



## POSITIONING MAURITIUS AS A KNOWLEDGE HUB IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Knowledge is the most valued commodity in the global economy. Since 2005, it has been proposed to develop Mauritius into a knowledge hub and a centre of higher learning, thus meeting the needs of an increasingly competitive, knowledge-based and globalised economy. Therefore, this paper provides an understanding of the higher education system in Mauritius. Secondly, it explores the interconnection between globalisation and higher education in Mauritius. Thirdly, it also focuses the challenges facing the higher education institutions and policies in Mauritius in this globalised era. For the purpose of this study, both primary and secondary data have been collected. A qualitative research has been privileged, whereby semi-structured interviews have been carried out mainly with the higher education policy makers and professional. In this age of globalisation, the landscape of higher education across the world is in the midst of massive economic, financial and technological change. Mauritius cannot be isolated from the globalisation process, has no options but to take advantage of the process and adapt itself as an island state to its challenges. The main findings of this study have shown that the globalisation process is reshaping the higher education institutions. Since turning Mauritius into a knowledge hub is of key importance in this globalised era, various issues such as building a strong university sector and world class institutions, investing in research and development, creating a highly-skilled environment for transferring knowledge between the university sector and business, the use of technology, internationalisation of tertiary education and regional partnerships have been addressed.*

**Keywords:** Higher education, Globalisation, Knowledge hub, Knowledge-based economy, Institutions, Internationalisation of higher education, Centre of higher learning.

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## Contribution/ Originality

This paper contributes to a better understanding of the higher education system in an island economy in an increasingly globalised context, especially in the African continent. This study is also one of the very few studies which have investigated the challenges facing the higher education policies and institutions in Mauritius.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The economic prospects of Mauritius in the future depend increasingly on two key elements namely the country's capacity to shift from traditional and declining sectors and to fully integrate the new international economic order. This requires a strategy that will provide Mauritius with the necessary skills and a knowledge-intensive base to overcome the major constraints which are affecting the economy. Such a strategy implies considerable investment in education and training as well as in economic infrastructure (Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), 2006). The higher education landscape worldwide is being influenced by the process of globalisation. Higher education is critical to build the human capital that in turn builds the very institutions that are regarded as an indispensable factor of development. Mauritius, which cannot be isolated from the globalisation process, has no options but to take advantage of the process and adapt itself as an island state to its challenges. Globalisation has some opportunities and threats, and higher education institutions are likely to be affected by the changes. To survive and grow, institutions have to accommodate changes. Therefore, this paper analyses the impacts of globalisation on higher education in the Mauritian context and the elements needed to position Mauritius as a knowledge hub mainly from an academic perspective. The ability of a society to produce, select, adapt, commercialise and use knowledge is critical for sustained economic growth and improved living standards. Education is viewed as a fundamental right as it can significantly contribute to bettering the livelihood of people, communities and the nation in general. However, this fundamental right should not be understood or exercised along a one-sided approach but, on the contrary, citizens must be fully aware of their due involvement and responsibility in ensuring that the right to education (in the case of Mauritius, free education) does not become merely an acquired or taken for granted right! Universities and colleges in Mauritius fulfil the task of churning out the necessary human resources for different sectors of the economy and also producing enlightened citizens for the country. Therefore, the government is also paying tremendous importance to the development of higher education institutes in Mauritius. Apart from setting up its own institutes, the government is also encouraging the establishment of private colleges and universities in Mauritius for creating a healthy competition. Moreover, there are several regional and overseas higher educational institutes in Mauritius.

Tertiary education has and will continue to be an important component of the Mauritian developmental model since the human resource is the only bankable resource that our small island possesses. The idea of turning Mauritius into a knowledge hub was first mooted in the early 1990s but until today with a gross tertiary enrolment rate currently hovering around 19 percent, it is clear that Mauritius is still far from generating the critical mass required of knowledge hubs.

