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A practical framework for the US universities to attract and support African students to business education

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Abstract: This paper presents a practical framework designed to guide US universities to attract and retain international students from Africa, particularly in the context of business education. Drawing from consumer choice theories, international student decision-making models, and the socio-cultural contexts of African countries, this study synthesizes existing literature to provide actionable insights for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Key focus areas include cultural and social integration, financial accessibility, specialized business curricula, inclusive campus environments, and career opportunities. The framework emphasizes leveraging alumni networks, addressing racial climate concerns, and tailoring institutional strategies to align with African students' unique needs and aspirations. This paper serves as a valuable resource for universities, policymakers, and other stakeholders committed to fostering a supportive academic environment for this growing student population.

Keywords: African international students; higher education; institutional strategies; cultural inclusion; financial accessibility

1. Introduction

The United States has long been a leading destination for international students seeking higher education, hosting over a million international students annually during recent academic years [1]. Among this diverse population, African international students represent a growing segment, with their enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities experiencing substantial growth over the last decade. For example, during the 2022–2023 academic year, more than 50,000 students from Sub-Saharan African nations pursued higher education in the United States, marking an 18% increase from the previous year [1,2]. This trend highlights the appeal of U.S. universities to African students, driven by the promise of quality education, global career prospects, and personal development opportunities.

For African students considering U.S. higher education, the decision between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) is a critical one. HBCUs, with their legacy of cultural affirmation, smaller class sizes, and personalized support, offer unique advantages [3,4]. Conversely, PWIs, often lauded for their diversity, global reputation, and extensive resources, present a distinct set of opportunities [5]. Each institutional type provides a different academic and cultural environment, influencing students' choices and shaping their educational experiences.

This study positions itself as a practical guide for U.S. universities aiming to attract and support African international students, particularly in business education. By synthesizing consumer choice theories, decision-making models, and insights from

the socio-cultural contexts of African nations, the paper proposes actionable strategies tailored to this demographic. The framework presented herein equips the US-based universities with tools to understand and address the unique needs, aspirations, and challenges of African students, fostering a more inclusive and supportive academic environment.

2. Background

HBCUs were established during an era of racial segregation in the United States, providing essential access to higher education for African Americans who were otherwise excluded from most institution. Over the years, HBCUs have become known for their inclusive environments, fostering a strong sense of community, personalized support, and a focus on student development [6]. These institutions have played a significant role in empowering minority students, offering opportunities for academic achievement and leadership within a culturally affirming setting. As the landscape of higher education evolved, HBCUs expanded their reach, attracting a diverse array of students, including African international students, who are drawn to the sense of belonging and supportive environments these institutions provide.

On the other hand, PWIs have historically catered to a broader demographic, and many have prioritized expanding their international student recruitment efforts in recent years [7]. PWIs often offer extensive resources, diverse curricula, and well-established networks that can be highly appealing to African students seeking a global educational experience [8]. However, African students at PWIs may encounter challenges related to cultural adjustment, racial discrimination, and a lack of support in navigating an unfamiliar academic environment. These barriers can affect their academic success, social integration, and overall university.

Despite their growing presence in U.S. higher education, African international students have often been overlooked in institutional strategies and academic research. Much of the existing literature has concentrated on the experiences of African American students or has generalized the challenges faced by all international students without addressing the unique socio-cultural and economic contexts of African students [9,10]. There is a critical need for universities to recognize the diversity within the African student population and tailor their approaches to meet these students' distinct needs.

The current gaps in institutional practices include insufficient financial support, limited targeted recruitment efforts, and inadequate social and cultural integration strategies. For instance, African students frequently face financial constraints that can restrict their choice of institutions, yet scholarship programs specifically targeting this demographic remain limited [11,12]. Additionally, while HBCUs offer a supportive environment, they may lack the global recognition that some African students seek for their business careers, whereas PWIs, despite their resources, may struggle to provide a culturally inclusive atmosphere.

3. Literature review

The literature review provided below explores the diverse experiences of African international students in U.S. higher education, emphasizing the intersectionality of

race, gender, socioeconomic background, and national origin. It examines comparative studies of international student populations, the role of alumni networks in recruitment and retention, financial accessibility strategies, and the global competition for African students among leading education destinations. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of cultural competence and inclusive campus climates in addressing racial microaggressions and fostering a sense of belonging. These insights provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding and addressing the unique needs of African students, offering actionable strategies for institutions to create more equitable and supportive environments.

3.1. Globalization and higher education

The global competition for international students has intensified in recent years, with the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Australia vying to attract talent from Africa. Each country offers distinct advantages and faces unique challenges in this competition [13]. The United States remains a popular destination due to its reputation for academic excellence and a wide variety of programs. However, its high tuition costs and restrictive immigration policies often deter economically disadvantaged African students [5]. In contrast, Canada and Australia attract African students with more affordable tuition rates, streamlined visa processes, and post-graduation work opportunities [14]. The U.K. continues to draw students with its prestigious universities and one-year master's programs but struggles with rising tuition fees following the end of EU tuition subsidies [15].

