




The Role of Leadership in Promoting Internationalisation and Sustainability in African Higher Education: A Narrative Review

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DOI: 10.53103/cjess.v6i4.542

Abstract

In advanced economies, educational institutions such as MIT, Imperial College London, Stanford, Oxford, Harvard, Cambridge, and Caltech lead in most benchmark areas used by assessors in university rankings. Despite the growing importance of internationalisation and sustainability in higher education, most African institutions face unique challenges in areas such as resource allocation, brain drain, infrastructure, vision, governance, faculty and staff development, student support services, community engagement, and communication. For some of these challenges to be addressed effectively, leadership, which focuses on internationalisation and sustainability, is needed. Therefore, this narrative review paper aims to assess the role that leadership plays in the digital revolution in terms of boosting internationalisation and sustainability in African higher education institutions. The paper, thus, synthesises existing literature on leadership in African higher educational institutions (HEIs), highlighting the challenges and opportunities, especially in the areas of internationalisation, sustainability, funding, and capacity building. The findings show that effective leadership strategies, which include strategic planning, collaborative leadership, visionary leadership, cultural competence, and stakeholder engagement, are the catalyst for promoting internationalisation and sustainability in most HEIs. The paper also proposes a framework for effective leadership that can facilitate internationalisation and sustainability in African HEIs. The findings of this review paper have implications for African higher educational institution leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders who desire to lead the market in terms of internationalisation and sustainability. By stressing the critical role of leadership in this context, this review contributes to the development of more effective strategies for promoting internationalisation and sustainability in African higher education institutions, and elsewhere.

Keywords: Higher Educational Institutions, Effective Leadership, Internationalisation, Sustainability, Africa, Narrative Review, SDGs

Background to the Study

Leadership has always been a key factor in the success of every jurisdiction. Without leadership, institutions are like a headless snake, lacking direction. In pre-colonial

African societies, leadership roles were grounded in communal values, morality, and spiritual cosmologies (Wamble-King, 2024). These frameworks of beliefs (i.e., spiritual cosmologies) provide the source, legitimacy, and primary aim of leadership and power. For example, during the transatlantic slave trade era in Ghana, braided hair (i.e., comrow) was so revered as a symbol of power and authority that it was used as a medium for communicating escape strategies (Quampah et al., 2023).

A classical definition by Burns (1978, p. 18) opines that “Leadership is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilise, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers.” Leadership, therefore, starts with a person with a sense of direction, purpose, or ideas, who motivates others to work hard towards accomplishing this purpose. This happens when the individual realises that they (i.e., the leader) alone cannot accomplish the goal, and that they need the coordinated efforts of others (i.e., followers) to achieve the vision.

Another orthodox description by Stogdill (1950, p. 3) sees leadership as “the process of influencing the activities of an organised group toward the achievement of goals.” According to Northouse (2021), it is a process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Thus, the accomplishment of the leader’s goals or vision is highly dependent on the activities of an organised group (i.e., followers), which are extremely imperative. For an organisation to achieve performance, it needs to satisfy its key performance indicators (KPIs). KPIs translate organisational strategy into measurable outcomes and focus attention on the most critical aspects of performance. They differ from ordinary metrics because they are explicitly linked to strategic goals and decision-making (Parmenter, 2015). Thus, they are quantifiable metrics used to measure how effectively an organisation is achieving its strategic objectives. They help quantify performance so leaders can determine whether current activities are successful or need improvement.”

Sometimes, these indicators are set by the organisation itself or its regulators. In Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), these metrics or KPIs are set by regulatory bodies. Some of these bodies are University Grants Commission (UGC) of India, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) of Zambia, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) of Australia, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) of Malaysia, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) of South Africa, the National Accreditation Agency for Higher Education (BAN-PT) of Indonesia, the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) of Georgia, USA, and the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) of Ghana, established under the *Education Regulatory Bodies Act, 2020 (Act 1023)*. These national bodies have their local KPIs used in measuring the strength of HEIs in their jurisdiction.

