



BEST PRACTICES
Recruiting International
Students in Africa:
A WHITEPAPER



“Invest in ***long-term partnerships*** and relationships. A long-term plan is really the only way to ***build a brand that people trust in*** markets that are quickly getting crowded with both good and unscrupulous recruiters.”

— Chelsey Acierno, International Recruitment Manager and Refugee Resettlement Project Coordinator, Columbia College

Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
CONTEXT	5
ECONOMIC PRESSURES	8
BEST PRACTICES	8
1. Practise patience	
2. Consider students' whole journey	
3. Do your research	
4. Know your brand	
5. Commit to diversity and inclusion	
6. Be flexible but also firm	
7. Be responsive	
8. Support your team and insist on accountability	
9. Use efficient processes	
10. Make the most of a multi-channel strategy	
CONCLUSION	24
APPENDIX A: MARKET FACTS: 14 AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN 2023	
APPENDIX B: ENROLMENTS AND Y-O-Y GROWTH TRENDS	
APPENDIX C: ECONOMIC INDICATORS: GHANA, KENYA, NIGERIA, TUNISIA, EGYPT, RWANDA	

Introduction

Africa is a promising — and often relatively new — source of international students for college and university staff who are intent on welcoming a wider mix of nationalities to their campus. Demand for study abroad is high in many African countries, and there are great opportunities to recruit bright and hard-working students across the continent.

However, many educators do not yet have an optimal plan in place for how to efficiently and responsibly recruit African students who are right for their programs. Achieving sustainable results in Africa does not happen by making a small tweak to strategies that have worked in Asia, Latin America, or elsewhere.

At Illume, our team has decades of experience in recruiting students from African countries, and we have offices across the continent. Our mission is to help students enrol in overseas institutions and programs for which they are well suited and that will provide them a rich experience and good career prospects. We have placed thousands of students according to that mission.

We share our experience in this white paper with a goal of helping institutions to (1) better understand the recruiting context in Africa, and (2) develop a respectful, effective approach when working with students, agents, parents, and partners. The insights in this paper focus on how to:

- Set realistic targets and admissions policies;
- Develop processes to ensure accountability from local partners;
- Attract students who are the right fit for programs;
- Use budget/resources to best effect;
- Build your brand over the long term;
- And more.

We look forward to any questions or comments you may have. Please send them to info@illumestudentservices.ca and we'll be sure to get back to you promptly.

Context

Before we can discuss recruiting students in Africa, we should start off with some context and myth-busting.

1. AFRICA IS NOT A SINGLE MARKET

Africa is home to more than 50 countries, 1.4 billion people, hundreds of languages, and an incredibly varied history. Each country has a unique education system that shares some similarities with those in other African countries, but which functions according to its own logic and requirements.

The continent of Africa includes the regions of North Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, and Southern Africa. Most students choosing to study abroad come from:

- **North Africa** (population 250 million): e.g., Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia
- **West Africa** (412 million): e.g., Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal
- **East Africa** (457 million): e.g., Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Ethiopia
- And in **Central Africa** (185 million), Cameroon

2. STEREOTYPES PERSIST

Virtually every African country has a colonial past — and a complicated relationship with that past. Colonialism has shaped how foreigners conceive of Africa to this present day — a problem amplified by the fact that many people still read about, rather than visit, African countries.

Families are keenly aware of Western misperceptions of “Africa,” and are naturally sensitive to this. They know how often Africa is reduced to a land of luxury safari resorts on the one hand, and war, famine, and instability on the other. It wasn't that long ago that Africa was known abroad as “the dark continent.” It's no wonder that African families are worried that their children might experience racism in the West.

Most African countries are marked by deep contrasts. Poverty, corruption, and inequality between classes. Thriving cities, five-star hotels, sophisticated technologies, and world-class education institutions. Families who can afford Harvard without a scholarship. Families who can't afford the next meal. Students who speak better English than those born in Canada, the US, Ireland, or the UK.¹ Students whose education has been neglected but who dream of getting a foreign degree.

¹Often, those students are still told they must take a TOEFL or IELTS test if they want to be considered for a STEM program abroad ... or any program.

Discrepancies in educational quality and access mean that some African students are ready for direct entry into higher education programs, while others need a year or two of foundational preparation before they can truly succeed. Discrepancies in wealth mean that some students need a scholarship or discount to be able to study abroad, or a more affordable program in a less expensive city. African student markets are thus heterogenous and complex.

“Understanding the student segments within a country is key because each segment will be influenced by different factors. Higher-income families will look at rankings and prestige, middle-class families will want proof of ROI and post-study work opportunities, and lower-income families will naturally be price-sensitive and need either scholarships or more affordable programs.”

— Duarte Dias, Director Client Relations & Partnerships, Illume Advisory Services



3. AFRICA IS NOT ASIA (OR LATIN AMERICA)

Many African students who are considering study abroad tell us that they aren't seeing themselves in the marketing directed at them. They see Asian faces on brochures. Testimonials from satisfied students ... from Latin American countries. They pore over brochures, websites, and social media looking for confirmation that an institution does, in fact, host students from their country. If they see that proof, it goes a long way.

