandan context. Therefore, examining and analyzing Rwandan higher education regionalization initiatives need to be situated in its context. The following chapter examines that context.

### **Chapter 3: The Rwandan Context**

Chapter two focused on the conceptual framework and different aspects affecting internationalization and regionalization found in the literature. This chapter now turns to a discussion of the context featured in this thesis. It has been crucial to highlight the general context of characteristics of higher education regional initiatives in the East African Community to understand the context of regionalization initiatives undertaken by Rwandan higher education institutions. Therefore, this chapter is subdivided into two sections. The first section examines the context of higher education regionalization efforts within the East African Community, and the second section reviews the context of Rwandan higher education.

#### **The context of higher education internationalization and regionalization in EAC**

Given that Rwanda is one of the member states of the East African community, it is imperative that the discussion on regionalization initiatives for higher education in Rwanda be situated in that context. This section will highlight the overview of the East African Community and the historical background of higher education collaboration in the region to end with significant achievements and challenges.

#### ***Overview on the East African Community***

The East African Community, EAC is a regional intergovernmental organization and economic community founded in 1967 by three countries, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, which were part of the British Colonial empire. After independence, these three countries wanted to increase their economic cooperation in different areas such as customs, labor migration, and taxation (Trines, 2018). Unfortunately, EAC collapsed in 1977 and was followed by various conflicts, including the war between Uganda and Tanzania from 1978 to 1979. In 2000, the countries restored the EAC and tried to remove all trade barriers, which accelerated the integration of their economies. In 2007 Rwanda and Burundi joined EAC, and



in 2016 South Soudan integrated the Community. The East African Community comprises six partner states: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Soudan, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Uganda. The EAC is characterized by rapid population growth with 177 million citizens, of which over 22% is the urban population. The number of students in higher education is also growing and has tripled over the past decades (Trines, 2018).

The EAC has several semi-autonomous institutions through which it implements its mandate. One of these institutions is the Interuniversity Council for East Africa (IUCEA) which has the mandate to (a) coordinate the harmonization of higher education and training systems in the East Africa Community; (b) facilitate their strategic development, and (c) to promote internationally comparable standards and systems (IUCEA, 2017). In 2017, the summit of the East African heads of state declared the East Africa Community (EAC) a “Common Higher Education Area” with the purpose of transforming the East Africa Community into a common higher education area as the ultimate goal of EAC. The IUCEA (2017) indicated that developing higher education areas does not mean standardizing higher education systems. Instead, the process creates general guidelines for higher education components such as degree cycles, credits systems, quality assurance, and qualifications frameworks. Before the creation of a common higher education area, the region has experienced various attempts to collaborate and harmonize its higher education systems, which are highlighted in the following historical background.

### ***Historical background of higher education collaboration in the region***

The establishment of the common higher education area initiative can be traced back to three historical contexts (IUCEA, 2015). The first context is the colonial initiatives that started with Makerere University. Makerere University College, affiliated with University College London, was established in 1949 and was then the only higher education institution in East Africa. It received students from Kenya, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, and even from the so-

called Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). Makerere was like an institution that served the whole sub-region. In 1963, therefore, authorities decided to establish the University of East Africa, comprising the existing University College at Makerere and the two newly-established University Colleges, one in Nairobi, Kenya, and the other in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania (IUCEA, 2015; Knight 2017; Oanda & Matiangi, 2018)

In 1970, each of the three countries decided to convert its University College into an independent, national university. It is worth mentioning that having a national university was seen as an important thing to have as a sovereign nation. Hence, the University of East Africa was dissolved, and Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania were created. However, the three universities continued their collaboration and established the Inter-University Committee (IUC), with a full-time secretariat in Uganda, under the auspices of the East African Community (EAC), which had been set up in 1967. The IUC had political and financial support from the EAC (IUCEA, 2015; Knight, 2017). In 1977, for political, administrative, and ideological reasons, the EAC collapsed, and the financial support to the IUC declined. However, the three universities persevered in their collaboration, and the IUC survived despite operating under severe resource constraints (IUCEA, 2015; Knight, 2017; Oanda & Matiangi, 2018).

In 1980, heads of universities in the three countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania) committed to new collaborative efforts and formerly established the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) as a membership-based organization, replacing the IUC. Therefore, the IUCEA evolved as a platform for sub-regional collaboration between higher education institutions (IUCEA, 2015; Knight, 2017; Oanda & Matiangi, 2018).

In 2000, the three countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania) re-established the EAC, which had collapsed in 1977, as mentioned above. In 2002, in recognition of the critical role played by the IUCEA, the new EAC incorporated it as a legal body. In 2007 Burundi and

Rwanda joined the EAC, followed by Soudan in 2016, and their universities became members of the IUCEA. In 2005 the EAC countries formed a customs union whereby countries agreed to transform the EAC into a common market to allow the free movement of goods, services, labor, persons, and capital. Finally, in 2009, the IUCEA became an institution of EAC in charge of the harmonization of higher education in the area with the mission to (a) facilitate networking among universities in East Africa and with universities outside the region; (b) provide a forum for discussion on a wide range of academic and other matters relating to higher education in East Africa; and (c) facilitate maintenance of internationally comparable education standards in East Africa and to promote the region's competitiveness in higher education (IUCEA, 2015; Knight, 2017; Oanda & Matiangi, 2018).

### ***Important achievements and challenges***

The IUCEA worked collaboratively with its members (116 higher education institutions) to achieve its mission. Therefore, it developed a detailed handbook in five volumes for quality assurance in higher education and trained much senior administrative staff. In 2012 EAC also developed an East Africa Higher Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN) to foster the establishment of Quality units at universities in the region and strengthen Quality assurance systems within universities and national quality assurance agencies (Trines, 2018). However, it is worth mentioning that EAQAN cannot impose its quality assurance mechanisms. IUCEA, in all its initiatives, relies only upon the cooperation of universities and national government agencies.

In 2015, the Member States of the East African community agreed to create a Common Market to strengthen economic integration. The purpose was to facilitate the easy mobility of learners and labor and allow the mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications across the region. To concretize that ambition, IUCEA developed a comprehensive East African qualification framework (EAQFHE) for higher education as a

key tool for harmonizing EAC education systems. This framework tries to codify the structure, length, and outcomes of academic degree programs in EAC. Besides, EAQFHE established a common credit system, called East African Accumulation and Transfer (EACAT), that specifies the minimum credits requirements for established benchmark qualifications to make academic qualifications more comparable and facilitate the transfer of credits. It is essential to mention that apart from being voluntary adherence, all EAC countries have not yet aligned their home system to this framework (IUCEA, 2015; Knight, 2017; Oanda & Matiangi, 2018).

The IUCEA has also worked to cultivate an international student exchange program and facilitated inter-university academic activities in teaching, research, and community services (Knight, 2017; Trines, 2018). Generally, IUCEA has undertaken significant initiatives for intraregional research cooperation and activities. The current project called ACE II (Eastern and Southern Africa Higher Education Centers of Excellence) is an illustrative example of such initiatives. This World Bank-funded project intends to initiate regional incubators for technical innovation and specialized research in topics relevant to the region's development (IUCEA, 2015).

Despite these initiatives and ambitious objectives, scholars mention that the creation of a Common Higher Education area in East Africa remains challenged, and its success is still elusive (Oanda & Matiangi, 2018; Trines, 2018). At the regional level, many integrations and harmonization efforts in the EAC are still undermined by the nationalist interests of countries that do not respect their agreements and pledges (IUCEA, 2015). Also, the absence of a political will and low government engagement, poor economic resources for higher education institutions, the dependence on foreign aid and external supports, interference of external forces, variation and differences in curriculum and assessment systems are significant challenges (Jowi, 2019; Oanda & Matiangi, 2018; Trines, 2018). The ineffectiveness of

regional frameworks and discordance in policies leads to poor coordination of regional initiatives. As mentioned above, despite the existence of quality assurance regulations developed by IUCEA, the latter does not have any authority over accreditation and quality assurance enforcement mechanisms for member universities. As pointed out by Oanda and Matiangi (2018), quality assurance and accreditation process issues in member states are controlled by their own national councils for higher education and ministries of education. Besides, each partner state also has developed its qualification frameworks and national quality assurance standards that sometimes conflict with existing regional frameworks. Therefore, stakeholders fail to articulate clear and coherent rationales, objectives, outcomes, relevant contents, and programs for undertaken regionalization initiatives (Knight, 2017). Oanda and Matiangi (2018) insisted that the context in which regionalization is operating in EAC demonstrates that its regionalization initiatives are shaped to serve external interests linked to higher education systems and commercial interests of developed countries

At the institutional level, scholars indicated issues related to weak and inadequate institutional structures that support internationalization as an important challenge (Jowi, 2009; Oanda & Matiangi, 2018;). There are also issues of poor planning, insufficient financial support, poor quality of academic programs (diversity of providers and weak regulatory frameworks), and poor research productivity as long as Africa's research capacity is relatively marginalized and dependent on knowledge produced in the west (Jowi, 2009). Also, higher education institutions in the regions compete fiercely for students as a source of revenue, and, as a result, it is challenging to fund joint projects such as student scholarships and mobility, research and innovation, and a common approach to staff development initiatives (Oanda & Matiangi, 2018).

## **The context of Rwandan higher education**

This section reviews the context of higher education in Rwanda, particularly its historical background, governance, and challenges. The section also highlights some elements related to internationalization.

### ***Overview***

The first institution of higher education, the National University of Rwanda, was established in 1963, just after its independence. From 1962 to 1994, Rwanda counted seven private and four public higher Learning institutions. Unfortunately, the 1994 genocide against Tutsi destroyed the country with incalculable loss of lives, human capital, and infrastructures (Habarurema, 2019).

After the Genocide, in its vast program of rebuilding the nation, the government of Rwanda opted for human capital investment as a foundation for its resilience and development (MINEDUC, 2008). Higher education has been given particular attention and was considered a pillar in achieving its vision of becoming a nation founded on core human values within a knowledge-based and technology-led economy (Habarurema, 2019). Thus, higher education has been entrusted with the mission of strengthening quality and excellence in teaching and learning to develop and provide qualified personnel with high levels of knowledge, technology, social competencies, and critical thinking skills (MINEDUC, 2008; Schendel, 2016; Semugaza, 2005).

The government was expecting Higher Education to be internationally competitive, meet the demands of Rwanda and the regional economy for skilled and educated workers, and deliver research, innovation, and knowledge transfer to support social and economic development (MINEDUC, 2008). This vision instigated the government of Rwanda to spend a higher proportion of its budget on higher Education (Schendel et al., 2013). The country also eased policies and laws to allow the private sector to partner with the state in investing in the

Higher Education sector. The government has considered the private sector involvement in higher education as valuable assistance in increasing accessibility, affordability, and quality (Habarurema, 2019).

### ***Higher learning institutions***

Higher education in Rwanda is currently delivered through three kinds of institutions: those offering general teaching programs, those providing technical and vocational programs, and those focusing on technological and research programs at the post-secondary level (MINEDUC, 2020). Based on the ownership status, there are three categories: Public institutions of higher learning, Government-subsidized institutions of Higher learning, and Private institutions of higher learning (MINEDUC, 2020). The country has three public higher learning institutions: the University of Rwanda, which comprises six colleges and a center for postgraduate studies; the Rwanda Polytechnic, which comprises eight Integrated Polytechnic Regional Colleges (IPRC); and the Institute of Legal Practice and development (ILPD). Also, there are 28 private higher learning institutions (Hughes & Mukarutwaza, 2020; MINEDUC, 2019). A total of 86,206 students were enrolled in tertiary education in 2019. In the same year, universities enrolled 86,206 students, with 58.5% in private institutions and 41.4% in public institutions. Rwanda is still behind the universal enrollment rate, and it can be considered an elitist higher education system. The Gross enrolment rate in Higher Education has decreased from 2016 to 2019, from 8.3% to 7.4 %. According to the Ministry of education, the continuous reduction in the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions may be attributed to different reasons, including the closure of some universities that did not comply with the external audit recommendation and students' financial constraints (MINEDUC, 2019).