## 2. HIGHER EDUCATION IN MAURITIUS

The Republic of Mauritius is located in the Indian Ocean and is made up of approximately 1.3 million people. The peopling of Mauritius is a 'deterritorialisation' of people across the globe. The heterogeneity of the island is reflected by its ethnic groups, languages and religious differences (Bunwaree and Kasenally, 2007). Mauritius moved across different stages in its development following economic crusade experienced during in the 1980's and mid 1990's: from a monocrop economy relying mainly on sugar exports to a broader based multi-pronged oriented economy with an emerging textile industry and thereafter the tourism sector which gained significant economic impetus. Following the expansion in the financial sector, the information, communication and technology (ICT) sector is the most recent development strategy since Mauritius is aiming to position itself as the 'cyber island' or 'knowledge hub' in the African region (Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), 2009).

The education system in Mauritius is largely based on the British system since Mauritius was a former British colony. When Mauritius became independent in 1968, education became one of the main preoccupations of the Mauritian Government to meet the new challenges awaiting the country. Considerable investment of resources, both human and material, has been put into the education sector and impressive progress has been achieved in terms of free, universal, compulsory primary education, free textbooks, free secondary education and a fairly wide range of higher education courses at the University of Mauritius ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education\\_in\\_Mauritius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Mauritius)).

Moreover, higher education or post secondary education in Mauritius is also referred as tertiary education in Mauritius. Since 1988, the Tertiary Education Commission is known to be an important agency in issues of higher education in Mauritius. It is primarily responsible for fostering the development of postsecondary education and training facilities, providing guidelines for tertiary educational institutes in Mauritius, making recommendations to the Minister on development of higher education in Mauritius, promoting co-ordination among the tertiary education institutes and advising the Minister on award of scholarships (Tertiary Education Commission, 2009).

The formal higher education system in Mauritius had started in 1924 with the establishment of College of Agriculture. Since then the tertiary education sector in Mauritius has witnessed and has developed into a diversified system, composed of public, private, regional and overseas institutions catering for a wide range of courses and programmes, both in traditional and through the distance education mode. Within the public sector, tertiary education revolves around the University of Mauritius (UOM), the University of Technology (UTM), the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) and the Mauritius College of the Air (MCA). In addition to the above publicly-funded institutions, an estimated 35 private institutions and 50 overseas institutions/bodies are presently delivering tertiary-level programmes, mostly in niche areas like information technology, law, management, accountancy and finance. According to the TEC, the gross enrollment rate at the higher education institutes of Mauritius has gone up to 19.7% (<http://colleges.indiaedu.com/africa/mauritius/high-education.html>) and the higher

education sector of Mauritius is also expanding with the setting up the Open University of Mauritius in 2012. (<http://colleges.indiaedu.com/africa/mauritius/high-education.html>).

The tertiary education has been set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Education since long and it's the first time in 2010 that the new ministry, known as Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science, Research & Technology was set up by the present government with the view of transforming Mauritius into a centre of excellence in higher education, and the development of a research culture in our tertiary education institutions so that they become more responsive to the needs of the country. One of the aims of the government is to increase access to tertiary education, especially at the University of Mauritius. According to the present Minister of Tertiary Education, every Mauritian family should be able to boast at least one graduate by 2015 (L' Express, 2007). He also proposes to increase the tertiary enrolment rate for Mauritian as well as foreign students.

However, Kasenally (2007) stated that "We do not all need to be graduates unless it will serve a purpose". According to her, the minister's proposals "need to be profoundly analysed before being set in motion." Moreover, she also claimed that, we need to be extremely cautious about privileging quantity as the end goal. Once these graduates are churned out from universities, will they find a job that matches their graduate ambitions? Issues such as whether the job market is sufficiently elastic to absorb all these new graduates and the lowering of university entrance requirements to accommodate students who do not have the grades. Vocational or polytechnic institutions could be developed as not all school leavers wish or are cut for academic training. Quality also is a very important issue to be taken into account if we want to attract foreign students and democratise the higher education sector. Therefore, all these issues mentioned above have to be considered before embarking on opening up tertiary education to a greater number of students. This will also determine whether Mauritius becomes a viable knowledge hub or not. Bissoondoyal (2006) highlighted that, in order to develop Mauritius into a knowledge hub, top institutions should be encouraged either to set up campuses here or make local institutions in entering into strategic partnerships with them. He also pointed out that Mauritian should stop expecting everything to be provided free to them. A fraction of the costs could be paid by the Mauritian students.