4. TRUST IS EARNED

The tradition of study abroad is well entrenched in countries such as China and India. It is less so in Africa. The recruiting environment in some African countries has been compared to the “Wild West”: lots of agencies/schools primarily interested in making money — and too little guidance available to families to help them guard against unscrupulous actors.

Families considering study abroad for their children will have heard of students who were steered to the wrong school or who were taken advantage of financially. They will be worried about making a wrong decision that will drain their finances and offer no ROI, or worse yet, see their child end up somewhere they don't feel supported or even safe.

As a result of all this, African families are looking for people they can trust. That's a key reason that many institutions partner with Illume — we have built up crucial relationships in many African countries, including with good agents, schools, community groups/churches, and other influencers. We are a known quantity with a track record of excellent service. We have processes in place to see that a student goes abroad to the right program, institution, and destination.

“I urge African students and families to ask as many questions of school representatives as they want about the kind of supports they will receive if they choose this institution. It is their right to know, and the institution should be ready not just to promise extensive supports, but to deliver them.”

— Karuna Ausman, Director, Illume Student Advisory Services



5. AFRICA SHOULD MATTER TO EVERYONE

In 2050, one out of every three young people on the planet will live in one region: Sub-Saharan Africa. The implications of this “youth bulge” — i.e., when youth make up a disproportionately large share of a population — are not yet clear.

If the energy of African youth is harnessed through greater access to education and job opportunities, this could spur unprecedented economic growth in the region. If it is not, the results could be devastating on a humanitarian level and could deepen security issues that spill through — and past — the continent.

Foreign institutions have a role to play in making their capacity, quality of teaching, and career services accessible to African students whose domestic education systems may be overburdened and underfunded. And they have a responsibility, from an ethical perspective, to avoid the following when recruiting in Africa:

- Not conducting research before marketing programs to parents and students;
- Accepting students into programs for which they cannot succeed without first doing a preparatory year;
- Enrolling students without having adequate supports in place (e.g., language, academic, social/psychological).

“Nigerian parents are willing to sacrifice so much to send their children to foreign institutions for degrees. They are determined to provide their children with a better life and career than they could have in Nigeria.”

— Ebi Obaro, President, Maple Education Canada



At Illume, we are seeing too many institutions launching themselves into crowded African student markets without pausing to reflect on the right approach. This is neither responsible nor sustainable. Recruiting in Africa requires patience, a long-term orientation, and an investment in building trust and partnerships.

Economic Pressures

TUNISIA

Lack of economic opportunity is a major “push” factor driving Tunisian demand for study abroad — and permanent residency abroad. Tunisian youth are tragically well represented on the doomed illegal ships carrying hopeful migrants out of the country to Mediterranean Europe. They board those ships out of desperation and determination to secure a better future.

KENYA

Kenya is known as East Africa’s tech hub and has been referred to as the “Silicon Savannah” of Africa. The government supports an education curriculum that promotes technical skills, and Kenya boasts some of the most exciting start-ups on the continent. Kenya is also a financial and transportation hub in the region. While innovative, the economy is also plagued by corruption. This corruption weakens the potential for growth and the potential for wealth to be more evenly dispersed across the population.

GHANA

Ghana has had a relatively rough few years economically, so price sensitivity is a trend recruiters should be aware of. In 2019, Ghana had the world’s fastest-growing economy after doubling its economic growth in one year. In recent months, inflation rose above 50%; food prices, in particular, have skyrocketed.

NIGERIA

The Nigerian economy remains highly dependent on oil revenues: the oil sector accounts for 95% of Nigeria’s foreign exchange earnings and 80% of its revenues. Nigerians have weathered several crises over the past few years: extensive flooding that decimated farms, a decrease in oil production, and rising costs that have constrained industrial production. Double-digit inflation and the devaluation of the *naira* have also been problems.

EGYPT

This year, the Egyptian pound is the sixth worst-performing currency in the world after losing more than half its value in 2022. At the end of March, the worst performing currencies, in order, were the Lebanese pound, the Venezuelan *bolivar*, the Zimbabwean dollar, and the Iranian *rial*. The foreign currency crisis will likely affect the study abroad choices of Egyptians in the coming year, forcing more families to prioritize affordability.

“Colleges and universities should understand that **security and safety is a priority** for African families looking at study abroad options. Security is a competitive advantage for Canada because there is quite a lot of fear about gun culture and violence in the US, even though students like the prestige associated with a US education.”

— Kwame Otuapem Odame, Illume in-country representative for Trent University

Best Practices

1. PRACTISE PATIENCE

In international education circles, there is sometimes too much focus on the massive youth demographics in the region. The millions of African students seeking higher education degrees can make some recruiters consider these students a quick fix for slowing Chinese enrolments, for example, or a speedy way to diversify a campus.

This is the wrong mindset for a sustainable brand presence in the region. It's also an approach that can quickly hurt your reputation in key markets.