Staff in tertiary education institutions was 6610, with 3122 in public tertiary institutions against 3 488 in private tertiary institutions in 2019. In public tertiary institutions, academic staff was only 2158 against 964 administrative staff. In private tertiary institutions, academic

staff was 2164 against 1324 administrative staff. These numbers show that public institutions are better served than private institutions regarding academic staff, considering the number of students each staff can serve. It is worth noting that the administrative staff is more than half of the academic staff in some higher learning institutions. The number of tertiary staff by the level of Education in 2019 was as follows: Ph.D., 877; Masters, 2,171; Bachelors, 968; Below Bachelors, 306 (MINEDUC, 2019).

### ***Higher education governance***

The Higher Education Council (HEC) governs higher education in Rwanda. HEC is a government agency established in 2007. According to the law establishing the Higher Education Council, HEC is an independent government agency to support the transformation of the higher education sector to fit for purpose and be internationally credible (MINEDUC, 2020). The Higher Education Council is responsible for ensuring higher education institutions' structure, organization, and functioning, monitoring and evaluating the quality and standard of provision, and ensuring the quality enhancement of teaching and research (MINEDUC, 2020). One of the key responsibilities of the Higher Education Council is to act as a regulatory agency. Therefore, as a regulatory agency, it advises the Minister in charge of Higher Education on issuing operating agreements to private sector higher education institutions (MINEDUC, 2020). The HEC also advises the Minister in charge of Higher Education on all matters relating to the accreditation of higher education institutions. The authority to establish a higher learning institution belongs to the Ministry of education.

Therefore, according to MINEDUC (2020), the responsibilities of HEC includes to set standards for accrediting institutions of higher learning institutions; to prepare educational standards of institutions of higher learning; approve curricula, and academic programs of institutions of higher learning; to monitor the quality of researches conducted in institutions of higher learning institutions; to monitor the implementation of standards in higher learning



institutions; to compare and give equivalence to degrees and certificates at the level of institutions of higher learning awarded by institutions of higher learning from abroad; to coordinate activities related to study loans and bursaries to students of institutions of higher learning; to coordinate activities of various public or private organs, foreign countries and international organizations relating to gathering financial aid in awarding student loans and bursary in institution of higher learning; disseminate the policy of institutions of higher learning and other related decisions and to monitor their implementation (MINEDUC, 2020).

At the institutional level, the management and governance of higher learning institutions are made through four organs: the chancellery, the council of an institution of higher learning; the office of the vice-chancellor; the academic senate; and the senior management committee (MINEDUC, 2017). The chancellor may be considered an honorary task and is responsible for presiding over academic ceremonies. The management and the decision-making powers are entrusted to the Council of an institution. While setting vision and strategies, regulations, financial and budget approval are overseen by the Council of an institution, the daily management of higher learning institutions is under the office of the Vice-Chancellor. The office is under the responsibility of the Vice-chancellor, who administers all day-to-day activities of an institution. Deputy Vice-Chancellors second the vice-chancellor. While the academic senate is mainly in charge of teaching, research, and education that reports its activities to the Council of an Institution, the senior management committee is an advisory body to the vice chancellor's office (MINEDUC, 2017).

### ***Some challenges***

Higher learning institutions in Rwanda face various challenges that can affect internationalization and regionalization, as is the case in other developing countries' contexts (Teffer & Altbach, 2004). The first documented challenge is related to finance and funding. On the one hand, public higher education funding has shifted from full government funding to

costs sharing between the government, the students, and institutions generated income. However, this has resulted in a lack of enough funds for public universities' programs (Nuwagaba, 2013; Schendel et al., 2013). On the other hand, private higher institutions rely only on tuition fees and other internal income-generating projects. Private institutions' students don't receive any assistance or loan from the government. As a result, many private higher institutions in Rwanda struggle to maintain their financing balance. This situation was a major cause of the closure of many universities in recent years (Mbonyinshuti, 2020). Another issue pointed out by different scholars concerns the quality of education. Since 2010, more than ten universities have been closed because of noncompliance with national quality standards (Mbonyinshuti, 2017). It has also been argued that students sometimes graduate with poor academic performance, career competencies, and critical thinking skills (Habarurema, 2019; Schendel, 2016). Another challenge facing higher learning institutions is the poor access and usage of Open Distance Learning (ODL) and teaching (Mukama, 2018). This issue lies in the failure to use ICTs' modern technologies, limited resources for ICT and the internet, poor record and learner support systems, an inadequate number of staff and facilities, and lack of friendly policies for investments in Open distance learning and teaching (Mukama, 2018).

### ***Overview on internationalization***

The country doesn't have a national policy that clarifies its internationalization strategies. However, internationalization is implied in the mission given to higher education. The higher education policy asserts that among the missions of higher education in Rwanda is to provide graduates who are capable of contributing to national economic and social needs and who can compete in the international labor market (MINEDUC, 2008). The policy also emphasizes that the development and delivery of higher education in Rwanda are subject to the regional context as the region presents both opportunities and challenges. Membership in the East African Community, in particular, opens up new opportunities for collaboration and

partnerships, and competition for staff and students clarifies the policy (MINEDUC, 2008).

The policy will go far and clarify the country's expectations from the region:

Historically, higher education in Africa grew out of a colonial or, more accurately, Euro-centric model. That was essentially elitist and politically directed, with an exclusively theoretical focus. More recently, however, a specifically African dimension to higher education has emerged, which the Government of Rwanda supports. This is being reinforced through regional exchanges and collaboration and supported through networks such as the Association of African Universities and the Inter-University Council for East Africa. Rwanda's recent accession to the East Africa Community gives her opportunities to work with the higher education sectors in the other countries of the community and opens up new opportunities for collaboration and partnerships as we harmonize our higher education system with that of the other partners (MINEDUC, 2008, p.7).

This focus on the regional context is also supported by the consciousness of the international trends that affect higher education in Rwanda. "In the last twenty years, higher education around the world has witnessed a radical transformation in its design and deliver as well as its governance, organization, management, and funding," precise the policy (MINEDUC, 2008, p.7). In that line, the policy enumerates international pressures under which higher education functions: knowledge economies, lifelong learning needs, gender issues, economic globalization and competition in global markets, ICT, and higher education funding. However, despite the above description of the importance of the regional and international context for higher education, the policy does not formulate any specific objectives or activities related to internationalization and regionalization.

It is worth mentioning some internationalization-related activities found in some reports. Highlighting the mobility of Rwandan students, UNESCO (2020) reported that in

2019, 4851 Rwandan students were enrolled in tertiary education in other countries (UNESCO, 2020). Rwanda is among the top five countries in East and Southern Africa to send the highest number of students to the United States. The USA is followed by China, France, Canada, and India in receiving a large number of degree-seeking Rwandan students (UNESCO, 2020). On the one hand, this mobility is facilitated by different scholarships arranged by the government within bilateral agreements with other governments or important key partners. On the other hand, families fund themselves for their children's overseas studies. Also, the country has a strong collaboration in the training of the faculty staff and research with renowned partners such as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Partnership for Applied Sciences Engineering and Technology (PASET), and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) (Hughes & Mukarutwaza, 2020). In addition, in 2019, the number of inbound students was estimated to be 3216, mostly from neighboring countries (UNESCO, 2020).

Recently, Rwanda has also welcomed different international universities or degree-granting institutions that train students at undergraduate or graduate levels. One can mention Carnegie Mellon University Africa (CMU), College of Surgeons of East, Central, and Southern Africa, University of Global Health Equity (UGHE), Mount Kenya University, African Institute of Mathematical Sciences (AIMS), African Leadership University (ALU), Institute for Conservation Agriculture (RICA), and Southern New Hampshire University (SNHV) in partnership with Kepler Rwanda. All these institutions bring an international dimension to the Rwandan higher education sector.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted the contextual factors affecting higher education regionalization in Rwanda. It first situated Rwanda in the general context of the East African Community to understand how regional initiatives have reached their current form. The chapter presented

some challenges related to managing and administering higher education regionalization initiatives. Also, the chapter reviewed the development of higher education in Rwanda, its governance, and some challenges. The chapter presented an overview of internationalization practices in Rwanda. This chapter has established a foundation for further analysis of challenges that affect higher education regionalization within EAC. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical framework and the study's research design.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

The previous chapters introduced the concepts and context for this thesis. This chapter outlines the research methodology that has been followed to answer the research questions. It will review six points: the theoretical framework, the overall research design, the sampling, the data collection, the data analysis, and the internal validity of the study.

### **Theoretical framework**

To structure and understand the study and interpret its data (Grant & Osanloo, 2015), I used the Knight's FOPA model to regionalization. The FOPA Model is a comprehensive conceptual model based on three distinct but complementary approaches: functional, organizational, and political (FOPA).

First, the functional approach takes a functional perspective of regionalization and focuses on the practical activities of higher education institutions and systems. At that level, two distinct groups of activities are identified. On the one hand, the approach allows identifying strategies that facilitate closer alignment and harmonization among national/subregional higher education systems (e.g., the establishment of a quality assurance framework or implementation of the academic credit system). on the other hand, the approach permits the identification of strategies and practices that facilitate programs like student mobility schemes, cross-border collaborative education programs, pan-regional universities, and context of excellence (e.g., research networks or regional centers of excellence). (Knight, 2017). It is important to note that there are relationships and connectivity between the two activities groups. For instance, compatibility among quality assurance systems and academic credit systems will help student mobility within the region (Knight, 2017). In sum, the functional approach takes into account four institutional level “program strategies” for the internationalization of higher learning institutions, including academic programs, research

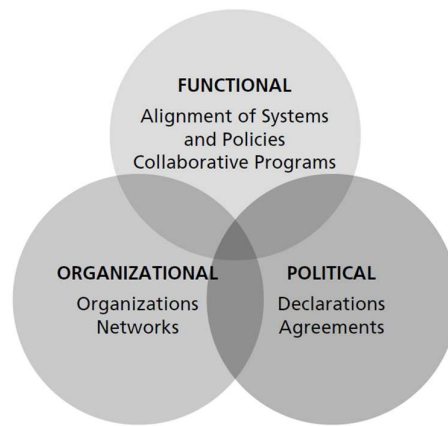
and scholarly collaboration, external relations (domestic and cross-boarders), and extracurricular activities (Knight, 2017).

Second, the organization approach develops and guides regionalization initiatives more systematically. It is described as an organizational approach because frameworks, structures, and agencies are needed necessary to help establish and oversee initiatives at the regional and intra-regional levels. Various networks and organizations emerge, including government and non-government bodies, professional organizations, foundations, and networks. These entities assume a variety of responsibilities – policy-making, funding, research, capacity building, regulation, and advocacy, among others (Knight, 2013)

Third, the political approach involves political will and strategies that put higher education initiatives on the agenda of decision-making bodies. This approach allows for major programs or funding schemes to be launched and initiatives to be formalized. Declarations of intent, binding conventions, treaties, protocols, agreements, and special meetings such as summits or policy dialogues are instruments for generating political support and visibility to make the regionalization of higher education a priority. This approach can be characterized as more top-down, formal, and intentional. It is also considered the key to gaining financial and political support (Knight, 2013).

Although the study did not focus on the political approach, it is essential to note that these three approaches are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they have an important area of relationship and intersection, as is illustrated in the following figure.