### **2.1. Developing Mauritius into a Knowledge Hub and a Centre of Higher Learning**

The concept of a knowledge economy is one in which all sectors are knowledge intensive, are responsive to new ideas and technological change, and are innovative and employ highly skilled personnel, engaged in lifelong continuous learning (Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), 2006). One of the features of the globally competitive knowledge economies is that governments, institutions of higher learning and industries work together to create knowledge hubs. Hence, a knowledge hub is concerned with building a country's capacity to better integrate itself into the global economy, through the generation, acquisition and transmission of knowledge to support of various economic sectors, in view of fostering social and economic development. Knowledge is therefore the most valued commodity in the global economy. "Knowledge hubs are local innovation systems that are nodes in networks of knowledge production and knowledge

sharing” (Evers, 2008). The characteristics of a knowledge hub are: high connectedness and high internal and external networking and knowledge sharing capabilities. Knowledge hubs fulfill three major functions: to generate knowledge, to transfer knowledge to sites of application; and to transmit knowledge to other people through education and training (Evers, 2008).

A knowledge hub is concerned with the process of building up a country’s capacity to better integrate it with the world’s increasing knowledge-based economy, whilst simultaneously exploring policy options that have the potential to enhance economic growth. As mentioned earlier, the idea of turning Mauritius into a knowledge hub was first suggested in the early 1990s, however, in 2005, the government proposed to develop Mauritius into a knowledge hub and a centre of higher learning, thus meeting the needs of an increasingly competitive, knowledge-based and globalised economy. According to the report by the [Ministry of Education & Scientific Research \(2005\)](#), while promoting a Knowledge Hub agenda, greater importance will be given in tertiary education especially in the “fields of Science & Technology, Information and Communication Technologies, Skills Development and in Research & Development in Applied Science” (<http://www.gov.mu/portal/goc/educationsite/file/knowhub.pdf>).

As said earlier, the vision of Tertiary Education Commission is to “make Mauritius the intelligent island of the Region in the Global Village” and its mission is to position Mauritius in the Region as a world-class Knowledge Hub and the gateway for post-secondary education as well as a Centre for Higher learning and Excellence ([Tertiary Education Commission, 2007](#)). To position Mauritius as a key player in the sub-region, its tertiary education sector will also be required to attain world-class status, and be able to attract international students, brand name institutions of higher learning and a highly-qualified teaching staff. Therefore, it will be necessary to increase significantly expenditure for tertiary education and Research & Development to the level of countries Mauritius wishes to emulate. Currently, the public expenditure on tertiary education and Research & Development each amount to approximately 0.4 percent of GDP. However, in view of competing demands for public funds, the pursuit of this agenda will have to rely heavily on domestic private sector and overseas brand name institutions. In order to promote this agenda, priority areas have been identified, contacts with reputable overseas institutions initiated, an appropriate regulatory framework for tertiary education established, an investment package proposed and a student financing programme defined. All these issues have been addressed in the report by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research (<http://www.gov.mu/portal/goc/educationsite/file/knowhub.pdf>).

### **3. GLOBALISATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

Globalisation is today’s phenomenon that deserves to be studied across various disciplines. It is used to describe a process of social change on the macro level of societies. Globalisation has been defined as the process of intensification of cross-area and cross-border social relations between actors from very distant locations, and of growing transnational interdependence of economic and social activities (Giddens, 1990; Beck, 2000). Globalisation is a multidimensional phenomenon. It has indeed created opportunities for some people and countries as well as introduced new risks, if not threats for many others.