However, international bodies such as the International Association of Universities

(IAU), International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America (IESALC), the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), and the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) have some centralised metrics used for evaluation. For example, the QS World University Rankings, the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative parameters to rank universities worldwide. They are reputation (academic & employer), research performance (output, impact, citations), teaching & student experience (faculty ratios, learning environment), internationalisation (diversity and research collaboration), industry and innovation impact, and sustainability and societal influence. These parameters are used to examine the multifaceted vision and goals of leaders in HEIs in advancing teaching, research, global engagement, and societal contribution. In this 4th industrial revolution, the desire of most African HEIs to 'sell' their institutions to the outside world has strongly activated a call for policy and proposal formulation on internationalisation. Knight (2004, p. 11) defines internationalisation as the procedure of mixing an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education. Thus, this process is intentional and strategic, and should dwell heavily on institutional leadership priorities and vision backed by strong policies. The end of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ushered in the onset of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

As part of the United Nations' Agenda 2030, the SDGs were aimed at achieving inclusive, equitable, and environmentally sustainable development by 2030. Thus, from 2015 to date, sustainability (with its pillars of environmental, social, and economic sustainability) has become a strong issue of consideration by HEIs who are advancing policy documents on internationalisation. This action requires sustainable leadership. As Aung and Hallinger (2022) emphasise, "sustainability leadership in higher education has the potential to transform university practices through reorientation and stewardship of the institutional mission and strengthening the commitment of stakeholders" when leaders prioritise sustainability as a core institutional goal.

Universities are more likely to lead when they are guided by transformational and strategic leadership, in which leaders articulate a clear vision, inspire institutional members, and align educational goals with long-term change and innovation (Salicru, 2015). This form of leadership promotes positive learning environments, stakeholder engagement, and effective integration of technology, thereby enhancing institutional performance and student success (Petrucci & Rivera, 2018; Ciulla & Ciulla, 2020). Conversely, institutions tend to lag when leadership is predominantly managerial or reactive, lacking vision, professional development investment, and a culture of continuous

improvement (Aspling, 2013; Watson-Jarvis, 2000). In most advanced economies, this (i.e., effective leadership) could be the justification behind the success of leading educational institutions such as MIT, Imperial College London, Stanford, Oxford, Harvard, Cambridge, and Caltech in teaching, research, capacity building, international engagement, sustainability, resource mobilisation, and community engagement.

In Africa, the situation is distinct, as most African HEIs face difficulties with resource allocation, brain drain, poor infrastructure, a lack of a clear leadership vision, poor governance, poor staff development programmes, inadequate student support services, and poor community engagement (Zickafoose et al., 2024). Since there are a myriad of challenges facing African HEIs, the scope of the paper is limited to leadership and how it can advance the internationalisation and sustainability drive of African HEIs. Therefore, the objectives of the study are to:

- 1) explore the current state of leadership in African higher education institutions and its impact on internationalisation and sustainability efforts,
- 2) identify effective leadership strategies that promote internationalisation and sustainability in African higher education institutions, and
- 3) examine the role that leadership plays in promoting internationalisation and sustainability in African higher education.

The Leadership-Driven Internationalisation and Sustainability (Ledis) Framework

Within a rapidly growing, globalising, and resource-constrained environment, African HEIs are expected to respond to the dual imperative issues of internationalisation and sustainability. Thus, universities in Africa are not expected to achieve their vision, mission, core values, objectives, and mandate only; they are expected to play an active role in contributing meaningfully to achieving the internationalisation drive and the UN's SDGs through research, teaching, community engagement, and Transformational, Intentional, Strategic, and Ethical (TISE) leadership. In response to the challenges facing African HEIs, the study proposes the leadership-driven internationalisation and sustainability (LEDIS) Framework as the principal catalyst (see Figure 1).

The LEDIS Framework has four variables – TISE leadership (i.e., the independent variable), moderating factors (i.e., the mediating variable), and internationalisation and sustainability (as the dependent variables). The framework suggests that, for African higher education institutions to achieve their internationalisation and sustainability objectives, the adoption of Transformative, Inclusive, Sustainable, and Entrepreneurial (TISE) leadership is essential. African leaders manning various HEIs should be transformational, intentional, strategic, and ethical in their quest to achieve internationalisation and sustainability goals. On assumption to office, many African HEI leaders usually have several moderating

challenges to deal with. That is, usually, there are issues of maintenance of organisational/institutional culture, preservation of existing university policies, and satisfying stakeholders' demands with constrained resources to deal with. Sometimes, managers of African HEIs act in accordance with the moderating variable demands to the delight of regulators and other stakeholders. This can stifle creativity. However, if African HEI leaders adopt TISE leadership, they can work hard in the internationalisation and sustainability drive, while maintaining the demands of the moderating variables. The internationalisation drive is achieved when TISE leadership is activated in conducting internationalisation policies, curricula, research programmes, and mobility for the university. TISE leadership is again needed in achieving the sustainability drive by developing policies for the university in human, environmental, social, and economic sustainability. It also takes TISE leadership for an African HEI leader to develop measures to achieve the UN's SDGs. In Figure 1, the two unidirectional arrows from TISE Leadership to internationalisation and sustainability indicate a linear relationship between the independent and the two dependent variables. However, the bidirectional arrows between the two dependent variables (i.e., internationalisation and sustainability) show the symbiotic relationship existing between them. Thus, the internationalisation agenda of any HEI should be linked with sustainability.