**Figure 1:** *Knight's FOPA Model*



*Source: Knight, 2017*

It is worth noting that the FOPA model helped to structure the study, and specifically, it informed the overall research questions, interview questions, and the study design itself. It allowed the researcher to understand and interpret the study data by finding the relationships between frameworks, structures, and agencies that support or do not support regionalization.

### **Overall research design**

As this study intended to explore the factors underlying the engagement of Rwandan universities towards regionalization with the East African Community, the researcher opted to use the qualitative approach, which is a suitable method for a narrative description (Fraenkel et al., 2006). Similarly, Creswell (2007) indicates that qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Furthermore, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to understand or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Creswell, 2007). This matches well with the objectives of this study.

In addition, being qualitative research, this study also used a case study approach to answer questions under investigation. Creswell (2007) argues that a case study helps the investigator explore a bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection



involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case-based themes. In addition, a case study allows having different perspectives and processes on the problem under study (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, this study was suitable for a case study.

On the one hand, it is important to mention that a case study design strategy may involve single-case designs or multiple-case designs (Yin, 2005). The researcher opted for a single case study design. Reflecting on the major reasons for conducting a single-case study, Yin (2005) indicates that it may be conducted as a prelude to further studies. Therefore, the researcher selected Rwandan universities purposefully as a single case of the study because of the lack of sufficient literature on the topic focusing on internationalization and regionalization in the context of Rwanda. The researcher assumed that this study could serve as an introduction to further studies on the subject in Rwanda.

On the other hand, a single case study may involve more than one unit of analysis. Therefore, a single case study is called holistic when it involves a single unit, whereas it is called embedded when it involves multiple subunits of analysis (Yin, 2005). Yin (2005) argues that various subunits can add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into a single case. Therefore, as this study targets to generate different perspectives on the questions under investigation, the researcher opted for an embedded-single case study design.

Three Rwandan universities have been selected purposefully as subunits of the case study. Because of constraints related to time, financial, distance, and covid restrictions, three universities have been considered relatively enough to give the researcher the needed perspectives on the issue under study. Two of the three selected universities are located in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda, and another one is located in the province. These three universities have in common the fact that they recently prioritized internationalization as a strategy. One of the two located in Kigali is a comprehensive university, whereas another is

small but regional oriented. The university out of Kigali is a more community-oriented college. Because these three institutions are diversified by their location, size, the orientation of programs, and seniority in higher education provision, they contain all the characteristics that represent Rwanda's higher Learning institutions as a whole.

### **Specific data collection methods**

This study focused on three research questions mentioned above. What regionalization/internationalization initiatives are undertaken by Rwandan universities: characteristics, areas of priority, and challenges? How do universities stakeholders perceive the benefits of regionalization/internationalization for Rwandan higher education? How do these initiatives relate to the perceived benefits of such programming? Therefore, to answer these research questions, this study opted to use two qualitative research methods or sources of evidence (Yin, 2018), namely document analysis and interviews.

On the one hand, according to Yin (2018), documentary information, whether paper or electronic, is relevant to every case study topic. Documentation presents many strengths in the process of data collection. First, it is stable because it can be reviewed repeatedly and is non-obstructive because it is not created as a result of the case study. Second, it is specific because it can contain the exact names, references, and detail of an event. Third, it is broad because it can cover a long period of time, many events, and many settings (Yin, 2018). Mostly, the documentation analysis helped to corroborate and augment evidence from interviews, especially in helping to verify the correct spellings, titles, names, and specific details. In this study, documents analysis focused on the institution's public documents such as strategic plans, academic policies, student services policies, available partnership documents, official memos, minutes, records, and other documents related to internationalization and regionalization initiatives.

On the other hand, interviews helped the research target and focus directly on case study topics. Yin (2018) argues that interview is one of the most essential sources of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or actions. Therefore, well-informed interviewees can offer significant insights into such affairs or actions. Interviews allow the research to ask for explanations through ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ questions as well as personnel participants’ views such as perceptions, attitudes, and meanings (Yin, 2018). The study identified semi-structured interviews as the most practical and which can net the most useful information to answer research questions (Creswell, 2007). Interview questions were open-ended (Fraenkel et al., 2006). The researcher developed an interview guide through a list of questions emphasizing key terms originated in the literature. This method permitted the interviewees to construct the meaning of the phenomenon throughout the discussions (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions mainly included the interviewee’s background, key concepts, benefits of internationalization and regionalization, current initiatives and practices, and challenges. The interview questions are attached as an appendix to this thesis. It is worth noting that these two methods (document analysis and interviews) allowed the data triangulation by finding the intersection between data from different sources. Yin (2018) argues that any case study finding is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several various sources of information, following a similar convergence.

## **Sampling**

The sample constitutes a group from which information is obtained (Fraenkel et al., 2006). Within the three subunits of our case study, the researcher did not intend to study all the population. He only selected a group of the population. Cohen et al. (2007) indicate that selection of a sampling strategy must be governed by the criterion of suitability. Therefore, the sample selection should be based on an informed judgment of the researcher that the group is likely to have information. In that line, the study used a non-random and purposive

sampling technique. A purposive sampling helped to access knowledgeable people who have in-depth knowledge about particular.

Therefore, the researcher selected leaders and administrative staff for the present study because they can give knowledgeable information. The researcher selected two individuals from each of the three universities under the following criteria: One leader from the vice-chancellor's office and one senior manager or the head of the internationalization program (or related office). In total, this study targeted six administrative staff for in-depth interviews. As mentioned above, these participants were selected because they have in-depth knowledge about the topic under investigation because of their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise, or experience (Cohen et al., 2007). Fluency in English and its usage in daily responsibilities (administration, teaching, or writing) were also considered inclusion or exclusion criteria.

### **Data collection**

Before the data collection, the researcher received IRB approval. After this approval, the researcher recruited interview participants himself. He used his existing network within institutions to identify and obtain permission to meet with each participant. During the meeting with the participants, the researcher explained the research project through the participant information sheet (attached in the appendix). During these meetings, participants were encouraged to ask questions to clarify the study and procedures. The researcher also developed a consent form to be read and signed by interviewees before the interview. The consent form was written in English (attached in the appendix).

Interviews took place in the interviewees' offices between January 4 and February 10, 2022. All interviews were conducted in person by the researcher and were in English. Each interview duration took approximately between 45 minutes and 75 minutes. The researcher recorded answers through an audio recorder. After the interview, the researcher himself

transcribed the interviews. Then, the interview data was stored electronically as interview transcripts on the secured Boston College departmental server "CIHE-student data." Only the researcher had access to it. After the transcription of the interviews, all audio files were deleted from the audio recorder. It is worth noting that **personal information that can identify the research participant was not recorded. Only participants received a code that was stored in a different location than the interview data.**

For the document analysis, the research asked the administration for assistance in locating relevant institutions' public documents and received permission to use them (Creswell, 2007). The researcher was allowed to sit in the library study room to read and analyze the content of printed documents, and electronic records were accessed through the institution's website.

### **Data analysis**

Scholars argue that different strategies are used to analyze data. These strategies include interview transcription, coding, memoing, and description (Babbie, 2007, Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2018). Cohen et al. (2007) argue that qualitative data analysis involves organizing, accounting for, and explaining the data to make sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities. More specifically, Creswell (2007) argues that data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. In the same line, Babbie (2007) indicates that coding is the key process in the analysis of qualitative research. It consists of organizing a large amount of data into smaller segments. Memoing consists of writing memos or notes to yourself that can be used for subsequent analysis (Babbie, 2007). Description facilitates contextualizing the data. It involves recording detailed descriptions of the study's observation and data (Babbie, 2007).

Therefore, the researcher used the thematic analysis through diversified steps for this study. Before data collection, the researcher made an initial theme list based on key concepts found in the literature review and the FOPA model frameworks. Drawing from Miles et al. (2014), the researcher used holistic coding to apply a single code to a large unit of data in the corpus to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop. After the interviews and document analysis, the researcher familiarized himself with data through iterative listening of recordings, reading his notes, and transcripts of interviews. This process led to creating new codes to add to the initial codes. After making codes, the researcher put together those codes by gathering them into broader themes. There was an iterative “play” with data from different interviewees, searching for patterns, insights, and concepts, putting information into different arrays, and reflecting on various themes and subthemes (Yin, 2018). As mentioned above, the FOPA model and the literature review shaped the study research questions and, ipso facto, the data collection plan. Therefore, the theoretical orientation guided the data analysis by helping to organize themes and categories, pointing to relevant aspects to be described and explanations to be examined. Thus, the researcher opted to rely on the theoretical propositions, which yielded analytic priorities (Yin, 2018).

### **Ethical considerations**

Fraenkel et al. (2006) argue that the concept of internal validity means that any relationship observed and drawn between two or more variables should be unambiguous. In other words, the idea refers to whether the way a study has been conducted leads to a trustable and meaningful result. In general, as qualitative research does not deal with the relationship between variables, it is not concerned with validity. However, as Fraenkel et al. (2006) mentioned, because of the researcher's primary role in collecting and interpreting data in qualitative research, the researcher's bias could constitute a substantial threat. Chenail

(2011) argues that the researcher, as an instrument, can be the greatest threat to trustworthiness in qualitative research. For this study, confirmation bias and leading questions bias could be considered a possible threat to the validity of this study. Confirmation bias is the researcher's tendency to see what he/she expects to see while conducting a scientific study (Marsh & Hanlon, 2007). Confirmation bias occurs when a researcher interprets data to support hypotheses or beliefs. He may also omit or look for data that do not favor his view. Fortunately, confirmation bias may be identified and eliminated by using critical reflexivity and positionality. The researcher must continually re-evaluate responses and ensure that his pre-existing assumptions and beliefs are avoided. Leading questions may constitute another form of bias. They are formed in such a way as to elicit a certain response from the participant. The tendency to use leading questions happens particularly in an interview or when designing a questionnaire. Therefore, the researcher has to consider bias related to questions while constructing the interview. To avoid these possible threats, I spent much time preparing the field by visiting institutions and discussing with the administration and respondents the study and its purposes. I also critically used my reflexivity. Also, I asked two experts from higher learning institutions in Rwanda to read my research questions, interview guide and collected data for cross-checking. Chenail (2011) suggested that working with others allows peer evaluation and triangulation to occur, thus avoiding researcher biases.

Besides, before conducting interviews, the research meditated on predictable risks (or harm) for participants. These risks may be either physical or psychological harm. For this study, the research found no physical harm that was predictable. However, psychological damage can occur during the interview when some questions or words hurt the participants. Another risk may arise when there is a breach of confidentiality. When the latter happens, it leads to different consequences for participants. To prevent these risks, the researcher informed participants about the content of the interview, its purpose, and its procedures.

Participants gave their consent before their involvement in the study. Also, the researcher recorded participants' answers under a pseudonym and after their approval. In sum, the study design and processes optimized all possibilities to ensure internal validity and avoid any form of participant harm.



## **Chapter 5: Findings and discussions**

This chapter will present the study findings organized in four points: perception of internationalization and regionalization, benefits of internationalization and regionalization, internationalization and regionalization initiatives, and key challenges and barriers to internationalization. The chapter will conclude with an analytical discussion of finding in an attempt to answer research questions.

### **Perceptions of internationalization and regionalization**

This study sought to understand what drives institutions' leaders to pursue internationalization and regionalization initiatives. The researcher assumed that clear understandings, goals, and outcomes lead to appropriate interventions. As described in the following pages, respondents highlighted internationalization as a new, complex, multi-dimension concept with roots in the Rwandan culture. The following will also discuss the relationship between regionalization and internationalization from respondent perspectives.