Countries like Canada have successfully implemented targeted recruitment campaigns in African nations, partnering with local schools and communities to increase visibility. Australian universities have also emphasized career-oriented programs and pathway options to attract students from developing regions [16].

3.2. International student experiences

International students form a diverse and growing population within U.S. higher education, yet their experiences often vary significantly based on their cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Comparative studies examining African, Asian, and European international students reveal nuanced differences in their motivations, challenges, and coping mechanisms.

African, Asian, and European international students often cite the promise of a high-quality education and global career opportunities as primary motivators for studying in the U.S. However, African students are particularly driven by a desire to access fields aligned with economic development in their home countries, such as business, STEM, and healthcare [14]. In contrast, European students frequently emphasize personal growth and intercultural experiences, while Asian students are often influenced by family expectations and the prestige of U.S. institutions [17].

While all international students face adjustment challenges, African students encounter unique barriers due to racial and cultural biases. Studies show that African students at PWIs report higher levels of racial microaggressions compared to their Asian and European peers, which adversely affects their sense of belonging. European students often experience smoother cultural integration due to shared Western norms,

while Asian students commonly struggle with language barriers and pressures to excel academically [18].

African students also face economic hardships more acutely, with limited access to scholarships or financial support specifically targeting their demographic. This contrasts with Asian students, who often benefit from established scholarship programs from their home countries, and European students, who may access bilateral funding agreements between the U.S. and their nations [12].

Social support plays a critical role in the success of international students. African students often rely on informal networks, such as connections within African diasporic communities or faith-based organizations, to navigate challenges [19]. Asian students, in contrast, are more likely to seek support from co-national student groups, while European students lean on campus-based international student offices for guidance and support [20].

Moreover, African students value culturally affirming spaces, such as HBCUs, which offer unique support systems tailored to their needs. However, the lack of global recognition of HBCUs poses a challenge for African students seeking to leverage their U.S. education for international career opportunities.

3.3. Intersectionality in education

The concept of intersectionality [21] underscores the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and national origin, and how these overlapping identities create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. For African international students in the U.S., these intersecting factors significantly shape their academic and social experiences, presenting unique challenges and opportunities.

African students often face racial stereotyping and cultural marginalization in PWIs, which can hinder their academic and social integration. Unlike African American students, whose cultural identity is typically aligned with the U.S. racial landscape, African students navigate a dual challenge of being racialized as Black while retaining distinct national and ethnic identities [22]. This duality often results in African students feeling “othered”, both within Black communities and broader campus environments [7,23].

Gender adds another layer of complexity to the experiences of African international students. Female African students often face unique challenges stemming from patriarchal cultural norms in their home countries, which may influence their confidence in academic settings. At the same time, gendered discrimination on U.S. campuses may compound these issues. Research suggests that female African students tend to outperform their male counterparts academically but report higher levels of social isolation and lower self-efficacy in navigating campus life [24].

Economic background significantly impacts African students’ experiences in U.S. higher education. Many African students come from low-income families and rely heavily on scholarships or remittances to fund their studies. This economic precarity exacerbates their stress levels, limits their access to resources, and often forces them to take on part-time jobs that detract from their academic performance [25]. In contrast, wealthier African students experience fewer financial barriers but

may still face cultural and racial challenges.

National origin further differentiates the experiences of African students. Students from Anglophone African countries often find it easier to adapt to the academic and linguistic demands of U.S. education compared to their Francophone or Lusophone counterparts [26]. However, all African students, regardless of linguistic background, may face challenges in communicating their unique needs to faculty and administrators, who often lack cultural competency in understanding the diversity within the African continent [27].

African students often face intersectional discrimination, where their identities as Black, African, and international converge to create unique experiences of marginalization [28]. For example, an African female student from a low-income background may experience systemic biases related to race, gender, and class simultaneously, making it more challenging to access opportunities for academic success.

Despite these challenges, intersectionality also highlights the resilience of African students. Many students leverage their unique cultural identities and experiences to build strong peer networks, advocate for institutional change, and excel academically [15].

3.4. Cultural competence and campus climate

Cultural competence and an inclusive campus climate are essential for supporting African international students, who often face racial microaggressions and a lack of cultural understanding at PWIs.

Mandatory diversity and inclusion training for faculty and staff has been identified as a critical strategy for improving cultural competence. Such training should include modules on the unique challenges faced by African students, including linguistic adaptation, cultural identity, and racial bias [29]. Racial microaggressions remain a persistent issue for African students, undermining their sense of belonging and academic performance [30]. Institutions can mitigate this by implementing clear anti-discrimination policies, establishing support systems, and fostering open dialogues about race and inclusion on campus [31].

Programs that foster peer mentorship and cross-cultural exchanges have been successful in creating inclusive environments. African students often benefit from culturally affirming spaces and student organizations that celebrate their heritage while facilitating broader community engagement [32].

3.5. Financial accessibility strategies

Financial constraints remain a primary barrier for many economically disadvantaged international students, particularly those from African nations. Institutions worldwide have adopted innovative financial aid models to address these challenges and make education more accessible.