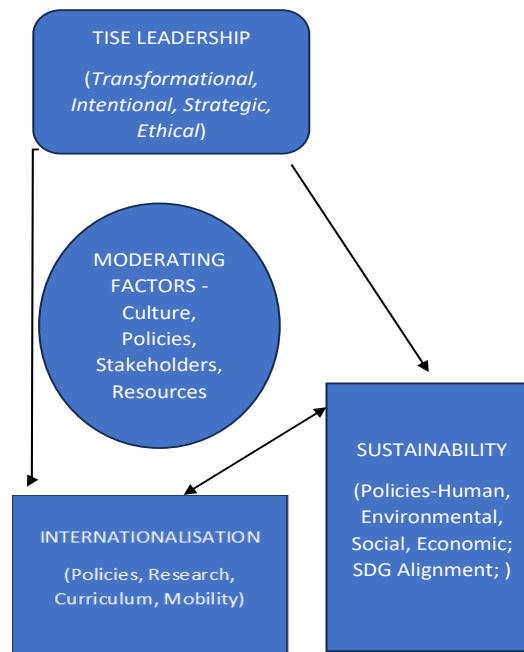


Figure 1: The Leadership-Driven Internationalisation and Sustainability Framework (LeDIS Framework)

Methods

This study adopts a narrative review approach to examine selected literature on the role of leadership in advancing internationalisation and sustainability within African higher education institutions (HEIs). Some peer-reviewed journal articles constituted the data for the review. The papers were published between 2019 and 2025 by both African and non-African researchers. These studies were purposively selected, with an element of random inclusion, from the Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ERIC databases, published in English. Guided by the study's objectives, key themes—such as leadership in higher education, internationalisation, sustainability, and the African university context—were identified.

The literature was reviewed qualitatively using thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring issues, points of convergence and divergence, and gaps in existing scholarship. To enhance the credibility of the review, multiple databases and diverse scholarly perspectives were consulted. Nonetheless, the study acknowledges the inherent limitations of narrative reviews, particularly their non-exhaustive coverage and interpretive nature.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of this narrative review paper, which draws on 12 selected studies on the role leadership plays in promoting internationalisation and sustainability in African Higher Education. The segmentation of the findings is based on the study's objectives:

The Current State of Leadership in African Higher Education Institutions and Its Impact on Internationalisation and Sustainability Efforts

Naboho et al. (2025)

Naboho et al. (2025) examine how African universities are expected to internationalise from a continental, supranational policy perspective, using the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) as an analytical lens. Unlike institution-level case studies, the paper makes an important contribution by foregrounding policy-driven internationalisation, situating universities within the regulatory, political, and ideological frameworks of the African Union (AU) and the Association of African Universities (AAU). From the perspective of the authors' review, the paper is significant in several ways. One, it treats internationalisation as a strategic and system-level agenda, not merely a set of ad hoc institutional activities. Two, it reveals how leadership agency is shaped—and

constrained—by supranational governance structures, and three, it raises fundamental questions about the sustainability and inclusiveness of dominant internationalisation models in Africa.

The paper adopts a critical and historically grounded conceptualisation of internationalisation, tracing its evolution from medieval international education to post–Cold War internationalisation. Drawing on Knight (2004) and de Wit et al. (2013b), the authors emphasise internationalisation as a strategic, intentional process that integrates global and intercultural dimensions into university missions. However, a key conceptual contribution is the engagement with African critiques of intentionality, particularly Teferra’s (2019, 2020) argument that internationalisation in Africa is often coercive rather than voluntary. This tension is central to one’s leadership discussion: it problematises the assumption that African university leaders operate with full strategic autonomy when internationalising their institutions.