#### ***A new, complex, and multidimensional concept***

Most of the participants revealed that they had recently opened their eyes to internationalization opportunities. "Internationalization is itself a new concept, and also our strategies to it are very recent," noted our respondent. Whatever new, the respondents showed that they understand the concept of internationalization well in terms of its complexity and multifaceted orientations. Therefore, participants implied that internationalization refers to different mechanisms, strategies, policies, ways, platforms, and approaches put together by a higher learning institution to strengthen and facilitate knowledge and values sharing and creation among people and nations beyond the physical borders of countries. A participant insisted on that idea in the following:

I understand internationalization as a kind of platform, a way of strengthening and facilitating knowledge sharing among nations. It is a strategy to drive a university into the global forum to look for partnerships with other universities and institutions outside Rwanda.

However, one respondent drawled the researcher's attention to the fact that internationalization is not just doing things. It is also a way of thinking. He noted the following

People can even be in an international university without being international in their way of thinking when everybody is just thinking about his own culture, its way of doing things without opening up. So, the openness we are talking about is when all university members feel that they are part and parcel of the global network and are introduced together to opportunities that are around.

Key terms used by our respondents to illustrate the concept of internationalization may be summarized as follow.

**Table 3:** *Respondents' key terms illustrating the concept of internationalization*

	Key terms
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening up the borders of minds and ensuring global citizenship</li> <li>• Integration of national, regional, and international perspectives into all aspects of the university</li> <li>• The purpose of being part of the universe, all people, and all nations. Academic is global in nature.</li> <li>• The way of bringing the diversity of people, culture, and teaching in a higher learning institution</li> </ul>

- 
- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A gateway of many opportunities for students, academics, institutions, and nations</li><li>• Developing mechanisms for credits accumulation and transfer that allow students mobility</li></ul> |
|--|---|

*Source: designed by the author*

Besides, our respondents revealed that internationalization might be in many different forms, as described below.

### ***Sens of necessity***

From our respondents' perspective, internationalization is necessary for Rwanda because it will bring many opportunities for its development. One of the respondents clarified that in the following:

Because Rwanda is a small country, the capacity to do everything and cover all the disciplines is limited. There are several where we have relatively limited capacity. We need to enlarge by opening up our institutions through international and regional partners to develop some areas.

Another to add that “we cannot pretend to have the entire we need to train our students in different areas. We don't have everything. So, we need to bring together our resources”.

For example, respondents revealed that because of the tragic history of war and the Genocide against Tutsi, higher education institutions and the country still have a big problem of a critical mass of qualified academic and faculty staff. Therefore, it is important to explore different opportunities that internationalization and regionalization offer to offer excellence.

One correspondent assured this:

We cannot go alone if we want to build an internationally recognized university for teaching, research, and innovation activities. We also need to enlarge the markets of products and investments.

In addition, internationalization cements the meaning of the university itself. “University comes from the universe, which means that it has a mandate and a mission to be and to serve the universe,” precise one of our respondents. Therefore “Internationalization is to ensure that universities fulfill that mission of being present worldwide through its programs, services, and people it serves.” Besides, current global changes, driven by the globalization movement and information and communication technologies, are strong motivators to embrace internationalization. “You see, the world is becoming a village! ICT is offering us important opportunities we have to take. The future belongs to those who participate effectively in the global knowledge-based economy,” insisted a respondent.

### ***Rooted in the values of the Rwandan culture***

First and foremost, most of the participants indicated that they understand the concept of internationalization from a cultural point of view. According to study respondents, internationalization is embedded in the Rwandan culture that considers the value of collaboration and cooperation as the foundations of all growth and development. One participant stated the following:

There are sayings in the Rwandan language that illustrate well this concept:

“Akanyoni katagurutse ntikamenya iyo bweze” [a bird that doesn’t fly won’t tell where there is harvest]; “Ubwenge burarahurwa” [Wisdom cannot be harnessed from within]; “Inkingi Imwe ntigera inzu” [One wall doesn’t make a house]; “Umutwe umwe, wifasha gusara” [Two heads are better than one]; and many others which reveal the cultural background of this concept.

In the same line, respondents insisted that the concept of internationalization correlates to the meaning of Rwanda itself.

Rwanda comes from the verb “***Kwanda***,” which means spreading over a large area, expanding, expanding, and spreading out. Rwanda means a land that enlarges, a

country that should become wider and wider. Internationalization, therefore, comes in to materialize that spirit. From that perspective, internationalization is understood as driving universities into the global forum where people feel part and parcel of the global network to look for partnerships and strengths.

### ***Internationalization Vs Regionalization***

From the perspectives of our respondents, internationalization and regionalization are the same concepts. The only difference our respondents identified is that internationalization is much broader, whereas regionalization considers more issues that affect higher education in the same region. “Regionalization is more or less internationalization at regional aspect,” indicated one of the respondents.

You know, there is an expression which says that you have to think big but act locally. So, there is no difference as such, except you need to have a minimum focus.

In our context, our first focus is the East African Community, EAC.

For another respondent, regionalization means to belong to a region:

Regionalization means to belong to a community of the countries in the same region.

That is what you have to understand by regionalization. As for as Rwanda is concerned, we belong to many organizations. We belong to EAC, where we have a high council that regulates education in this EAC.

However, while most of our respondents identified regionalization as part of internationalization, they pointed out that the benefits of the two processes are sometimes different. According to respondents, regionalization facilitates the sharing of knowledge and experience among institutions in the same region. Also, it is not expensive, accessible, and more effective. The following statement of one of our respondents is more explicit:

What is different when we talk about regionalization is having the same context, the same problems, and the same challenges that allow you to learn easier from each

other. While with internationalization, you can get money, you can get facilitation, you can get facilities, you can get this or that, but it is not easy to get into working communion where you can say I am learning. It is challenging to learn because you will find that their problems are far from your problems.

In the same line, respondents think that regionalization initiatives are less expensive;

You don't need to cross the long distance. You don't need a translator because you understand each other. You are talking the same language, not necessarily speaking the same language. But, still, at least the language at cultural perspectives, at mindset level, you are not so much far from one another.

For another respondent, regionalization fosters the conscience of belonging to a region:

As far as the East African Region is concerned, regionalization is, for us, an opportunity to create that minimum number of people who believe in EAC, who believe in being African, and go beyond the colonial boundaries of countries to accelerate the development of this region.

For other respondents, regionalization can even be a solution to the negative sides of internationalization:

You have seen that in Rwanda, you may find that some students who have gone to study abroad go to rehabilitation centers when they come back to the country. Why? Because they are ruined, destroyed in their minds because they felt in different cultures, they could not adapt, nobody was following them, their parents were very far, and the conditions were different. Regionalization can help to address that issue. Here in the region, you open up, help each other, and are not afraid of the other because you are almost sharing the same context, the same culture.

### ***Forms of internationalization/Regionalization***

Our respondents indicated that internationalization and regionalization take different forms. These include partnerships in academic programs, research collaborations activities, networking, and extracurricular activities. More specifically, as indicated by our respondents, these forms may have as part of the agreement student exchange, study abroad component where students go abroad and study for a while. It can also have elements that establish joint-degree programs in different areas that complement each other. It can also include a component of exchange of academic and faculty staff, training of academic staff, or research enterprises. Respondent insisted that all these forms of partnerships and collaboration should be more integrative and complement each other. Internationalization should be a flux movement of go, back, come and go to study, do research, and teach in favor of students, academics, and staff. The following statement of one of our respondents is more clarifying:

We would like to see internationalization informed by academics and researchers exchange in both directions. Not only Rwandans going and staying in developed countries or other African countries, but also people from those countries coming to do research and participate in teaching in our respective institutions. And it cannot be limited to academic and research staff, we would like to see students involved in that process, and it could be informed by short stays in different countries to enhance their learning experience.

In the same line, other respondents added that “networking is not just working with others, it is to be in the network. We need to be in the networks as school, not as a school as a building but as management, teaching staff, and students”.

### **Benefits of internationalization/regionalization**

The research tried to understand the motivations to pursue internationalization activities for a higher learning institution. Respondents have found the benefits of

internationalization and regionalization at different levels. They may be new ways of doing business, learning from best practices, access to staff and students, access to facilities, access to funds, academic improvement, economic integration, access to markets and employment, and finding solutions to local problems. In the following, I want to highlight some institutional and student benefits.

### ***Benefits from an institutional perspective***

Respondent insisted on the fact that internationalization offers significant institutional benefits. It enhances the capacity of institutions through benchmarking, diversity, expertise, innovation, empowerment, and mutual support. In sum, internationalization allows institutions to grow interactively and comparatively.

Internationalization ends up telling us, ‘Yes, we are doing what is right, or we have to attain appropriate standards to produce our graduates and products. In sum, to enhance quality.

Another to added:

When you have programs, they may be good, but if you don’t benchmark them, you may be running low quality thinking you are running good quality things. It is essential when you compare yourself to what others are doing. You learn from them, they learn from you, and as they start learning from you, they challenge you, and sometimes you find new ways of doing things.

As an example, respondents underscored that the presence of international students stimulates the efforts of standards. Institutions feel motivated to raise their standards, and the atmosphere of the whole university community changes. In sum, internationalization encourages institutional transformation. Interculturality is quality. The words of one of our respondents are more clarifying:



Internationalization brings a diversity of knowledge and culture (in terms of dressing, culture in terms of food, behavior). It also brings diversity to teaching and learning processes. The presence of students, academic, and faculty staff with different experiences and backgrounds enhances our education quality.

It is worth adding that our respondents see internationalization activities as the opportunity to have good students, good lecturers, and access to senior staff and experts who can teach, advise, train, and give guidance either physically or virtually. Internationalization helps to fill the skills gaps, as clarified by one of our respondents:

Because we have an internationalization network, we never run out of teaching staff. We may be looking for someone in a particular area of teaching, and if we do not find one in our local areas, we automatically use that network to call for an expert from anywhere to come and teach that particular course. They may come from India, the USA, South Africa, and Europe. Here, we have in our teaching staff 26 different nationalities.

According to respondents, internationalization allows innovation by looking at what has been successful elsewhere and seeing what can be adapted to one's context.

I would like to mention that internationalization should not stop only at teaching and research activities; we would like to expand it to innovation as well. We have started to establish incubation centers, and we would like to see bright ideas from sister African countries coming here and getting their ideas incubated until the time we can transfer them into a kind of startups.

Respondents also indicated that internationalization/ regionalization initiatives increase the institution's visibility, reputation, ranking, and trust. As a result, reputation becomes a means to attract investments and partnerships, and ipso facto the quality.

If you partner with those prominent and renowned universities and organizations, it increases your visibility. It attracts investment, funding organization, and new partnerships for you because people trust what you are doing. We have seen that all internationalization initiatives are undertaken by our institution become a marketing tool. International students and international researchers are branding the name of our university.

Finally, respondents indicated that academic and faculty staff benefit from internationalization activities, especially from exchange programs that facilitate training, upgrade their skills and competence, and provide international working experience. A respondent noted the following:

Thanks to internationalization activities, our teaching staff are upgrading their levels, discovering new ways of doing things, new programs to develop, new teaching tools, strategies of teaching, techniques to do research, and new jobs

### ***Benefits from students' perspective***

Our respondents indicated that the pursuit of internationalization brings many benefits for students. Internationalization exposes students to different experiences, cultures, and new perspectives and allows them to go beyond their “comfort zones.” Students are trained to compete nationally, regionally, and internationally through internationalization. Students also have access to different scholarships and competing programs through internationalization activities.

We have some programs in the undergraduate, some in Master's, where the best students who wish to pursue their studies are introduced to our partnering networks and opportunities to do Masters and Ph.D.