During the past two decades, the spread of markets and the globalisation process have transformed the world of higher education. According to [Nayyar \(2008\)](#), “market forces, driven by the threat of competition or the lure of profit have led to the emergence of higher education as business.” The technological revolution has transformed higher education in terms of distance education as a mode of delivery. Moreover, markets and globalisation have started to influence universities. For example, in the field of teaching, [Nayyar \(2008\)](#) puts it as “discernible departure from the liberal intellectual tradition in which education was about learning across the entire spectrum of disciplines. Students’ choices were shaped by their interests. There was never perfect symmetry.” Universities endeavoured to strike a balance across disciplines, whether literature, philosophy, languages, mathematics, physics or life sciences. But this is changing since parents and students display a strong preference for higher education that makes young people employable. Therefore, the availability and popularity of courses are being shaped by markets. Universities are introducing new courses for which there is a demand in the market. It can also be added that markets are beginning to influence the research agenda of universities.

According to [Nayyar \(2008\)](#) and the [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development \(OECD\) \(2004\)](#), the world of professional education is being influenced by globalisation and market, for example, engineering, management, medicine and law. Since professions are becoming increasingly internationalised, globalisation is also encouraging the harmonisation of academic programmes. Market forces and technical progress have opened up a new world of opportunities for those enrolled in distance education. However, distance education may not be affordable for some people, especially in developing countries.

From the above, it can be observed that globalisation is changing the form and shaping the content of higher education and markets are also starting to influence the nature and culture of universities. The commercialisation of universities has become quite widespread. “At one end, the commercialisation of universities means business in education. At the other end, the entry of private players into higher education means education as business” ([Nayyar, 2008](#)). In this process of change, both dangers and opportunities are closely intertwined. Markets and the commercialisation of universities could lead to the erosion of values as well as morality.

The globalisation of higher education has some implications for people and countries as well as for higher education and development. In developing countries, the globalisation of higher education is influencing the quality of education, for example, sub-standard institutions are charging high fees, providing poor education and also they are becoming less accountable to students since there are no consumer protection laws or regulators for this market ([Marginson and Wende, 2006](#)). It can be noted that there are three important implications. Firstly, globalisation of education has enabled more foreign students to study for professional degrees or doctorates in universities in industrialised countries. At the same time, centres of excellence in higher education in labour-exporting developing countries are increasingly adopting curricula that conform to international standards. Such people become also employable anywhere ([Nayyar, 2008](#)). Secondly, globalisation has also led to an increase in the mobility of professionals. It all started with the brain drain. For example, immigration laws in USA, Canada and Australia have facilitated the entry of high-skilled or qualified people ([World Bank, 2002](#)). People are almost

mobile across borders and they are considered as globalised since they are employable almost anywhere in the world. Thirdly, transnational corporations are spreading their tentacles everywhere and they have also become transnational employers of people (Nayyar, 2008). They place expatriate managers in industrialised and developing host countries. Professionals are recruited both in industrialised and developing countries for placement in corporate headquarters.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodology used to carry out the study. Although there are literatures on globalisation and higher education, the main purpose of this paper is to examine the higher education system in an island economy and the importance of positioning Mauritius as a knowledge hub in the context of globalisation.

As mentioned in the abstract, both primary and secondary data have been collected for the purpose of this study. A qualitative research was used, involving mainly the collection of primary data at the institutional level. Interviews were conducted mainly with the academics from the University of Mauritius, the former Dean of the Faculty of Social Studies & Humanities, a former Vice Chancellor, the former President of UMASU<sup>i</sup> (University of Mauritius Academic Staff Union). The main aim of these interviews is to collect information regarding the concept of knowledge hub and globalisation, the opportunities and threats while positioning Mauritius as a knowledge hub in the context of globalisation. In qualitative interviewing, there is much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view and the interview reflects the researcher's concerns (Bryman, 2004). Interviews in the study were seen as the appropriate research technique in order to explore and capture mainly the voices of the academics.