Although leadership is not explicitly theorised, it is structurally embedded throughout the analysis. By employing neo-institutional theory, the authors implicitly position university leaders as actors responding to coercive pressures (e.g., AU and EU policy frameworks, funding conditionalities), mimetic pressures (e.g., emulation of the Bologna Process), and normative pressures (e.g., professional and quality assurance standards). This framing shifts leadership away from heroic or transformational models toward institutional and compliance-oriented leadership. Leaders are portrayed less as innovators and more as policy mediators, navigating legitimacy, funding, and reputational demands. Adopting this approach can stifle the creative thinking of leaders. Thus, leadership in most African higher education is increasingly exercised within constrained policy spaces, where legitimacy and alignment with supranational expectations may take precedence over locally grounded innovation. This is the current state of leadership in most African HEIs. This state may negatively impact the activities of HEIs regarding internationalisation and sustainability drives and efforts.

Obeng-Sarpong et al. (2020)

At its core, the study by Obeng-Sarpong et al. (2020) exposes a leadership landscape in Ghanaian HEIs that is structurally compliant but operationally constrained. Leadership is shown to operate within formally established governance frameworks—statutes, councils, committees, and regulatory instruments—but struggles to translate these structures into effective, efficient, and responsive institutional practice.

The regression analysis is particularly revealing. The finding that evidence of Effectiveness and Efficiency (EOEE) alone explains 43.7% of the variance in operational challenges, rising to 54.3% when Accountability in Governance (AIG) is added, suggests that leadership quality and governance practices are not peripheral issues; they are central

determinants of institutional functionality. In practical terms, this implies that many leadership challenges in HEIs are not merely resource-related but are deeply governance-driven. This reflects a broader reality in many HEIs where leadership is procedurally rule-bound, cautious and compliance-oriented, and reactive rather than strategically proactive. Such leadership cultures tend to prioritise administrative survival and political navigation over long-term institutional transformation.

The study's discussion of external governance challenges—particularly funding constraints, internationalisation pressures, and difficulties in attracting high-calibre faculty—provides critical insight into how leadership affects internationalisation efforts. Although internationalisation is framed as an external challenge, the findings suggest that leadership capacity mediates how institutions respond to global demands.

In sum, Obeng-Sarpong et al. (2020) demonstrate that leadership effectiveness, particularly in terms of efficiency and accountability, accounts for a substantial proportion of operational challenges in Ghanaian HEIs. Their findings reveal a governance environment characterised by statutory compliance but limited strategic responsiveness, where political interference and funding constraints weaken leadership autonomy. These conditions significantly shape institutions' capacity to internationalise and pursue sustainable development, as global engagement and long-term institutional relevance depend heavily on leadership credibility, participatory governance, and effective implementation of decisions. And this is the current state of leadership in most African HEIs.

Effective Leadership Strategies that Promote Internationalisation and Sustainability in African Higher Education Institutions

Andoh and Salmi (2019)

Viewed through the lens of the current internationalisation discourse, the paper by Andoh and Salmi (2019) reflects a decisive shift from earlier, mobility-driven and externally oriented models of internationalisation toward a more strategic, mission-aligned, and development-focused approach for African universities. The authors show that while African institutions have increasingly institutionalised internationalisation through dedicated offices, partnerships, and research collaboration—largely with universities in Europe and North America—these efforts often remain insufficiently connected to national, regional, and societal priorities. Contemporary internationalisation, as framed in the paper, is no longer an end in itself but a means to strengthen research capacity, governance, innovation, and community engagement, consistent with the universities' "third mission."

The analysis underscores a key tension in current debates: internationalisation has

generated measurable gains in research output and global visibility, yet it has not been fully leveraged to address Africa's development needs or regional integration agendas. By calling for alignment with the African Union and regional frameworks, deeper engagement with diaspora networks, and embedding internationalisation across institutional operations rather than confining it to specialised offices, the paper positions internationalisation as a transformative, inward-looking, and context-responsive strategy, rather than a symbolic pursuit of global prestige.

Kiplangat (2024)

Kiplangat's (2024) paper examines the significance of transformational leadership in African higher education and how it can empower future generations by enhancing institutional change, academic outcomes, and socio-economic development. The study is positioned within the broader challenges facing African HEIs—such as funding deficits, political interference, brain drain, and inequity—and argues that transformational leadership provides a viable response to these constraints. The paper adopts a largely qualitative and conceptual approach, drawing on a review of existing literature, qualitative interviews with university leaders, and illustrative case studies from selected African universities.