According to some respondents, internationalization offers many opportunities that improve their learning experiences: knowledge sharing, language improvement, discovering

new cultures and ways of thinking, new connections, and new friends. “We have here many initiatives related to curriculum, exchange programs, intercultural activities, and teaching that enrich the student’s learning experience,” insisted our respondent.

In the same line, internationalization initiatives facilitate the mobility of students through different mechanisms for credit accumulation and credit transfer. A respondent was confident to say this:

Within EAC, we developed different strategies that allow students to take short stays in different countries. For example, our students can take some modules in Rwanda and transfer their credits to another university in the region.

In addition, internationalization gives students access to a large market and employment opportunities, as explained by one of our respondents:

Through our participation in the process of internationalization and regionalization, we are producing graduates steeped in different experiences and cultures, able to adapt and work elsewhere. They can’t limit themselves to the local market, and they can compete in regional or international markets.

Another added the following:

Many international organizations come here to recruit our students because we are known in the region that our graduates have international skills and competencies. Thanks to that background of internationalization, we have people who went to Angola, Nigeria, DRC, Burundi, and even Kenya.

### **Internationalization and regionalization initiatives**

The study has revealed that Rwandan universities are part of an extensive network of partnerships. From the study data, Rwandan universities have undertaken several international and regional initiatives in their pursuit of internationalization. Those initiatives go from campus-based activities to regional and international interventions. Besides, those

activities mainly focus on academic programs, research, staff and student exchange, and extracurricular activities. We want to highlight these initiatives through different networks.

***Interuniversity Council of East Africa (IUCEA) network***

Visited universities are members of the Interuniversity Council of East Africa (IUCEA), the East African community body in charge of coordinating higher education initiatives in the region. Our respondents indicated many initiatives and collaborations they established under the IUCEA network. Those initiatives focus on facilitating staff exchange, providing scholarships for students, establishing Centers of Excellence, and harmonizing programs.

First, there is a student and staff mobility program under the “East African scholarships initiative,” funded by a grant from KFW, in which some Rwandan universities host or send students to the regional universities. A respondent asserted the following:

Under this partnership, our lecturers can go to different countries and universities to teach for three months. IUCEA paid them, and we facilitate them for only their accommodation.

Second, our respondents revealed that they are following the harmonization protocol developed by IUCEA. One affirmed that in these terms:

When it comes to teaching, we have program benchmarks that IUCEA developed for different disciplines, and those benchmarks serve to inform programs in our respective countries of the region. And now, we have moved to a time when we are signing what we call mutual recognition. Thanks to those benchmarks to having programs that speak to one another, we can facilitate the movement of professionals, students, and staff.

Third, data revealed that under IUCEA, Rwandan universities are parts of different sub-networks such as the “East African community of science and technology commission,” which established the “Regional science, technology, and innovation Conference.” This conference

creates a platform for research, meeting, discussing, and sharing knowledge every two years. Another sub-network is EALA (East African Land Administration Network), which brings universities in the region to discuss, research, and work on land-related issues. Another interesting subnetwork is the East African community of Medicine (EACM). The latter provides accreditation to schools of medicine in the region, Rwandans included. Another working sub-network is the Greater Virunga transboundary Center (GVTC), which gathers some Rwandan, Ugandan, and Congolese universities. Fifth, respondents mentioned that IUCEA facilitated the creation and development of regional scientific journals in different domains. To end, respondents noted that students from the region pay the same amount as the locals agreed upon within EAC countries.

### ***Regional centers of excellence***

One of the visited universities is hosting several regional Centers of excellence. The mission of these Centers of Excellence is “to address national and regional developmental challenges through research and innovation as well as development, training, and demonstration,” as confirmed by our respondents. These centers are funded by the government of Rwanda in collaboration with organizations such as the World Bank, African Development Bank, and the East African community, the German Bank of Development (FHW), United Nations for Environment Protection (UNEP), and UNESCO. The centers cover Eastern and southern Africa even though they don’t exclude other people from other countries and continents. “we have students from western Africa, we have students from South America and Europe,” indicated a respondent. These centers train students at the graduate level. In the following, I will review the main activities of those centers:

**Table 4:** *Regional centers of excellence operating in Rwanda*

Center of Excellence	Objectives and characteristics
African Center of Excellence for Data Sciences (ACEDS)	The center aims to be a research hub for postgraduate students; attract international expertise and practitioners; stimulate collaboration between academics, partners, and stakeholders; demonstrate the center's relevance to innovation, job creation, and economic prosperity; securing resources to encourage multidisciplinary collaboration international research projects. The center focuses on data mining, econometrics, biostatistics, demography, and actuarial sciences as areas of interest.
African Center of Excellence in Energy for Sustainable Development (ACEESD)	The center aims to provide national and regional capacity building (MSc & Ph.D.) by establishing and implementing energy systems using local energy sources and appropriate technology. It also intends to train students, policymakers, and utility managers. It also focuses on providing energy research, consultancy, and advisory services to public and private organizations at national, regional, and international levels.
African center of excellence in Internet of things (ACEIOT)	By offering offer Master's and Ph.D. programs, the center has different objectives. First, it aims to build a critical mass of African scientists and engineers in the Internet of Things (IoT) through higher education and research. It also set up an IoT living lab in Rwanda for open innovation and related services.
African Center of Excellence for Innovative Teaching and Learning Mathematics and Science (ACEITLMS)	The Center's objectives are to bring innovation into teaching and learning by designing and running outstanding Ph.D. and Med programs in mathematics and science education, research and training, and

	community engagement. The Center mainly focuses on Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.
Center of excellence in Biodiversity and natural resource management (COEB)	The center focuses on capacity building and training in the environment and biodiversity. It also focuses on developing biodiversity, and climate changes educational programs for schools, supporting research in biodiversity, hosting public lectures on environmental issues and biodiversity research, etc.
Center of excellence in Biomedical engineering (CRBE) and eHealth	The center aims at training, conducting research, develop physical infrastructure in Biomedical engineering. The center also seeks to create an enabling environment for transforming Rwanda into an attractive and competitive medical tourism destination, linking biomedical sector industry development and economic transformation.
EAC Regional Center of Excellence for Vaccines, Immunization and Health Supply Chain Management (RCE-VIHSCM)	The center aims to offer high-quality preservice and continued professional training to strengthen human resources capacities in the EAC region, conduct evidence-based research in health supply chain management, and support the implementation of innovation in HSCM.
East Africa Institute for Fundamental Research (EAIFR)	The center is known as a “UNESCO category II center,” affiliated with the international center for Theoretical Physics (ICTP). The center trains students at the postgraduate level (MSc and Ph.D.) and facilitates research-oriented advanced studies in all areas of physics and mathematics. Besides, the center provides facilities and opportunities for advanced training and research for scientists from East Africa Countries and the rest of Sub Sahara Africa, emphasizing women in science throughout its all programs.

Center of African Virtual University (AVU)	The center aims to increase access to quality higher education and training through innovative information and communication technologies to act as a physical hub for creating, organizing, and sharing knowledge and developing ODeL programs. Among the center's activities are the Applied computer science program (ACSP), Peace management, and conflict resolution programs.
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*Source: Visited Institution's documents*

### ***Diversified networks and partnerships***

Visited universities have several diversified partnerships and collaborations with universities and organizations worldwide for joint research projects, student exchange, and consultancy. A respondent asserted the following:

Through these partnerships, we share staff, and we share students. We sent students, and they sent students to us. Our students go for a period of six months as an internship.

Another respondent indicated that his institution has more than 400 partner institutions, adding that "many are dormant." Respondent also revealed that most of their partnership and Memorandum of understanding (MoUs) are primarily oriented toward European and American universities or organizations.

Some universities are part of church-based networks that help to strengthen and promote higher education internationalization in the region. As an example, respondents mentioned the "Adventist Accrediting Association" (AAA), a worldwide body of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. AAA provides accreditation to Adventist universities all over the world. Another Adventist network is ECD (East-Central Africa Division) which coordinates the regional universities in 11 countries, including Rwanda.



### ***Home-based initiatives***

Universities have also relatively developed some initiatives to promote internationalization and regionalization. In the following, one can mention the existence of structures that implement internationalization, international staff and students recruitment, and extracurricular activities.

#### **International students and staff recruitment**

All the visited universities have international students. And there is an apparent willingness and strategy to recruit international students with a focus on Owest Africa. There is a growing number of African students at the three visited universities. One respondent asserted that universities work closely with government institutions to ease the recruitment of international students. They also partner with different private companies specialized in the sector or with scholarship agencies in various African countries. Besides, some students are recruited under existing partnerships and sponsorships. Some universities have also put an online system that facilitates international students to apply. A respondent asserted the following:

We have an online portal whereby international students and staff can access us. This portal helps our students to know our programs. It helps them when they need to apply for admission, apply for a visa, and apply for equivalence. You see, it is working.

Other respondents indicated that they use international staff recruitment to internationalize their institution. One of our respondents shared his experience:

What we do, is to focus on recruiting international staff. And 30 % of our academic and faculty staff are from abroad. When you are learning from your own context, by your own people, it works, but when someone from outside comes in and teaches you, you find that it is the same you have been learning from your own people, but the examples, experiences, and stories enrich the learning.

### **Extracurricular activities**

Some respondents indicated that their institutions have extracurricular activities to enhance the international experience of their local students and the integration of international students and staff. These activities include organizing international conferences and lectures, organizing competition inter-nationalities, organizing intercultural week, and strengthening the institution's language center. A respondent noted the following:

To ensure that our university is internationalized, we organize research conferences and public lectures, where international speakers and researchers come here and share their research works and findings with our students and staff. We do this regularly.

And another one to add:

We organize an intercultural week every semester. Different nations represented here bring diversified presentations of the key features of their countries. It can be a folkloric feature, singing, dancing, or clothing, or it can be a history of their country or anything that can characterize their country. It takes a week of the tournament, and we give awards to the best winners. Those are opportunities to let people feel part of us. All these are ways of integrating international students and enriching our local students with exposure to different realities.

### **University's internationalization structures**

One of the three universities visited revealed that it has internationalization instruments, namely a policy and a strategic plan that guide the implementation of internationalization. But the researcher tried unsuccessfully to have a copy of those instruments. He was told that there was no hard copy of those instruments, but rather all were posted on the institution's website. The indicated link was not accessible during the period of data collection. Also, one institution has one staff in charge of internationalization

exclusively. In other visited universities, internationalization is combined with other offices, either the public relation and marketing office or the office of the Vice-chancellor her/himself.

### **Key challenges and barriers to internationalization**

Several challenges hinder the development of internationalization and regionalization initiatives in Rwandan higher learning institutions. In the following, I want to summarize what our respondent pointed out:

#### ***Inadequate human resources and structures***

Our respondents pointed out that internationalization and regionalization have recently attracted the interest of Rwandan higher learning institutions, but unfortunately, they have inadequate human resources, skills, and competence to implement them. The preparedness of lecturers, administration, and faculty staff have also been insufficient. In addition, the structure has not yet fully accommodated all the internationalization components and its varied aspects. One respondent declared the following:

Basically, one person should not handle internationalization. At least, it might be an office with more than four people. We have many activities related to these initiatives. We want to internationalize and go global, but we don't want to put internal systems into place that will make it happen. No qualified personnel, no marketing facilities to attract international students; how it can work?

And another one to add:

The other barrier may be the preparedness for lectures. Some lectures are not well prepared to integrate international students. They don't know that we have shifted, that now we have students from different nations, different backgrounds. You find someone is giving examples from his own home, and no one understands, and he doesn't know how to open up the examples from outside. So that is an issue, of course. Last but not

least, the challenge of scholarship is still there because we wish to get more sponsored international students to bring that dynamism through interaction and interculturality.