Firstly, it was important to identify participants to be included in the study. A representative sample of 20 academics mainly from the five faculties such as the Faculty of Science, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Law & Management, Faculty of Agriculture and Faculty of Social Studies & Humanities was targeted but only 15 responded positively to participate in the study (as shown in table 1). The other 5 academics turned down the interview due unavailability and their busy schedule. In addition, it was important to include a former Vice Chancellor (VC), a former Dean of the Faculty of Social Studies & Humanities, who was involved in the restructuring of the implementation plans at UOM and the former President of UMASU in the study, who act as the sole authority for negotiation with university management regarding the conditions of work of the academics at UOM. Most of the academics interviewed were also members of UMASU and they also were composed of different positions and grades such as Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Associate Professors and Professors. Apart from the academics at the University of Mauritius, interviews were also carried out with 2 Directors of higher learning private institutions. The two institutions mainly provide online courses in the fields of management, marketing, information technology, journalism, fashion technology amongst others. However, the names of these 2 private institutions will not be disclosed and shall be kept confidential throughout the paper. It should be pointed out that these two institutions are international private tertiary education institutions providing academic and professional courses to school leavers, graduates and the business community. They are fully accredited and all their courses have been approved by the

Tertiary Education Commission and the Mauritius Qualifications Authority in Mauritius and the British Accreditation Council in the United Kingdom. Links have also been established and they work in collaboration with a number of universities and professional awarding bodies worldwide.

**Table-1.** shows the 20 participants for the study

<b>Faculties</b>	<b>Number of Participants Interviewed</b>
Faculty of Science (FOS)	3
Faculty of Engineering (FOE)	3
Faculty of Agriculture (FOA)	2
Faculty of Law & Management (FLM)	3
Faculty of Social Studies & Humanities (FSSH)	4
Former President of UMASU	1
Former VC	1
Former Dean (FSSH)	1
Directors of private institutions	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

Firstly, interviews with the participants were all carried out through personal meetings and were performed at the workplace of the interviewees. The atmosphere during the interviews was open and genuine, where the interviewees shared their understanding of the knowledge hub and globalisation and its relationship with higher education on a global level as well as in the Mauritian context.

Secondly, the interviews had a semi-structured character, whereby an interview guide was prepared with mostly open-ended questions and specific topics were covered. The advantage of this technique includes the fact that it opens up for a more free conversation where the interviewee can provide additional information. Topics revolved the concept of knowledge hub, globalization, the link between globalisation and higher education, the impacts of globalisation on higher education in Mauritius (in terms of opportunities and threats), role of higher education in the development, challenges facing higher education institutions and the future of higher education in the context of globalisation in the Mauritian context. Probing was also used and interviewees were expected to illustrate examples, elaborate, explain and describe certain issues pertaining to the higher education systems.

Apart from the primary data collection through interviews, secondary data were also collected in the form of Tertiary Education Commission annual reports, press cuttings and survey reports from other countries were also consulted.

## **5. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS**

Since it was a qualitative research, interview data were recorded, transcribed and analysed. The themes below were chosen and grouped. In addition, these themes demonstrate the significance of some previously discussed in the literatures.

Moreover, the key findings were grouped under the following themes namely:

1. An understanding of the concept of 'knowledge hub'
2. The link between globalisation and higher education
3. Impact of globalisation on higher education

4. Opportunities of positioning Mauritius as a knowledge hub
5. Challenges facing higher education institutions while positioning Mauritius as a knowledge hub in the context of globalisation
6. Future of higher education in the context of globalisation in Mauritius

### **5.1. An Understanding of the Concept of 'Knowledge Hub'**

Some academics from FSSH, FOE and FLM have defined the concept of a knowledge hub as a platform whereby there exist different academic institutions that provide different educational outlets, which could be in multidisciplinary areas and disciplines with world class educators attracting students from all over the world. The opportunities may be offered using different modes of delivery. Other academics from other faculties and the private institutions have defined the knowledge hub as a platform that would involve academic and research collaborations across the world. They have underlined the setting up of foreign branches/campuses in Mauritius and attracting foreign students to come and study here. Moreover, the former VC believed that the term is intended to reflect the goal of having a significant increase in the size of the tertiary sector and related field such as Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) and scientific innovation. In addition, one academic from FOS has focused his definition as a platform to share knowledge capabilities and data, solve problems through networking, generate new ideas, improve services and advance technological innovation as well as promote indigenous development. He also mentioned that in the economic context, the economy is driven by knowledge and has put a lot emphasis on innovation, whereby it is a key element in building a knowledge hub.