Scholarships tailored to international students, such as Australia's Endeavour Scholarships and the U.K.'s Chevening Scholarships, have been successful in attracting students from low-income backgrounds [33]. These programs emphasize leadership potential and academic merit while covering tuition and living expenses,

alleviating significant financial burdens [34].

U.S. institutions can draw lessons from collaborative funding initiatives such as Germany’s DAAD programs, which involve partnerships between governments, universities, and private organizations. These partnerships ensure the long-term sustainability of financial aid programs and create opportunities for students to access internships or post-graduation employment [15]. For instance, Canada has integrated work-study programs that allow international students to offset their educational expenses through part-time employment. Such programs provide both financial relief and practical experience that enhances employability after graduation [35].

3.6. Alumni impact

Alumni networks play a pivotal role in the recruitment and retention of international students, serving as powerful ambassadors and mentors for prospective and current students. For African students, alumni connections offer culturally resonant guidance and insights into navigating both the academic and social environments of U.S. universities. Studies have shown that prospective international students rely heavily on testimonials and endorsements from alumni to make decisions about where to study [36]. African students, in particular, often depend on alumni networks to gain insights into institutional reputation, campus climate, and available resources [37]. Positive testimonials from African alumni who have experienced academic success and career progression significantly influence student enrollment choices [38].

Alumni mentorship programs have been found to enhance retention rates among African students by providing emotional support, academic advice, and professional connections [39]. For example, HBCUs that maintain strong alumni engagement programs report higher satisfaction and persistence rates among African international students compared to PWIs [40].

4. Key findings from secondary data

The following tables represent the synthesis of secondary data findings on African international students in US higher education.

4.1. African student demographics and enrollment trends

The landscape of African international student enrollment in US higher education reveals significant growth and changing patterns over the past two decades. This quantitative overview captures key demographic data and enrollment trajectories (see **Tables 1** and **2**).

Table 1. African student enrollment in US higher education (2023–2024).

Metric	Value	Context
Total Sub-Saharan African Students	56,780	Fastest-growing region for international student mobility (+13% in 2023–2024)
Nigerian Students	20,029	Leading source country from Africa
Ghanaian Students	9394	Second largest source country
Kenyan Students	4507	Third largest source country

Table 1. (Continued).

Metric	Value	Context
Ethiopian Students	3078	Fourth largest source country
South African Students	2814	Fifth largest source country
Top 5 Countries Percentage	~70%	Proportion of all African students in the US
COVID-19 Enrollment Decline	6.3%	Lowest decline among all global regions

Source: Institute of international education, author’s own research compilation.

Table 2. Historical enrollment growth of African students in the US (2000–2020).

Time Period	Approximate Enrollment	Growth Pattern
2000–2010	20,000 → 36,000	80% increase over decade
2010–2015	36,000 → 45,000	25% growth in five years
2016–2020	45,000 → 55,000+	Most significant surge period
Post-2020	55,000+	Quick rebound to pre-pandemic levels

Source: Institute of International Education, author’s own research compilation.

4.2. Comparative analysis: HBCUs versus PWIs

The institutional landscape for African international students presents distinctive characteristics between HBCUs and PWIs, with each offering different advantages and challenges. **Tables 3** and **4** capture key institutional attributes and their implications for African students.

Table 3. Institutional comparison for African international students.

Institutional Characteristic	HBCUs	PWIs
Number of Institutions	101 institutions nationwide	Majority of US higher education institutions
Student Demographics	80% Black students, 70% from low-income backgrounds	More diverse but predominantly White student population
Degree Production	3% of higher education institutions but produce 17% of bachelor’s degrees earned by Black students and 24% of STEM degrees	Dominant in overall degree production
Cultural Environment	Strong sense of belonging, culturally affirming, community-oriented	More challenging racial climate, potential for isolation and microaggressions
Class Size	Smaller classes, more personalized attention	Typically larger classes, less individualized interaction
International Recognition	Limited global recognition despite quality education	Strong global reputation and higher visibility in rankings
Resources	Limited financial resources, fewer research facilities	Greater resources, extensive research opportunities

Source: Author’s own research compilation.

Table 4. Notable HBCUs with African international enrollment (2017–2018).

Institution	International Students	Notable Trends
Morgan State University	945	Leading HBCU for international enrollment
Howard University	920	Second highest international enrollment among HBCUs
Tennessee State University	584	Increased from 68 students in 2008 to 549 by 2016 (8% of undergraduate population)

Source: Author’s own research compilation.

4.3. Financial landscape and resource allocation

Financial accessibility remains a critical factor in African students’ educational experiences. **Tables 5** and **6** highlight the significant disparities in resource allocation and financial support mechanisms available to these students.

Table 5. Financial resource comparison (2019).

Metric	HBCUs	PWIs (Ivy League)	Disparity Ratio
Average Foundation Funding	\$45 million (across 99 HBCUs)	\$5.5 billion (across 8 institutions)	1:1781
Land Grant Funding Gap	Estimated \$12.6 billion underfunded over 30 years	N/A	N/A1
Tuition Rates	Generally more affordable	Typically higher rates	Varies by institution
International Student-Specific Aid	Limited by resource constraints	More extensive offerings but high competition	Varies by institution

Source: Author’s own research compilation.