***Poor commitment to IUCEA initiatives and proposals***

Our respondent revealed that many universities are not fully embracing the regionalization strategies proposed by IUCEA. That is due to a lack of internal mechanisms to enforce EAC regulations, mindset, resistance to change, and competition. A respondent noted the following:

Even though IUCEA is the only institution of the East African Community mandated to harmonize higher education in the region, it is voluntary to join the network. In addition, there are no existing mechanisms to enforce and monitor its regulations and frameworks, and that situation leads some universities to neglect regional regulations or requirements.

And another one to assert:

There are good frameworks, good policies, and they are well-written, but the implementation becomes a problem. Who wants to implement them? There are also no compulsory mechanisms to implement them. And when HEC (Higher Education Council), the Rwandan higher education regulator, visits our institutions for evaluation, it checks for regulations and rules it set itself only.

Second, it may be a problem of mindset and resistance to change, as pointed out by a respondent.

You know there are many opportunities that we are not taking. Some of our leaders don't understand it. For example, IUCEA has a good program for staff mobility. We can get or send a teacher from the region who may come to teach for six months, and we provide only accommodation. But some are not interested! They say, "if we have regular and full-time staff paid every month, why do we need these people coming

from EAC?” It is a mindset problem, and they don’t see the opportunities the program brings.

Third, another respondent pointed out the lack of trust as a real barrier to regionalization:

There is an issue of mindset whereby people don’t trust themselves, and they don’t trust the nearby neighborhoods. That is like in the Rwandan culture, whereby we are used to thinking that medicine that cures has to come from behind the next village, the next mountain. You believe that you cannot get quality from around, and you need to climb a hill, and then behind the mountain is where you will find the solution. That was part of the mindset, and I find it is rather African. Many Africans think quality comes from outside until they get disappointed to realize that rubbish can also come from outside. That is when they start to say that they should appreciate their own business.

Fourth, some identified competition as a significant challenge to the regionalization initiative.

One clarified that point as follows:

The curriculum may be the same because of that harmonization, but because of the competition in the academic sector, it might not be implemented as planned. The way our institutions compete with each other cannot go with collaboration and harmonization.

### ***Poor management and formulation of the research agenda***

Recognizing the burden of financial issues, respondents also indicated institutional weakness in terms of management and planning of the research agenda. A respondent revealed an important aspect:

Because if you want to benefit fully from internationalization, it will be good that we bring outside people to work on our research agenda so that research can contribute to

solving our problems. For the time being, it is the other way around. It is the people, researchers from outside, who bring their research topics and involve our researchers.

Another respondent associated this issue with the absence of will to invest in research:

In Rwanda, we still have a problem with research. We do not want to invest in it. For me, it is not because we don't have people who can do it, but the investment in research is still very low. You may see that some institutions, like mine here, when you see the amount of money they put into the research, is not really enough. And also, they may tell you that in the budget they have put this amount of money, but when you want to use it, they say there is no money. Yes! This means that they are not focusing more on research. Because maybe they know that research will not bring financial benefits. That is how our people think.

### ***Unfavorable internal system***

Another issue that affects internationalization and regionalization is the instability of study plans and calendars. Respondents revealed that it always happens to change study plans and move ahead or before the settled time. That situation might make it very difficult to attract international students who wish to cover only a short course. One respondent clarified the situation in the following terms:

Imagine what happens when a student booked a mathematics course planned to come to start in the second semester in March, and you put it ahead in June. It is very significant if you want to internationalize your programs.

### ***Lack of national policy that orients and harmonizes all initiatives***

Interviewees in the study indicated that they face several challenges in managing internationalization and regionalization because the country does not have a national policy on internationalization. One stipulated the following:

Another challenge related to regionalization is the policies. The national policies and the regional policies are somehow contradicting. They may conflict by saying that you can go and study somewhere outside the country, and when you come back here, they ask you equivalence while we are all in the same region. That is the problem you will be facing. Someone has graduated from Kenya, and when he comes to Rwanda, he needs to do an equivalence. That becomes a problem not only for my institution but also for other universities because when internationals come to work here in Rwanda, we need to get their equivalence. This is for every international, even those from the region where we say we have a harmonized system. Why do we need that equivalence?

Another respondent stated that a national policy could be a stimulating factor that can force higher institutions to internationalize and regionalize:

Unless we say ok, let's put some rules that if someone is not following this policy, he will not be allowed to issue degrees that can support and increase the relevance of EAC policies and lead to accountability. I think internationalization should have a policy from the ministry of education

### ***Financial and funding constraints***

Our respondent revealed that financial constraints in which higher education institutions work as a big challenge. First, institutions fear investing a lot in internationalization as they doubt the return on investment. Consequently, they cannot finance the outward mobility of students and staff, and the situation results in an unhealthy imbalance of exchange programs: Studying abroad becomes a privilege and very difficult to access. Also, the challenge leads to poor physical infrastructure and facilities to cater to incoming staff and faculty (accommodation) and Online and Distance learning facilities.

Second, there is a strong dependence on external funds. As revealed by our respondents, most of the initiatives for regionalization are funded by outsider partners: the World Bank, African Development Bank, KFW Bank, UNESCO, and other big multinationals. Respondents regretted that the situation was accompanied by the refusal to find self-reliant means.

The problem is that the existing regional area and initiatives are already fed by externals: the European Union, the world bank, or other funding agencies. We are not able to say that let us set aside a budget and make sure we do our business. I was a member of the executive committee of IUCEA, some countries are not contributing, and some universities are not contributing. You could find that some have five years of not paying their contribution to that regional network. And that is not really the problem of the economy. The problem is the mindset that people think that even for their own benefit, someone else should pay for them.

Third, the pressure for funds resulted in overlooking regional partnerships to value north-American partnerships. One respondent clarified this situation showing the risk of the balkanization of the region:

I have seen that we tend to be keen to partner with partners from the north because they bring in funds. Because when we talk about student exchange, mobility, and staff exchange within the scheme under IUCEA, it is often overlooked whenever you ask a college leader or university leader to join. But when it comes to partnering with northern universities, people are excited. But there is a risk of the balkanization of our universities because some universities are creating what they call ‘their network in EAC’: X State University with East African Universities, Y European University with EastAfrican universities. Yes, it is also an issue of mindset, but mostly, funds are a big motivator.



### ***Internationalization's negative effects***

Respondents indicated other challenges that are caused by the internationalization process itself. The phenomenon of brain drains and acculturation, non-adaptation. A respondent noted the following:

We face a significant challenge of the brain drain phenomenon, and Africa is losing investment in education. You train a person for eighteen years, from early childhood to a bachelor's degree, and people come and give that trainee a scholarship for a master's degree to study abroad. When the person decides to stay there, it means that the hosting country is investing only two years in getting for free 18 years of investments. So, it is costly for African countries when that kind of situation happens. And for those who go out after the Master's degree, it is 22 or 23 years of investment lost by the home country against a Ph.D. scholarship of only five years. Africa makes a loss of 24 years of investments. So, if calculated just monetary, it means that internationalization and exchange programs benefit more developed countries than our countries.

And another respondent added the following emphasizing the issue of acculturation:

Another barrier we have is acculturation. Some staff has different cultures, and others are copying culture that is not good to have. And also, managing those people who have their own cultures and don't want to learn about Rwandan culture becomes a big challenge. If you come from outside, you should go where you are going and try to learn, but they want to stay and work as they were in their own countries and want us to learn about their own cultures. The way they speak is a problem, the way they understand others is a problem, and the relationship is not even easy. This is a big problem because it is related to a culture known and done by everybody in the hosting country.

Another respondent pointed out the issue of non-adaptation of international students:

Another barrier is, of course, from those regional or international students! Some may not have enough patience to integrate. They have come here either as five people. They speak French, and you always see them speaking their french, and they don't want to integrate with others. Maybe others don't want to integrate them, neither do they not put any effort. You see that also.

The issue of adaptation also concerns local students, as one of the respondents indicated:

Rwandans find themselves easily in the “comfort zone,” linguistically and culturally. Not many students are ok with their communication skills, and not all students are conversant with them. That is a significant barrier: “communication skills.” Communication is an issue because they are not conversant with an important foreign language. You speak French, and they are not strong; you speak English, they are not strong, and they prefer to run away from anybody who is using other languages they don't understand. They don't welcome easily different cultures, other ways of doing things, other approaches, other cultures. You find that they are too “comfortable in their zone” because we have one language and the same culture as a country.

## **Discussion**

This study tried to identify internationalization and regionalization initiatives undertaken by Rwanda universities, with particular attention to best practices, drivers, and impediments. The study also targeted identifying the benefits of prioritizing regional collaborations and partnerships for Rwandan higher learning institutions. Three questions guided the study: How do universities leaders and administrators perceive the benefits of regionalization/internationalization for Rwandan Higher Education? What regionalization/internationalization initiatives are undertaken by Rwandan universities: characteristics, areas of priority, and challenges? How do these initiatives relate to the

perceived benefits of such programming? Therefore, the study generated several findings mentioned above that are worth discussing and interpreting in this section.

### ***Rationales and benefits of Internationalization and regionalization***

The study data indicate that respondents understand the concepts of internationalization and regionalization. On the one hand, the respondents recognize internationalization as a new, complex, multidimensional process of driving universities into global forums. Their perceptions concur with the literature that defines internationalization as a process of integrating international and intercultural dimensions into higher education delivery and services for the benefit of students, institutions, and societal development (de Wit, 2019; Knight, 2017). Given the internationalization and regionalization benefits identified by respondents, one can imply that they see internationalization as not an end in itself but as a means to improve quality, as this has been developed by de Wit (2017). In addition, as other scholars discussed, this study data suggests respondents saw regionalization as a subset or a part of internationalization that put more emphasis and focus on regional level collaboration, partnerships, and cooperation, as some scholars pointed out (Knight, 2017; Ndofirepi et al., 2017). Therefore, the study data indicates that internationalization and regionalization may take the same forms, such as partnerships, academic programs, research collaboration activities, networks, and extracurricular activities (Knight, 2017). In the same line with different scholars, the study data indicated that the two processes bring significant benefits to both institutions and students (de Wit, 2019; OECD, 2012; Rugumamu, 20004).

The study data is consistent with the literature that mentions the main rationale for African higher institutions towards internationalization is the need for institutional and academic strengthening (Jowi, 2009). Internationalization and regionalization allow institutions to grow interactively and comparatively. They enhance the capacity of institutions through benchmarking, diversity, expertise, innovation, empowerment, and mutual support.

They offer opportunities that improve the quality of education (Knight, 2009; Ogachi, 2008).

From the students' perspectives, the study data, in the line of literature, suggests that the two processes expose students to different experiences, cultures, and new perspectives.

Internationalization and regionalization offer opportunities to improve learning experiences, skills and competencies development, mobility, access to large markets, and employment opportunities (de Wit, 2019; Knight, 2017; OECD, 2012).

However, considering regionalization as a subset of internationalization has prevented some themes from emerging. For example, Ndofirepi et al. (2017) pointed out that regionalization can be seen as a component of internationalization (Convergent trends), or as a challenge or response to internationalization (divergent trends), or as a parallel process (overlapping trends). The two last themes have not emerged in the rationales of regionalization given by our respondents. In addition, other themes especially focusing on activities related to regional integration, closer alignment, and harmonization of higher education among national or subregional education (Knight, 2017), did not also emerge. The researcher expected themes such as quality assurance frameworks, academic credit systems, and benchmarking activities, among others. This characteristic has different implications and interpretations.