From the findings above, it can be observed that most of the interviewees at UOM and in the private institutions have defined the concept of knowledge hub more in terms of knowledge sharing and expertise of various nature, high quality source of information, innovation, increasing the size of the tertiary sector, networking and research collaborations among universities. These elements are the key ingredients in building a knowledge hub.

### **5.2. The Link between Globalisation and Higher Education**

Some academics have defined the concept of globalisation in an economic term and while others was more in a technological nature. From an economic perspective, academics claimed that globalisation calls for free trade, movement of goods and free movement of labour across borders. The Directors of the private institutions also defined the concept of globalisation in terms of improvement of international trade and technological progress. However, one academic from FSSH said that the term globalisation is recognised as being driven by a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural and political factors.

All the participants in the study including the private institutions have agreed that globalisation has a strong link with higher education. Some academics gave the example that, through internet, people from various locations can access online courses and earn their degrees. Directors of the private institutions said that globalisation process has facilitated the exchange programs among universities, virtual classrooms and distance education. Findings also indicated

that globalisation has facilitated the implanting of some foreign institutions in the developing countries. It can also be pointed out that the former VC also mentioned that globalisation allows students to study anywhere and obtain a generic level of education and or skill acquisition. Moreover, academics across faculties underlined that globalisation helps many countries in terms of capacity building, networking, sharing of knowledge and ideas as mentioned earlier. The private institutions claimed that globalisation influences the marketability of courses and programmes, the course content and the quality of higher education. From the main findings, it was found that with the internationalisation of education, Mauritius can overcome the limitations imposed by geographical insularity, thus broadening the academic and research horizons of staff and students alike. On the other hand, foreign institutions can outsource their expertise.

However, the former President of UMASU highlighted the recognition of degrees across borders is vital. Mauritius does have a framework for such recognition but how far our degrees are recognised internationally is yet to be known. In Canada, for instance, the Mauritian graduates have to retake certain exams for them to secure jobs. According to him, “if we wish to make Mauritius a knowledge hub, we must ensure that the quality of education is at par with foreign countries. In engineering, for instance, this can be achieved through accreditation of our programmes.”

This argument is also in line with another member of the UMASU, stating that UOM should be more visible on the global arena and that further collaborations with overseas universities need to be strengthened.

### 5.3. Impact of Globalisation on Higher Education

This question targeted more about the opportunities and threats of globalisation on higher education in the Mauritian context. From the data collected, it was found that globalisation provided more opportunities than threats. Some of the *opportunities* mentioned by the most academics and the two Directors are as follows:

- Expansion of higher education in Mauritius. Globalisation has provided more Mauritian students with the opportunity to pursue their studies in international universities or institutions.
- Emergence of new programmes of studies that would fit the needs of the globalised world. The course content has become more standardised, thus, this requires universities to compete with other similar institutions.
- Internationalisation of higher education an increasing number of foreign students in our institutions. This will allow more visibility of the institutions, sharing of values and culture, transfer of know-how, more exchange and scholarship opportunities for both students and academics and bringing a new source of income for the island economy.
- Improved and new methods of teaching and learning, with the ever growing use of technologies and virtual tools. This has provided more people to get access to higher education through distance learning.

- Delocalisation of many research organisations and educational institutions from their home-based location to several other countries where they are lots of opportunities to market their courses and research projects.
- Enabled academics to undertake research and share ideas, thus leading to increasing networking among academics worldwide. Thus globalisation has allowed research to be transglobal, thus ensuring the creation of a level playing field in the production and diffusion of knowledge. If necessary quality benchmarks are introduced, this would allow for world class education.