Table 6. Major scholarship programs for African students.

Program	Scope	Impact
Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program	Supports African students with strong academics who show commitment to social impact	Supported almost 40,000 young people since 2012
Zawadi Africa Education Fund	Connects talented female students with scholarship opportunities	Incorporates a nine-month coaching program
University of Cape Town’s Klaus-Jürgen Bathe Leadership Program	Full financial support (R120,000 per year)	Recipients must commit to serving their countries after graduation

Source: Author’s own research compilation.

4.4. Successful recruitment initiatives and strategies

Institutions employing targeted recruitment strategies have achieved significant success in attracting African international students. **Tables 7** and **8** highlight notable recruitment approaches and their outcomes.

Table 7. Institutional recruitment success stories.

Institution/Initiative	Strategy	Outcome
University of Rochester	Strategic recruitment began in 2010	Nearly 175 African undergraduates are currently enrolled
Amherst College	Directed recruitment since 2007	Nearly 20% of international students from Africa
SEC Universities Collaboration	Eight universities (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee) launched a joint recruitment effort	Positioning SEC as a “primary destination for students from Sub-Saharan Africa”
Washington College Initiative	African American deans and administrators conducting recruitment tours in Africa	Now in the second year of implementation

Source: Author’s own research compilation.

Table 8. Competitive landscape for African student recruitment.

Country	Competitive Advantages	Challenges
United States	Academic reputation, diverse program offerings	High costs, restrictive immigration policies
Canada	More affordable tuition, streamlined visa process, post-graduation work opportunities	Geographic distance, less name recognition in some regions
United Kingdom	Prestigious universities, one-year master’s programs	Rising tuition fees after the end of EU subsidies
Australia	Career-oriented programs, pathway options	Geographic distance, perception issues
China	Scholarships, proximity to Africa, growing economic ties with African nations	Language barriers, different educational systems

Source: Author’s own research compilation.

4.5. Factors influencing African students’ institutional choices

Multiple factors influence African international students’ decisions when selecting US institutions. **Table 9** presents these factors alongside their comparative manifestation at HBCUs and PWIs.

Table 9. Decision factors and institutional comparison.

Factor	Manifestation at HBCUs	Manifestation at PWIs	Relative Importance
Cultural and Social Integration	Strong sense of belonging, cultural affirmation, smaller community feel	More diverse but potentially isolating environment, racial microaggressions	High—affects psychological well-being and academic performance
Financial Accessibility	More affordable tuition but limited scholarship resources	Higher costs but potentially more financial aid options	Very High—primary barrier for many students
Academic Programs	Personalized attention, community-centered approach	Global reputation, extensive resources, higher rankings	High—particularly for business education
Career Opportunities	Strong community networks, entrepreneurship focus	Corporate recruitment pipelines, multinational connections	High—primary motivation for seeking US education
Campus Climate	Affirming environment for Black students	Challenges with racial bias and microaggressions	High—affects sense of belonging
Religious Inclusivity	Varies by institution, but often strong faith communities	Varies widely, less focus on religious community	Medium-High—over 40% of Africans identify as Muslim

Source: Author’s own research compilation.

These tables capture the essential secondary data findings regarding African international students in US higher education, providing a structured overview of demographics, institutional comparisons, financial landscapes, recruitment strategies, and decision factors that shape these students’ educational journeys.

Based on the secondary data presented above, a clear trend emerges regarding the growing presence of African international students in U.S. higher education. Enrollment data highlights a steady increase in African students, particularly from countries like Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, with a strong preference for business-related programs. The comparative analysis of HBCUs and PWIs reveals distinct advantages and challenges: HBCUs provide a culturally affirming environment and affordability but face limitations in financial resources and global recognition, whereas PWIs offer extensive resources and global career opportunities but present social and racial integration challenges. Financial accessibility remains a significant barrier, with many African students facing funding constraints, and HBCUs, despite their affordability, struggling with limited scholarship availability. Recruitment strategies from both U.S. institutions and competing education markets (Canada, the U.K., and Australia) underscore the importance of financial aid, targeted outreach, and career-linked education in attracting African students. The data-driven framework suggests that institutions must adopt holistic strategies integrating financial support, inclusive campus climates, cultural engagement, and career development initiatives to successfully attract and retain African students while ensuring their long-term success.

5. A framework for action

5.1. Cultural and social integration

For many African international students, the choice to study in the United States

involves more than just pursuing academic goals; it's also about finding a cultural fit and building meaningful social connections. Students are often drawn to environments where their cultural identities are recognized, respected, and celebrated, and where they can cultivate a sense of belonging in a foreign setting [41].

HBCUs provide a unique cultural connection for African students, offering a supportive community that honors shared histories and fosters a sense of belonging. These institutions often resonate with the cultural values of many African students, creating an atmosphere of comfort and acceptance. For students who value belonging and prioritize a positive campus climate, this cultural alignment is especially appealing [42,43]. Moreover, the influence of existing social networks, such as recommendations from family members, friends, or alumni, further enhances the attractiveness of HBCUs [44].