Furthermore, considering what was reported by respondents as challenges to regionalization, namely that institutions overlook regional activities, it can be inferred that understanding regionalization as simply a part of internationalization hinders regionalization development. This consideration has also instigated institutions to develop and promote internationalization activities at the expense of regionalization, as will be discussed in the following pages. Ogachi (2009) cements this point of view when he argues that internationalization poses challenges that undermine regional approaches' spirit and capacity.

Despite that lack of focus on essential themes of regionalization, the study data identified significant regionalization benefits that internationalization cannot provide. Regionalization is less expensive and can facilitate mutual learning between regional universities because of sharing the same context and problems. This can suggest that even though there are important reasons to approach regionalization, other interests or barriers prevent institutions from looking at it very strategically. The study data and literature pointed out financial interests and driven partnerships as negative factors affecting regionalization strategies (Oanda & Matiangi, 2018; Ogachi, 2009).

To conclude, based on the study data, it can be said that the respondents understand the concepts of internationalization and regionalization and the benefits to higher learning institutions in pursuing the two processes. But there are several regionalization benefits that do not receive necessary attention because regionalization is only understood and approached as a subset or part of internationalization.

The data suggest that internationalization and regionalization are rooted in Rwandan cultural values. This is a crucial element to the understanding of internationalization and regionalization. It means that pursuing internationalization and regionalization may perpetuate the same values. It might also mean that internationalization and regionalization would be easily welcomed, accepted, and implemented. The cultural foundations of such far-reaching activity are means of sustainability. On the other hand, this understanding of internationalization and regionalization may contradict the critics against African internationalization initiatives, which argue that African initiatives only mimic and copy and paste western forms and approaches. Approaches may be similar, but motives are partly original.

While the study respondents identified financial and funding constraints as challenging, no themes related to income generation as a rationale for internationalization

emerged. Some scholars argue that revenue generation is the potential benefit of internationalization (Tahira & Masha, 2015). Similarly, it is questionable how the benefits of internationalization and regionalization will be achieved if these processes cannot be sustained by themselves. Identifying the benefits of internationalization and regionalization without linking them to the implications of their costs may raise the question of sustainability in a context of economic scarcity. Combined with the fact that many of the internationalization initiatives undertaken by Rwandan institutions come from foreign funding, this suggests that institutions do not see internationalization and regionalization as self-financing opportunities.

***Internationalization and Regionalization initiatives: characteristics, approaches, and priorities***

The study data suggest that Rwandan higher learning institutions emphasize campus-based internationalization activities, known as "internationalization at home." This is a good practice. As highlighted in the literature, internationalization at home allows many students and staff who do not have the opportunity to travel abroad to have international experiences, skills, and competencies within their campus (de Wit et al., 2019; Jowi, 2009). Those activities are seminars, workshops, guest lectures, and intercultural days. They also include curriculum and other teaching experiences. However, themes related to Online and Distance Learning have not emerged as one important tool to internationalize at home. Others have considered ODL as a gateway to provide access to internationalization and lifelong learning opportunities and increase education quality (de Wit et al., 2019; Mukama, 2018). It seems important for higher learning institutions to develop a clear strategy for internationalization at home in order to ensure that leaders and academic staff prioritize internationalization at home. Strengthening internationalization at home can bring different solutions to the costs of abroad programs and activities and even to other challenges (De wit et al., 2019).

Study data also suggest that visited universities also focus on the recruitment of international students. This is also a good practice as international students enrich the internationalization experience of higher learning institutions. However, institutions still need to set up structures that support the integration of international students. As mentioned above, many universities do not have an internationalization office. OECD (2012) argues that the international office provides students with information and assistance with housing, language, cultural issues and facilitates the sharing of information. Yet, Rwandan universities appear to be lacking the ability to provide such services.

Besides, the data suggests that universities also focus on building partnerships and networks with international universities and organizations. These partnerships include student exchange programs, joint research, collaborative social projects, and staff exchange. These partnerships are materialized in different Memorandum of understanding, but the data suggested that many are dormant.

Taken together, the data obtained through this study show that our respondents define internationalization in a fairly narrow way, despite the fact that the literature on internationalization emphasizes the importance of a more ‘comprehensive’ approach to the concept (American Council on Education, 2020). Thus, understanding internationalization comprehensively can help to embrace it widely.

Considering regionalization, as described in rationales, internationalization has not only dominated regionalization in respondents' understandings but also in the institutions' approaches to regionalization. Institutions have developed more partnerships, networks, and collaborations with external institutions than regional ones. Besides, regionalization initiatives carried out by visited institutions focus on some areas while neglecting others. By looking at those regional initiatives under the FOPA Model (Knight, 2017), one would find an imbalanced approach to these initiatives. The model, in its function approach, identifies

two kinds of strategies. One strategy allows identifying activities that facilitate closer alignment and harmonization. Another strategy allows identifying activities and practices that facilitate student mobility schemes, cross-border collaborative programs, inter-regional universities, the context of excellence, and extracurricular activities. Applied to this study, one will find that the second strategy dominates initiatives carried out by Rwandan universities. Those initiatives include the centers of excellence, students and staff exchange programs initiated by IUCEA, and extracurricular activities, among others suggested by the study data. Contrary, initiatives leading to closer alignment and harmonization are quasi-inexistent. The situation can be linked to the issue discussed above of the domination of regionalization by internationalization and the lack of clear focus on regionalization initiatives. In addition, many of these regional initiatives are mostly initiated and funded by external partners. Many scholars have extensively criticized the dependence on external partners, stating that those initiatives are not likely to be sustainable because local and academic interests are not the primary motives of those funding partners (Ogachi, 2009; Ndofirepi et al., 2017).

Still, under the FOPA model, especially from the organization approach, one finds frameworks, structures, and agencies (Knight, 2017) that support regionalization. By applying this model to the Rwandan context, the study data suggest that structures and frameworks have not been fully developed at the institutional level. There are only regional structures and frameworks designed by IUCEA that help Rwandan higher learning institutions to integrate regionalization. However, there is a lack of solid commitment and engagement with IUCEA's initiatives and proposals, as will be discussed in the following.

### ***Benefits and challenges***

The study data suggest that leaders discovered significant benefits for their institutions in pursuing internationalization and regionalization strategies. However,



institutions face several challenges that impede the development of internationalization and regionalization. Some of these challenges may be located at the institutional level, while others are due to the national context, and others concern regional or international context. These challenges are generally interconnected, and some are transversal to many issues while others may be considered simultaneously as the cause and the effect.

One of the critical challenges pointed out by this study data spins on the issue of funding and finance. This leads to a lack of infrastructure, staff, and personnel. Funding pressures incite partnering with any organization or institution bringing funds while neglecting strategic regional networks and collaboration. However, it is essential to mention that the issue of funding and financial constraints is familiar to most contexts of developing countries. Jowi (2009) indicated that African universities don't receive sufficient funds from the government, and this cannot enable higher institutions to take advantage of internationalization opportunities adequately. Bringing in a meaningful and sustainable international dimension requires substantial funding. There is always the question of who will fund internationalization activities such as research, scholarship, international students' recruitments, marketing of programs, faculty exchanges, the technology needed for distance learning, internationalization at home if the governments in developing countries have essential and diversified priorities such as health and primary education? Return on investment is a serious question that higher learning institutions should think about. The situation invites an innovative internationalization that should sustain its objectives and activities. As indicated above, why not consider internationalization as an activity that can generate income for higher learning institutions? In the context of Rwanda universities, unexploited opportunities identified as challenges can, instead, become a solution to this issue of scarcity of funds. Universities need to find new ways of doing business. While lack of

funds is still a barrier to internationalization, it is also a key motivator to expand and diversify institutional income (Jowi, 2009).

Another challenge to the regionalization of Rwandan higher education pointed out by the study data is the lack of commitment to IUCEA regulations and proposals. In addition to reasons advanced by respondents, such as the lack of enforcing mechanisms for IUCEA's regulations, resistance to change, the mindset of higher education institutions leaders, and competition, the literature goes far and add other challenges. Trines (2018) indicated that member countries are still reluctant to fully liberalize their labor markets and continue to impose barriers to protect local jobs from regional competition despite multilateral agreements to the contrary. As a result, underfunded universities resist adopting equal treatment of students from all member countries regarding tuition fees because of fiscal issues. Besides, some higher learning institutions fear that the increased transferability of qualifications will cause them to lose students to institutions in other countries. In contrast, others fear losing their institutional autonomy. The costs of transforming academic structures and curricula and hiring staff to implement regionalization also slow down alignment efforts (Trines, 2018).

Other identified challenges confirm what the literature calls institution drawbacks (Jowi, 2009) that prevent many high learning institutions from responding adequately to internationalization demands. The study data emphasized the weak and inadequate institutional structure and capacity that support internationalization, poor planning, instability of study plans and calendars, unprepared lecturers, and insufficient financial support given to internationalization. These challenges connect with the issues of finance and commitment discussed above, and they are crucial barriers to the development of internationalization and regionalization initiatives.

The study respondents noted the lack of internationalization policy at the national level as an important challenge because they don't have clear guidance on key strategic activities or issues related to harmonizing local regulations with regional and international policies. This concern corroborates some scholars' suggestions who think that the lack of internationalization policy leads to fragmented, unplanned initiatives with unclear objectives, whereas the primary input of national policy would be to provide a clear definition of roles and clarify internationalization related issues such as cross border mobility schemes, recognition of qualifications, immigration, and employment (de Wit et al., 2019; Jowi, 2009). However, a national policy may not be a condition sine qua non for achieving internationalization, given good practices and experiences from some countries that do not have a centralized policy (de Wit et al., 2019).

Moreover, the study data identified the brain drain, the loss of cultural or national identity as risks of internationalization and challenges to its development. The study is also consistent with the literature as it sees those challenges in most developing countries, adding to those risks the commodification and commercialization of research and services. The two undermine the goals of relevance and equity and the perpetuation of historical dominance enjoyed by the global north, which dictates imitative modernizations in developing countries (Jowi, 2009; Knight, 2007; Tahira & Masha, 2015). These negative sides (or risks) of internationalization can be taken as demotivating factors for institutions to prioritize regionalization and internationalization initiatives.

To conclude, one can assert that there is a logical sequence of this study's results. Rationales and benefits explain why this or that activity is undertaken or should be prioritized. The study revealed that institution leaders understand the main aspects of the concepts of internationalization and regionalization. As a result, important initiatives are being conducted at the institutions level, and one can praise the fact that internationalization

at home has been prioritized in such initiatives. Given the data, however, internationalization dominates regionalization in their rationales as well as in their processes. Some important benefits of regionalization and related activities are not prioritized. Although respondents see more benefits to institutions from regionalization than from internationalization, there is little institutional commitment to regional partnership and cooperation. Institutions tend to prioritize partnerships from outside the region or those offering funding or financial opportunities. Challenges allowed the researcher to understand these choices, and to explain why certain activities are underestimated or undeveloped.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter will conclude the study by summarizing the key research findings. It will also highlight some contributions and limitations of the study. It will end with a proposition of some opportunities for future research.

First of all, this study aimed to identify internationalization and regionalization initiatives undertaken by Rwandan universities. The results indicate that the institutions have initiated different internationalization activities. The results show that Rwandan higher learning institutions are part of regional and global networks that create different platforms for research, meeting, discussion, and exchange. More specifically, internationalization and regionalization activities carried out by Rwandan higher learning institutions can be grouped into two categories: abroad-oriented initiatives and home-based initiatives. On the one hand, among abroad-oriented initiatives, results pointed out student and staff exchange programs, joint research, and consultancy facilitated by partnerships and collaborations with universities and organizations worldwide. On the other hand, as home-based initiatives, results indicated that Rwanda hosts nine regional centers of excellence that train students from eastern and southern Africa at the graduate level. Also, higher learning institutions are focusing on international students and staff recruitment and extracurricular activities. The latter include the organization of international conferences and lectures, the organization of intercultural weeks, the organization of competition inter-nationalities, and the strengthening of the institutions' language centers. Although minimal, higher learning institutions also have started to set up structures that support internationalization.