Regarding the *threats*, the following points were addressed by the most interviewees at UOM and the private institutions:

- Cost cutting. Higher education institutions are being more market driven in the neo-liberal era. This can act as a threat to the quality of education.
- Standard educational programmes through internet may not take into account cross-country differences as far as institutions, culture and economy amongst others are concerned.
- Increased competition at the institution; therefore the institution needs to be competitive in order to provide higher quality of education.
- International standard fee paying tertiary education requires considerable upfront investment but is highly vulnerable to rapid changes in demand due to national and international changes in economic prosperity. The VC gave the example of Australia, which has made a considerable investment in becoming an international location of education but in 2010 it suffered an 11% drop in demand from international students due to the global recession.
- Imposition of knowledge production from outside and this might threaten the local knowledge systems.
- With the opening up of the higher education platform, we will have increasing number of professionals coming to work in Mauritius, therefore this may imply fewer opportunities for the local people especially for those high profile posts.

#### **5.4. Opportunities of Positioning Mauritius as a Knowledge Hub**

All participants in the study agreed that human capital and higher level skills are important in achieving sustainable development, which will eventually contribute to the advancement of the country in various fields. Both the Directors and academics believed that it is important to develop Mauritius into a knowledge hub to remain competitive and face fierce international competition. The former VC has argued that in order for Mauritius to increase its GDP per capita, there needs to be new sectors of the economy that can sustain economic growth. Thus, the introduction of the knowledge based economy is proposed to provide the additional income and investment needed to make this a reality. Most interviewees claimed that there are economies with no natural resources but have invested massively in education and today they are among the leading economies (Singapore, Malaysia, Korea, China). As mentioned in the literatures, because

of its strategic location, Mauritius could be easily an ideal platform and gateway into Africa. It can be seen that Mauritius can be at the forefront of all strategic development plans for the region. However infrastructure and trade agreements without current, relevant, sufficient and readily available knowledge is of little or no value. Being deprived from natural resources, Mauritius has to rely on its innovativeness and creativity to progress further.

### **5.5. Challenges Facing Higher Education Institutions While Positioning Mauritius as a Knowledge Hub in the Context of Globalisation**

In this globalising era, as mentioned earlier since higher education has become market-driven, institutions have to be constantly in line with and meeting the demands of the market, thus working in collaboration with the industry. Therefore, interviewees from FOA and FOE claimed that sometimes it might be difficult to cope with the exigencies of the labour market and need to adapt to the global changes and societal needs. Most participants in the FOS and FLM believed that higher quality education should be provided and also focus more on research. Since every year the number of students on campus, are increasing, therefore enough space should be provided to accommodate them. Some also believe that with the increasing number of foreign students, a proper framework should be established to assist foreign students. On the other hand, Directors stated that more and more people are migrating or pursuing their studies abroad, there is a need for institutions in Mauritius to seek accreditation. The private institutions believe that the tertiary sector is not working enough in building a knowledge hub. Therefore quality is of primary importance in higher education. According to the former VC and most academics, the main challenge for UOM is capital funding. Without it, our equipment and resources will not support international standards for tertiary education and research. Mauritius will need to find some niche in this competitive market. Most of them highlighted that funding is not a problem for UOM only but worldwide. Academics believed that money for research are constantly being reduced, requiring universities to develop new financial systems. Universities are also having drastic cuts from the state as the main source of funding.

It can be seen from the above that there are numerous constraints and challenges in developing Mauritius into a knowledge hub. Emphasis should be laid on quality, competence, research and development they are very important in building a knowledge hub. Since higher education creates a critical mass of high skilled / high value resources, it allows countries that invest intelligently and strategically in higher education to develop new disciplines and areas of specialisation, thus creating new poles of development. Therefore, the objectives and activities of the knowledge hub should be clearly defined with a clear long term strategy with the support of government and the private institutions, thus ensuring its sustainability.