On the other hand, PWIs, while not historically tied to African students, often emphasize diversity and global engagement. This focus can appeal to students who see these institutions as opportunities to build broader, multicultural networks [45]. However, African students at PWIs may encounter challenges, such as racial microaggressions and a lack of cultural awareness, which can make it harder to establish a sense of belonging [7,46].

Trusted social networks play a fundamental role in guiding African students when selecting a university. Personal recommendations and success stories from alumni with similar backgrounds significantly shape their perceptions of an institution's social and cultural environment [40,47]. Universities that actively engage with and nurture these networks are better positioned to attract African students.

To support cultural and social integration, universities can implement initiatives such as culturally affirming support groups and structured alumni mentorship programs. Support groups dedicated to celebrating African cultures and traditions can help create a vibrant sense of community on campus. These groups can host cultural events, workshops, and festivals, providing platforms for students to connect with peers who share similar experiences. Collaboration between African student organizations and broader multicultural initiatives can also foster cross-cultural understanding and solidarity.

In addition, alumni mentorship programs can be a valuable resource for African students. Pairing students with alumni who have successfully navigated the challenges of studying in the U.S. offers them guidance, emotional support, and practical advice for adapting to campus life. Alumni mentors can also help students prepare for future career opportunities. Highlighting the accomplishments of alumni in marketing materials can inspire prospective students and enhance the institution's credibility.

5.2. Financial accessibility

Financial challenges represent one of the most significant hurdles for African international students pursuing higher education in the United States. Limited financial resources often narrow their options to institutions offering competitive tuition rates, robust scholarship programs, or work-study opportunities [48]. For students from lower-income backgrounds, the total cost of education, including tuition, fees, and living expenses, is a critical factor [49]. This financial burden is further compounded

by the scarcity of funding options specifically tailored for international students.

HBCUs have a long history of providing affordable education and offering scholarships to underserved populations. However, the limited financial resources available to many HBCUs can restrict the number of scholarships and grants they can provide to African students. By contrast, PWIs may offer a wider range of scholarships and grants, but their often higher tuition rates can make them less accessible to financially constrained students [50].

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for universities to improve financial accessibility and attract African students by creating funding packages tailored to their needs. Scholarships and grants specifically designed for African international students can help reduce financial barriers while enhancing an institution's appeal as a globally inclusive and diverse educational destination.

To address this issue, universities should focus on expanding scholarship programs that cater to the unique financial needs of African students. These programs could include scholarships that cover tuition, living expenses, and related costs, especially for students pursuing fields like business education. Institutions should also make these opportunities highly visible through recruitment campaigns, ensuring that prospective students can easily access information during the application process.

Collaboration with external partners can also broaden the scope of financial support. Partnerships with African governments, non-profits, and private organizations can provide additional funding for scholarships, making them more sustainable in the long term. Similarly, corporate-sponsored scholarships, developed in collaboration with companies operating in Africa, can underscore the mutual benefits of investing in the education of emerging African leaders.

Engaging African alumni in scholarship fundraising efforts can further strengthen these initiatives. Through giving-back campaigns, alumni can contribute to scholarship funds, with universities highlighting how their generosity helps future generations of students overcome financial barriers.

5.3. Curriculum and career opportunities

For many African students, pursuing higher education in the United States is deeply tied to their long-term career goals. Business education, in particular, is often seen as a stepping stone to global opportunities, entrepreneurial ventures, or leadership roles within African markets. Institutions that offer specialized business programs and robust career networks are especially well-positioned to attract these students [14,51].

PWIs, with their extensive resources and global reputations, often appeal to students seeking access to top-tier business programs and recruitment pipelines with multinational corporations [18]. These institutions frequently dominate global business school rankings, which heavily influence students' perceptions of academic quality and prestige.

In contrast, HBCUs, while often overlooked in traditional rankings, offer a distinctive value proposition. With their focus on community-centered education, smaller class sizes, and close faculty engagement, HBCUs provide an environment that fosters individualized student growth. Many HBCUs have recently expanded their business programs, introducing specialized offerings that cater to students seeking

niche expertise. In addition, HBCUs are well-suited to connect African students with networks emphasizing entrepreneurship and community upliftment, which aligns with many students' aspirations.

To strengthen career opportunities and enhance their appeal, universities should focus on building strategic partnerships with African businesses and leveraging their alumni networks. Collaborating with African companies can provide students with internships, job placements, and experiential learning opportunities, enriching the practical relevance of their business education. These partnerships also create avenues for students to return to Africa equipped with global insights and experience. Partnering with multinational corporations operating in Africa can establish recruitment pipelines, reinforcing the university's role as a bridge between local and international markets.

Alumni networks are equally critical in supporting career development [12,43]. Universities can involve African alumni as mentors, career advisors, and connectors to job opportunities. Alumni who have successfully built careers can serve as role models and provide invaluable guidance to current students. Encouraging alumni to establish regional chapters or organize networking events in African countries can further strengthen institutional ties and attract prospective students.