The main argument of the paper is that transformational leadership is critical for institutional transformation, research and innovation, community engagement, and socio-economic development. Thus, Kiplangat (2024) cited that transformational leadership characteristics or strategies of visionary leadership, inclusivity and diversity, collaboration, and partnership-building resonate with leading African HEIs' developmental mandates, in institutions such as the University of Cape Town, Kenyatta University, and the University of Ghana. These strategies are some of the catalysts for propagating internationalisation and sustainability in African HEIs.

The paper provides a comprehensive contextual diagnosis of the challenges facing African higher education, including chronic underfunding, political instability and government interference, brain drain, and access and equity issues. The paper concludes with a discussion of opportunities for digital transformation, curriculum decolonisation, global partnerships, the youth dividend, research capacity, and leadership visions that align with continental agendas, such as Agenda 2063.

Imurana and Bhartiya (2025)

In another study, Imurana and Bhartiya's (2025) review article examines the role of strategic leadership in guiding digital transition for sustainable innovation in higher education institutions (HEIs) in sub-Saharan Africa. Situated against persistent structural

constraints—such as weak infrastructure, limited resources, and uneven digital literacy—the paper argues that leadership is the critical mediating factor that determines whether digital transformation contributes to long-term institutional sustainability.

Within the broader literature on African higher education, the paper makes a timely contribution by explicitly linking strategic leadership, digital transition, and sustainable innovation, areas that are often examined in isolation. Although internationalisation is not treated as a standalone construct, it is implicitly embedded through discussions of global competitiveness, cross-border knowledge networks, and digital connectivity. The paper employs strategic leadership as its core analytical lens, conceptualised as the ability of institutional leaders to articulate a long-term digital vision, mobilise stakeholders, and align digital initiatives with sustainability goals.

Unlike transformational leadership approaches that emphasise inspiration and motivation, this study foregrounds planning, coordination, adaptability, and systems thinking. This distinction is important for your review, as it reflects a shift in leadership discourse from charismatic change leadership to strategic and adaptive governance, particularly in digitally mediated environments. However, the paper does not anchor its analysis in a single, clearly articulated leadership theory or model. Instead, it draws eclectically on leadership, innovation, and digital transformation literature. While this allows conceptual flexibility, it also weakens analytical depth and makes it difficult to assess leadership effectiveness across institutional contexts.

From the paper, the authors framed sustainability primarily as institutional and innovation sustainability, rather than environmental sustainability. The authors conceptualise sustainable innovation as the long-term, resilient integration of digital technologies that improves teaching, research, administration, and societal engagement. Thus, the paper contributes by highlighting the imperativeness of capacity building over short-term technological adoption, the need for context-sensitive digital strategies, and leadership in embedding digital practices into institutional culture.

However, sustainability is treated more as an outcome than a critically interrogated concept. Thus, the paper does not explicitly engage with SDG 4, environmental sustainability, and the tensions between digital expansion and resource consumption. By this, sustainability, as mentioned in the paper, is functional rather than normative. Although internationalisation is not explicitly theorised, it is implicitly present throughout the paper. The authors associate digital transition with increased global competitiveness, participation in international research networks, access to global knowledge platforms, and virtual collaboration and partnerships. In this sense, the paper reflects a digital internationalisation logic, where cross-border engagement is facilitated through technology rather than physical mobility. This aligns with contemporary debates on internationalisation at home, virtual exchange, and digitally mediated global collaboration. That said, the absence of explicit engagement with internationalisation frameworks (e.g., Knight, de Wit) limits the

paper's direct contribution to internationalisation scholarship.

Udekwe et al. (2025)

Udekwe et al. (2025) contribute to current debates on internationalisation by reframing it as an innovation-driven, effectiveness-oriented process rather than as a narrow focus on mobility, rankings, or institutional prestige. Their systematic review highlights that contemporary internationalisation must be transformative, digitally enabled, and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in Global South contexts. By foregrounding decolonisation and Africanisation, the authors challenge Eurocentric models of internationalisation and argue for curriculum reform, context-sensitive strategies, and equitable knowledge production. The study also identifies persistent structural barriers—such as weak policy implementation, limited mobility frameworks, and post-COVID disruptions—that constrain internationalisation effectiveness. Overall, the paper positions internationalisation as a dynamic, developmental strategy that requires innovation, strong governance, and contextual responsiveness to be meaningful and sustainable in African higher education.