### **5.6. Future of Higher Education in the Context of Globalisation in Mauritius**

Mauritius has become in recent years a very important location in attracting suppliers of higher education. Its relative economic, political and social stability has attracted these institutions to penetrate the African as well as South East Asian markets. Most of the suppliers come from Europe and India to use Mauritius as a platform for such venture.

Some interviewees believed that there is a future for fee paying private institutions that can invest on the state of art facilities and compete against the public institutions who are struggling for funds. The private institutions are in any way supported by their home institutions and can easily market their facilities to attract potential students, be it from Mauritius or from abroad.

As said earlier, programme of studies need to constantly be upgraded and go in line with the changing globalised world. Most academics viewed Mauritius as positioning itself in becoming a knowledge hub, it is therefore high time for Mauritius to change its academic structure and greater investment in tertiary institutions needs to be promoted. Findings also indicated that innovation can take place only if people are empowered academically and able to access global resources. Most academics believed that academic institutions should work closely with the government and additionally adopt a proactive approach. More collaboration with other universities should be encouraged. However, one academic argued that increasing access to higher education is being emphasised and in the process, quality has been sacrificed. There is also very little mechanism of quality control from Tertiary Education Commission, thus causing an outright invasion from commercially motivated institutions. It can be found from the above findings that the Mauritian higher education will benefit from the globalisation process since government's plan is to attract more foreign students.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has provided some reflections on how globalisation as an inevitable phenomenon, has some impacts on higher education in Mauritius and positioning Mauritius as a knowledge hub is a major challenge. Held (1999) argued that the "higher education systems, policies and institutions are being transformed by globalization, which is the widening, deepening and speeding up the world wide interconnected." In the global knowledge economies, it can be seen that higher education institutions are more important than ever as mediums for a wide range of cross-border relationships and continuous global flows of people. However, not all universities are international, but all are subject to the same processes of globalisation – partly as objects, victims even of these processes, but partly as subjects or as key agents of globalisation. Based on the literature review and findings, it can be seen that globalisation is not a single or universal phenomenon. It is nuanced according to locality, languages of use and academic cultures and it plays out differently according to the type of institution. When considering the future of higher education, the international and global aspects must be taken into account. It can be observed that globalisation provides opportunities as well as threats to the higher education systems, policies and institutions. All the participants in the study agreed that higher education supports development of a country but institutions are faced with some challenges, particularly regarding the financial resources. Academic freedom is under pressure in many parts of the world. Although in some places, academic freedom is being threatened by political authorities, in other by commercial influences and occasionally by the intolerance of the academic community itself, the norm of academic freedom remains central to the idea of the university. Since tertiary education and training in Mauritius is fast evolving in line with the global trends, it can be observed that the number of providers of education and training at the tertiary level has increased over the last

few years. If Mauritius wants to succeed in its vision of evolving into a regional hub for high quality education and training it is imperative for it to demonstrate that its education and training system are of enviable quality. There is a need for assuring high quality and standard of services provided by various institutions. Since developing countries and small island economies are highly vulnerable in this era of globalisation and in times of financial turmoil, government is therefore calling for the private sector as a development partner in shaping and sustaining the higher education landscape of these countries. Government's efforts to raise the tertiary enrollment ratio and promote Mauritius as the knowledge hub remain on the priority agenda of economic diplomacy to attract foreign students. The creation of a knowledge hub will be instrumental in supporting the development of a new economic model for the country. This new economic trajectory rests on making Mauritius a platform for services through the consolidation of Financial Services and Tourism sectors as well as the development of new growth poles such as Seafood Hub, Land Based Oceanic Industry and ICT services and knowledge industry. Therefore, innovation is the lifeblood of progress and digitising the learning experience is a must. Without innovation, educational institutions would simply collapse.

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<sup>iii</sup> UMASU is run by an executive committee, lead by a President, consisting of at least one academic representative from each faculty of the University. It is a platform for academics to draw common cause in ensuring a good work environment at UOM.

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