Specialized curricula tailored to African markets can further enhance an institution's appeal. Programs focusing on African entrepreneurship, emerging economies, and sustainable development address students' demand for region-specific expertise while demonstrating the university's global relevance. Incorporating experiential learning, such as consulting projects with African businesses or study-abroad programs in Africa, provides students with practical, hands-on experience that prepares them for real-world challenges.

5.4. Inclusive campus environment

For African international students, the campus environment plays a key role in shaping their academic success, social integration, and overall well-being. While many universities emphasize diversity, the lived experiences of African students often reveal gaps in creating truly inclusive spaces. The racial climate is a significant factor in these experiences, as students may encounter racism, microaggressions, and feelings of isolation, particularly at PWIs [26]. These challenges can erode their sense of belonging, ultimately impacting both their academic and social success.

HBCUs, with their mission to foster Black excellence and inclusion, often provide a racially affirming environment where African students feel welcomed and supported [14]. Many African students are drawn to the cultural alignment and sense of community these institutions offer. However, even at HBCUs, African international students may encounter unique challenges stemming from differences in regional, linguistic, and cultural identities that distinguish their experiences from those of African American students [52].

In contrast, PWIs, which generally have more diverse student demographics, often struggle to create fully inclusive environments for African students. Issues such as racial prejudice, a lack of cultural competency, and inadequate institutional support can deepen feelings of exclusion [50]. Addressing these shortcomings requires

intentional and sustained efforts to foster an environment that acknowledges and values the distinct needs and contributions of African students [51,52].

To create a more inclusive campus environment, universities should prioritize diversity and inclusion training that addresses the unique challenges faced by African students [21]. Faculty, staff, and students can benefit from cultural competency training that focuses on the diversity within African student populations, tackling issues like implicit bias, microaggressions, and strategies for fostering welcoming spaces. These modules should also highlight common challenges African international students face, including cultural adaptation, academic adjustment, and navigating stereotypes.

Tailored support programs can further enhance inclusivity. Universities can establish dedicated offices or initiatives staffed by trained professionals who provide counseling, resources, and advocacy specifically for African students [53]. Peer mentorship programs that pair African students with upperclassmen or alumni can offer personalized guidance, ease the transition into campus life, and provide ongoing support.

Community engagement initiatives are also essential [54]. Hosting events and workshops that celebrate African cultures can promote cross-cultural exchange and raise awareness among the broader campus community [31]. Collaborating with African student organizations ensures their voices are represented in institutional decision-making and helps address their specific needs.

Accountability is key to making sustained progress. Universities should set measurable diversity and inclusion goals and regularly assess campus climate through surveys and focus groups that engage African students [17,55]. Publicly sharing updates on these efforts demonstrates a commitment to equity and continuous improvement.

6. The framework

Based on the discussion thus far, the framework for supporting African international students in U.S. higher education emphasizes four key pillars: Cultural and Social Integration, Financial Accessibility, Curriculum and Career Opportunities, and Inclusive Campus Environment. This is presented in **Figure 1**. It advocates for fostering cultural belonging through mentorship and community programs, addressing financial barriers via tailored scholarships and partnerships, enhancing academic offerings with specialized curricula and career-focused opportunities, and cultivating inclusivity through diversity training and support systems. By implementing these strategies, institutions can holistically address the unique needs of African students, ensuring their academic success and overall well-being while strengthening institutional diversity and global engagement.