The Role of Leadership in Promoting Internationalisation and Sustainability in African Higher Education

Based on the data collected, this review paper has evidence to suggest that effective leadership is central to advancing internationalisation and sustainability in leading higher education institutions globally. Thus, in Kiplangat (2024), transformational leadership characteristics, coupled with visionary leadership, inclusivity, and diversity, as well as collaboration and partnership-building, were instrumental in the internationalisation agendas of the University of Cape Town, Kenyatta University, and the University of Ghana. Also, in Imurana and Bhartiya (2025), strategic leadership was instrumental in guiding digital transition for sustainable innovation in higher education institutions (HEIs) in sub-Saharan Africa. These findings of the current studies corroborate other studies in some African contexts.

For example, in a study conducted by Etomes et al. (2025) on transformational leadership for sustainable productivity in higher education institutions of Cameroon, leadership factors and intellectual stimulation had the strongest correlation with sustainable productivity, while inspirational motivation contributed the most additional explained variance in productivity. The effect was stronger in private HEIs compared with state-owned institutions, pointing to leadership's role in resource utilisation and change adoption. This suggests that the effect of transformational leadership in accomplishing internationalisation and sustainability goals in the African context is very effective in

privately-owned HEIs, where supervision is apparently high compared with state-owned HEIs.

Thus, the narrative review reveals that leadership in most African higher education institutions remains compliance-oriented and constrained by supranational policy pressures, which often stifles locally grounded innovation (Nabaho et al., 2025; Obeng-Sarpong et al., 2020). However, transformational leadership strategies—visionary direction, inclusivity, and collaboration—have proven effective in advancing internationalisation at institutions such as the University of Cape Town, Kenyatta University, and the University of Ghana (Kiplangat, 2024). Strategic leadership also emerges as a critical mediator for digital transition and sustainable innovation in sub-Saharan Africa (Imurana & Bhartiya, 2025). Reframing internationalisation as a decolonised, development-focused process rather than a pursuit of global prestige offers a more contextually responsive pathway for African universities (Andoh & Salmi, 2019; Udekwe et al., 2025). Notably, transformational leadership appears more effective in privately owned institutions, suggesting that governance autonomy moderates leadership outcomes (Etomes et al., 2025). Thus, leadership effectiveness in African higher education depends not on individual leader attributes alone but on the interplay between governance structures, institutional autonomy, and context-sensitive strategies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the literature on internationalisation and sustainability in African higher education, and the tenets of the LeDIS Framework, the following recommendations have been proposed for policy, institutional practice, and future research. HEIs in Africa should prioritise Transformational, Intentional, Strategic, and Ethical (TISE) leadership that consciously aligns internationalisation initiatives with sustainability goals. Thus, TISE leaders in African HEIs should explicitly embed internationalisation and sustainability into institutional visions, strategic plans, and governance structures. This can be done through:

1. developing curricula and programmes of study on internationalisation with a focus on human, social, economic, and environmental sustainability,
2. aligning institutional strategies with the UN's SDGs,
3. designing institutional websites with a touch of professionalism,
4. creating more international partnerships and collaborations,
5. prioritising international students' activities and giving them preferential treatment.
6. conducting periodic domestic conferences, seminars, public lectures, and programmes on the UN's SDGs and internationalisation,
7. building HEIs campuses with an internationalisation and sustainability mindset in

- waste management, greening, energy efficiency and renewable energy use, and water management,
8. introducing paperless administration policies and digitisation,
 9. encouraging student leadership to form clubs on internationalisation and sustainability,
 10. prioritising staff welfare, development, promotional activities, and capacity building,
 11. encouraging collaborative research, knowledge exchange, and staff participation in international conferences,
 12. exploring diverse funding mechanisms for staff, students, and the institution, and
 13. encouraging stakeholder engagement on internationalisation and sustainability initiatives.

Conclusion

In consonance with the findings of Owusu and Mardani (2020) that poor leadership prevented organisations from achieving their objectives, this narrative review paper discussed the role leadership plays in advancing internationalisation and sustainability in African HEIs. The challenge was that most African HEIs faced increasing pressure to compete globally while concurrently addressing local and regional development issues. The situation even becomes more worrying when leaders are expected to act in consonance with rigid regulatory policies and measures. This situation stifles the creative thinking ability of the African HEI leader in activating a strong internationalisation and sustainability drive. Based on the findings, the paper proposes the LeDIS Framework, with its strong TISE leadership, as a catalyst for the internationalisation and sustainability agenda of African HEIs. Thus, effective leadership is critical in guiding universities toward international engagement and sustainable practices that align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2017).

Declaration of AI-Assisted Editing

AI tools were used solely to improve the grammar, clarity, and readability of this manuscript. All scientific content and interpretations are the original work of the author.

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