Second, the study sought to identify the rationales that bring higher learning institutions to pursue internationalization and regionalization. The results indicated that higher learning institutions understand the role of internationalization and regionalization in enhancing the quality of their institutions' services. Internationalization was recognized as a

new, complex, multidimensional process of taking the university into global forums. Rooted in the values of the Rwandan culture, internationalization is seen as a way to open up the borders of minds and countries. More specifically, internationalization has significant benefits for both institutions and students. At the institutional level, results indicated that internationalization enhances the capacity of institutions through benchmarking, diversity, expertise, innovation, and mutual support. It allows institutions to have good students and staff to fill the skills gaps. It increases visibility, reputation, ranking, and trust. In sum, it allows institutions to grow interactively and comparatively. At the student level, the results indicate that internationalization exposes students to different experiences, cultures, and new perspectives. Specifically, findings suggest that internationalization improves students' learning experiences through knowledge sharing, language improvement, the discovery of new cultures, ways of thinking, new connections, and new friends. It also gives students different competencies that allow them to compete nationally, regionally, and internationally and access a large opportunity for market and employment. However, results indicated that internationalization was not defined comprehensively, which prevented some important themes and benefits from emerging.

Third, the study aimed to identify the benefits of prioritizing regional collaborations and partnerships within EAC for Rwandan higher learning institutions. The results indicated that higher learning institutions recognize the importance of prioritizing regionalization. Results suggest that regionalization facilitates sharing of knowledge and experience among institutions in the same region; it is accessible, more effective, and affordable. Results also indicated that regionalization could be a solution to the negative aspects of internationalization. Despite this understanding of the priority of regionalization for Rwanda, results indicated that Rwandan institutions define and pursue regionalization as a subset of internationalization, which has somewhat hindered regionalization's development.

Institutions have developed more activities, partnerships, networks, and collaborations with external institutions while overlooking the regional ones.

Fourth, the study aimed to identify barriers and challenges to regionalization and internationalization that Rwandan higher learning institutions face. The results found a multifaceted set of challenges. These challenges include inadequate human resources and structures, poor commitment to IUCEA's initiatives and proposals, poor management and formulation of research agenda, unfavorable internal system, lack of an internationalization/regionalization policy, financial and funding constraints, and negative internationalization effects.

Therefore, with these results, one can assert that this study will be useful for higher learning institutions, students, researchers, and policymakers. The research process, especially interviews with institutions leaders, helped the latter to reflect on motivations and priorities that underpin institutions' engagement toward internationalization/regionalization. Besides, the findings have revealed many best practices, gaps, and weaknesses that can help Rwandan Higher Learning Institutions and IUCEA for better future planning, monitoring, and evaluation of their internationalization/regionalization initiatives. The findings of this study may also allow Rwanda's policymakers and higher learning institutions to re-evaluate policies, regulations, guidelines, and strategies related to the internationalization of higher education. Ultimately, this study makes a contribution to the existing knowledge resources on internationalization and regionalization in EAC and Rwanda in particular.

However, this study has some limitations. Because of constraints related to time, financial, distance, and covid restrictions, the study targeted only three universities from 30 higher learning institutions. Even though a qualitative study does not intend to make a generalization, it is possible to get more information, perspectives, and orientations when the sample size is bigger.

That said, future research can exploit the same topic on a large scale. Also, this study identified the recruitment of international students as an important trend in higher education in Rwanda. Future research can explore the experience of international students in the context of a developing country. Besides, future research can focus on the impact assessment of internationalization and regionalization initiatives displayed by this study. In addition, it can be mentioned that funds and financial constraints still hinder internationalization and regionalization in developing contexts. A comparative study on the internationalization/regionalization strategy that sustains itself will be an important contribution to higher learning institutions working in the context of financial difficulties.



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## **Appendix A: Interview questions**



Boston College

### **Lynch School of Education and Human development**

**Project Title:** Exploring Institutional Commitment and Perspectives on Higher

Education Regionalization within East African Community: A Case study of

Rwandan Universities

**Interviewees:** Administration staff; Academic staff

**Interviewer:** Janvier Nduwayezu (Student at Boston College-Lynch school of education)

### **Interview questions**

1. Can you introduce yourself? How long have you been in your present position at this Institution?
2. My project proposal is about the internationalization processes at higher education institutions. How do you understand the term “internationalization”? What do you think that it means?”
3. “Do you see any benefit to your institution in pursuing internationalization strategies? If so, why? If not, why not ?”
4. Another word that is often used is “regionalization.” Have you heard of this term before? If so, how do you understand it? And do you see any relationship between regionalization and internationalization?
5. Briefly describe your role as it relates to your Institution’s internationalization/Regionalization activities?

6. What are the benefits of higher education internationalization/Regionalization for the higher education system in Rwanda?
7. Please help me to make a detailed list of internationalization/regionalization initiatives, partnerships, and practices undertaken by your Institution?
8. What are your Institution's structures that implement internationalization activities?
9. What are the challenges and barriers to internationalization/Regionalization your Institution is facing?
10. From your perspective, what are other higher education internationalization/Regionalization opportunities not exploited by Rwandan higher education institutions? Why?
11. Do you have something to add to all that we have discussed?

## Appendix B: Consent Form



**Boston College**

**Boston College: Lynch School of Education and Human development**

**Informed Consent to be in the study:** Exploring Institutional Commitment and Perspectives  
on Higher Education Regionalization within East African Community: A Case study of  
Rwandan Universities

**Researcher: Janvier NDUWAYEZU**

**Type of consent: Adult Consent Form**

### **Invitation to be part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. You were selected to be in this study because you have been identified as one who has in-depth knowledge, role, experience, and expertise in higher education in Rwanda, and especially in the internationalization initiatives of your institution. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

### **What is the study about, and why are we doing it?**

I am a Master's Student in the International Higher education program at Boston College, USA. This research study will be written up as my master's thesis. The purpose of the study is to:

- Identify internationalization and regionalization initiatives undertaken by Rwandan universities;
- Identify best practices, drivers, and impediments of those initiatives;
- Identify benefits of prioritizing regional collaboration and partnerships (EAC) for Rwandan higher learning institutions

- Identify key practical implications for higher learning institutions, policymakers, and regional collaboration networks and stakeholders

The total number of people in this study is expected to be six: Three women and three men.

#### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher himself on topics related to the internationalization and regionalization initiatives of your institution within the East Africa Community. The interview will largely focus on the meanings, benefits, practices, and challenges of higher education internationalization and regionalization in the context of Rwanda. An audiotape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made, although the researcher will take notes during the interview. I expect the interview to take about 45 minutes. Information collected from the interview will be linked to other information the researcher will collect from document analysis of your institution.

#### **How could you benefit from this study?**

Although you will not directly benefit from being in this study, others might benefit because the results of this work will be shared with the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions in Rwanda. You might benefit from being in this study because we will be discussing different institutions' regionalization initiatives and commitments to internationalization and regionalization of higher education. Ipso facto, you will develop critical insights into the topic, and potentially, you will become agents of change or improvement of higher education in Rwanda.

#### **What risks might result from being in this study?**

There are some risks you might experience from being in this study. They are informational risk that involves the breach of confidentiality. To minimize this risk, the researcher will be the only person with access to the interviews. The researcher will keep all information

received during the interview strictly confidential. The researcher will not mention your name in any reports using information obtained during the interview. In addition, participant data will remain secure, as described below.

#### **How will we protect your information?**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file. The audio record will be kept under a pseudonym. After the transcription of the recording, it will be destroyed. Transcripts will be coded and stored in a secure location. Codes and data will also be stored separately.

Personal information that identifies the research subjects will not be collected. Only participants will receive a code that will be stored in a different location than the data.

The Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records. State or federal laws or court orders may also require that information from your research study records be released. Otherwise, the researchers will not release to others any information that identifies you unless you give your permission or unless we are legally required to do so.

#### **What will happen to the information we collect about you after the study is over?**

I will not keep your research data to use for future research or another purpose. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from the research data collected as part of the project.

I will not share your research data with other investigators.

#### **How will we compensate you for being part of the study?**

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

#### **What are the costs to you to be part of the study?**

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

### **Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary**

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, no one from your Institution will be informed, and the researcher will destroy all data collected from you.

If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with your institution.

### **Getting Dismissed from the Study**

The researcher may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) it is in your best interests (e.g., side effects or distress have resulted), (2) you have repeatedly failed to be present at the agreed-upon time and place.

### **Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research**

If you have questions about this research, you may contact the researcher Janvier

NDUWAYEZU ( [nduwayez@bc.edu](mailto:nduwayez@bc.edu), ) or his Faculty advisor Rebecca Schendel

([schendel@bc.edu](mailto:schendel@bc.edu)).

### **Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant**

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

Boston College

Office for Research Protections

Phone: (617) 552-4778

Email: [irb@bc.edu](mailto:irb@bc.edu)

### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I will give you a copy of this document for your records. I will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.*

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature

Date

## **Appendix C : Participant Information Sheet**



**Boston College**

**Boston College: Lynch School of Education and Human development**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

**Title of Project:** Institutional Commitment and Perspectives on Higher  
Education Regionalization within East African Community

**Name of Researcher:** Janvier NDUWAYEZU

Dear participant,

Thank you for your interest in this research study! I hope that this information sheet will give you all the information that you need about the project. If you find you have further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

#### **Why is this research being conducted?**

I am a Master's student at Boston College, USA. This research study will be written up as my master's thesis. I also intend to share the results with your institution with the Ministry of Education in Rwanda.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to:

- Identify internationalization and regionalization initiatives undertaken by Rwandan universities;



- Identify best practices, drivers, and impediments of those initiatives;
- Identify benefits of prioritizing regional collaboration and partnerships (EAC) for Rwandan higher learning institutions
- Identify key practical implications for higher learning institutions, policymakers, and regional collaboration networks and stakeholders

### **Who will be taking part?**

Participants in this study are administration staff from your institution contacted by the researcher under the permission of an authorized administrator.

### **What will happen during the research?**

Participants will be interviewed in person by the researcher for approximately one hour of interview. All interviews may be conducted in either English, Kinyarwanda, or French, depending on participant preference. The researcher speaks the three languages fluently, and he can make a translation himself.

### **What questions will be asked?**

Questions will focus on institutional initiatives towards internationalization and regionalization, the meaning and benefits of those initiatives for a higher learning institution.

### **Will participants have the opportunity to review the final results?**

Yes. Every participant will be given the opportunity to review the written transcript of his or her interview. The final results will also be disseminated on the university campus at the end of the project, and all participants are welcome to attend and give feedback.

### **What will happen to the research findings?**

The findings will be analyzed and used in my master's thesis. This means that I will present the thesis for examination at the Boston College, Lynch School of Education. If I am successful, the thesis will remain available for public use in the Boston College Library in Boston, USA, and in the libraries of participating Rwandan Higher Education Institutions.

I will also produce a short report of the findings and related recommendations, which will be shared with university administrators and representatives from the Ministry of Education.

*Your participation will remain entirely confidential.*

**What is the benefit of participation?**

Unfortunately, I am unable to provide any financial incentives for participation in this study.

However, it is my hope that the results of this work will be very useful both for university administrators and for the Ministry of Education as they work together to improve higher education in Rwanda. You can be assured that your participation will help to achieve this goal!

The Research Ethics Committee has reviewed all aspects of this project at the National Council for Science and Technology. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. My contact information is below:

Researcher : Janvier NDUWAYEZU (nduwayez@bc.edu)