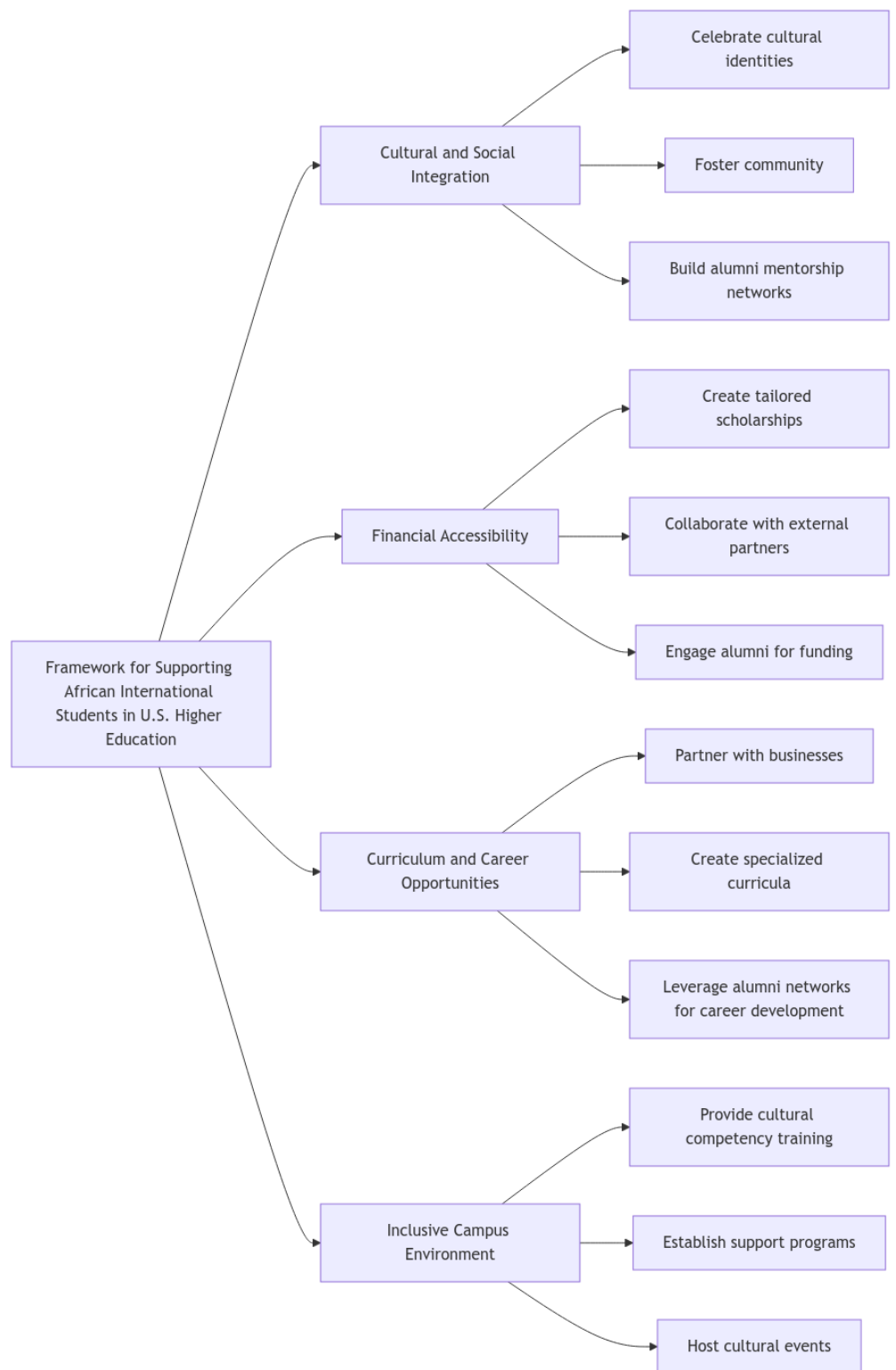


Figure 1. The proposed framework to support African students in US higher education.

In addition to sociocultural integration, fostering student engagement and academic integration is critical for ensuring the success of African international students. Universities should actively promote an inclusive intercultural learning environment that not only acknowledges diversity but also leverages it as a strength.

This can be achieved through collaborative learning initiatives, such as intercultural classroom discussions, group projects that encourage diverse perspectives, and mentorship programs that pair international students with faculty and peers from different backgrounds. Establishing academic support structures, including tutoring services, writing centers, and faculty-led discussion groups, can further ease students' transition into the U.S. academic system. Moreover, embedding global and African perspectives into curricula and encouraging faculty to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices can enhance engagement and relevance for African students. These efforts collectively contribute to an environment where international students feel valued, supported, and fully integrated into both the academic and social fabric of their institutions, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging and overall university experience.

7. Discussion

This study highlights the imperative necessity to tailor U.S. higher education practices to the specific needs and aspirations of African international students. Through the examination of the cultural, financial, and institutional forces shaping these students' experiences, the proposed framework presents practical implications for both HBCUs and PWIs. The discussion uncovers challenges as well as opportunities to foster inclusivity, accessibility, and career readiness.

Cultural alignment emerged as a key factor in African students' decisions and overall success. HBCUs offer a strong sense of belonging due to their legacy of culturally affirming environments. Conversely, PWIs, despite providing global exposure, often struggle to address the cultural and social integration needs of African students. This underscores the importance of targeted programs like peer mentoring, alumni networking, and cultural competency training for faculty and staff to bridge the gap.

Financial barriers remain a major challenge for African students, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. While HBCUs are known for affordability and supportive environments, they often lack the resources to provide competitive financial aid. PWIs, on the other hand, have greater financial capacity but may not offer scholarships specifically tailored to African students. Addressing this imbalance requires creative strategies, such as partnering with African governments and corporations to fund scholarships and integrate work-study opportunities.

Another critical focus is aligning academic programs with African students' career aspirations. PWIs excel in offering globally recognized business programs and access to multinational recruitment networks. However, HBCUs, with their smaller class sizes and emphasis on community engagement, provide personalized learning experiences. Strategic collaborations with African and multinational businesses could further enhance career outcomes by creating pathways for internships and employment.

Campus climate plays a significant role in the academic and social well-being of African students. While HBCUs generally perform well in fostering inclusivity, they could benefit from a deeper understanding of African students' unique intersectional identities, which differ from those of African Americans. Meanwhile, PWIs need to

address issues like racial microaggressions and cultural biases to create more welcoming environments. Initiatives like diversity training and student organizations celebrating African heritage are essential for fostering inclusivity.

The study emphasizes the need for collaboration between institutional types to enhance the recruitment and retention of African students. HBCUs and PWIs can complement each other by sharing best practices and co-developing programs that balance cultural support with global career readiness. Such partnerships would allow institutions to leverage their unique strengths and collectively address the diverse needs of African students.

Supporting international student mobility for African students holds significant implications for both individual students and the broader global higher education landscape. For African students, access to international education expands career opportunities, enhances skill development, and contributes to knowledge exchange that can drive economic and social progress in their home countries. For U.S. universities, attracting and supporting African students is not only an opportunity to diversify their campuses but also a strategic investment in education as a form of soft power and diplomacy. Higher education serves as a conduit for fostering long-term international relationships, strengthening ties between the U.S. and African nations, and cultivating future global leaders with positive affiliations to American institutions. This aligns with the broader concept of education diplomacy, where academic exchange facilitates cross-cultural understanding, economic partnerships, and geopolitical influence. By prioritizing policies and institutional strategies that enhance African student mobility, U.S. universities contribute to both global educational equity and the strengthening of international alliances, reinforcing their role as hubs of intellectual and cultural exchange.

Recommendations

Recommendations to policymakers and other stakeholders should focus on expanding educational opportunities for African international students through partnerships and support systems across various sectors. Governments must take the lead by increasing funding for scholarships. Collaborations between African governments and U.S. universities could create scholarship programs targeting fields tied to national development goals, such as business education, and sustain these opportunities for economically disadvantaged students through partnerships with international organizations. Streamlining visa and immigration processes is equally critical; simplifying procedures and reducing bureaucratic barriers would ease the journey for students pursuing education in the United States. Also, governments can establish bilateral agreements with U.S. institutions to promote educational exchanges, joint research initiatives, and student mobility, fostering knowledge transfer that benefits both nations.

Corporations also play an essential role in supporting African students through scholarships and internships. Multinational companies operating in Africa could fund business-focused scholarship programs, offering students a pathway to future employment while fulfilling corporate social responsibility goals. Internships and co-op programs tailored specifically to African international students could provide

valuable hands-on experience and exposure to global business practices. Beyond funding and internships, corporations could collaborate with universities to develop curricula that meet industry demands and address challenges in African markets. Alumni and mentorship programs are another key avenue of support; African professionals who graduated from U.S. universities could mentor current students, bridging cultural gaps, providing career guidance, and strengthening connections between students and businesses.

International organizations also have a vital role in advancing inclusivity within higher education. Entities like UNESCO and the African Union could advocate for accessible international education pathways for African students, working to dismantle systemic barriers. They could also facilitate multilateral funding frameworks that pool resources from governments, private-sector partners, and philanthropic organizations to build a robust support infrastructure for African students pursuing higher education abroad.

To further enhance the integration of African international students, universities must also consider religious inclusivity as a crucial element of cultural integration. Given that Islam and Christianity are the two dominant religions in Africa, with over 40% of the population identifying as Muslim, institutional strategies should actively accommodate religious diversity. Universities can achieve this by providing designated prayer spaces, recognizing religious holidays, and fostering interfaith dialogue on campus. Moreover, student organizations focused on religious and cultural exchange can offer a platform for international students to practice their faith while engaging with the broader campus community. These measures ensure that religious beliefs do not become barriers to social inclusion and academic success but rather serve as avenues for cross-cultural understanding.

Moreover, successful integration strategies should include structured welcoming activities to help students acclimate to their new environment. Orientation programs tailored to international students can provide essential information on academic expectations, cultural adaptation, and available support services. Joint activities with host students, such as mentorship programs, cultural exchange events, and collaborative projects, can facilitate meaningful connections and reduce social isolation. Furthermore, institutions should establish formal mechanisms to evaluate feedback from international students after their first year on campus. Regular surveys, focus groups, and advisory committees can help universities assess the effectiveness of their integration initiatives and make data-driven improvements to foster a more inclusive and supportive academic environment for all students.

8. Conclusion

The growing presence of African international students in U.S. higher education underscores the need for institutions to adapt and innovate their strategies to attract and support this vital demographic. This paper has presented a practical framework aimed at helping HBCUs and PWIs understand and address the unique needs, aspirations, and challenges faced by African students pursuing business education.

The framework emphasizes actionable insights in key areas: Fostering cultural and social integration, enhancing financial accessibility, designing specialized

curricula, cultivating career opportunities, and creating inclusive campus environments. By implementing these strategies, institutions can not only improve the academic and social experiences of African students but also strengthen their reputation as global leaders in higher education. For HBCUs, the framework highlights the importance of leveraging their legacy of cultural affirmation and personalized support, while encouraging the expansion of internationally focused programs and partnerships. For PWIs, it offers guidance on fostering more inclusive and supportive environments, addressing racial climate concerns, and tailoring resources to meet the expectations of African students.

This framework holds potential for broader application across other international student populations, particularly those from regions with similar socioeconomic and cultural dynamics. Future research could focus on evaluating the long-term outcomes of African students who graduate from U.S. institutions, providing insights into the effectiveness of these strategies and identifying areas for further improvement. While this study provides a conceptual framework based on existing literature and secondary data, the lack of primary data collection presents a limitation. Future research could enhance the originality and applicability of these findings by incorporating firsthand data through surveys, interviews, or case studies with African international students and university administrators. Additionally, given the limited availability of comprehensive secondary data on this demographic, further empirical research is needed to validate and refine the proposed framework.

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