A patient approach hinges upon understanding the community and culture in which you are recruiting. It requires making a lot of time for parents and grandparents, who are the key decision-makers. Parents and grandparents not only want to know about academic excellence and graduation outcomes, but also about safety, the presence of other African students and diaspora, and campus amenities and facilities.

Some universities are going so far as to connect the parents of prospective African students with the parents of current students at the university so parents can share their experiences and recommendations.

Building a foundation in an African market does not happen overnight, but it will yield the results you are looking for ... over time.

“To be successful in Africa, you must think in terms of customer service — the customer being the student and their family. Customer service should stretch from the student's first contact with you to their time on campus and even after. This is a big commitment, and you need time and resources to do it well.”

— Karuna Ausman, Director, Illume Student Advisory Services



“ Realistic expectations are key. **Don't expect large volumes of students right away.** Volume is not your friend in Africa. There's no point to just collecting tons of applications ... for what? **You want students who have a real chance** of being approved for a visa and **of succeeding and thriving** at your institution. That will work for you and more importantly, it will work for the student.”

— Chelsey Acierno, International Recruitment Manager and Refugee Resettlement Project Coordinator, Columbia College

[TIPS]

1

Enrol only students who have a chance of succeeding. If they aren't quite ready for your degree program, they should enrol in a preparatory program first. If they aren't well-off or need a smaller class size to begin with, a 1+3 or 2+2 model may be exactly what they need.

2

Part of the patience required in Africa involves taking time to do necessary research. Have you researched the kind of student profile that your country's immigration authorities are most likely to approve for a visa? Do students have enough financial security to afford a multi-year program in a foreign country? Are they ready for a degree program, or do you need to have a pathway/foundation for them?

3

Maintain a regular presence in your priority African country to nurture new partnerships. It is very evident to African partners — e.g., agents, school counsellors, and in-country representatives — which brands are serious about engaging and which are not.

“When a student comes to me to ask for advice, I always ask them, “Where is your parent?” Come back and see me when you are with them and then we will sit down and chat.”

— Karuna Ausman, Director, Illume Student Advisory Services



“Don't assume anything about the level of education and academic standards a student might have. There are incredible high schools in African markets that extremely rigorous in their approach to education and marking.”

— Rahim Kassam, Chief of Operations, Uniserv Education



2. CONSIDER STUDENTS' WHOLE JOURNEY

In-country representatives and in-country events and promotions are of course crucial to connecting with potential students. Just as important, though, is how you treat current students. For example:

- Provide excellent supports for them throughout their study — academic, language, psychological, career, community, etc. African students are travelling far from home, and they need all the support you can provide to help them thrive on campus.
- Connect with students' families throughout their studies. Families will appreciate your efforts to reassure them that their kids are safe and doing well.
- Encourage happy students to share their experience (e.g., social media, calls home to friends and family, testimonials). Positive word of mouth is crucial, especially when you have a small base of students from one country that you are hoping to grow.

3. DO YOUR RESEARCH

What matters to a Ghanaian student may be very different than what a Nigerian student cares about. For example, Ghanaian students tend to want to study, gain work experience in their host country, then return home to secure good jobs in industry or government. Nigerian students tend to be more interested in permanent residency in a host country. Differences in various markets should inform your marketing and positioning.

Other questions to research:

- What are the key economic sectors in the country you are targeting?
- Who are your competitors, what are they leading with, and how can you distinguish your offer from theirs?
- What is the history and culture of the country (so you are not ignorant in communications and conversations)?
- How is the education system set up and which institutions produce the most qualified students?
- Are most students even able to meet the pre-requisites and entry requirements of your program?

[TIP]

You want to get it right in terms of packaging and promoting your programs. We have seen several institutions miss the mark by marketing a first-year program in a country or region where students have no way to have the pre-requisite needed for the course. Such a misstep underlines the need to research a market – and its education system – before promoting programs there.

“There are very good public universities in Nigeria – and these are very difficult to get into. As a result, the students who do get in are excellent – but they may not be wealthy enough to pay for study abroad. Scholarships can be important in these cases. Then there are the students who attend high-end private high schools and enter expensive private universities. There will also be very good students and their families often can fund study abroad on their own.”

— Ebi Obaro, President, Maple Education Canada



“Students in Ghana are extremely interested in whether a program has a co-op component.”

— Kwame Otuapem Odame, Illume in-country representative for Trent University



“Students are looking ahead at their careers. Tell them about your career services, your graduation outcomes, the kinds of jobs that a specific program will prepare them for. The answers to these questions can interest students in a program they might not have considered before.”

— Feona Julius, Illume in-country representative for University of Windsor in Kenya



4. KNOW YOUR BRAND

Know your brand and how to distinguish it. The competition in African markets is intense right now, and many institutions are using scholarships as a way of standing out. This is fine when the scholarship is for a program that aligns with a student's goals and academic profile, or if it is targeted at bright but low-income students who really need it. It is not as good when it is a superficial ploy aimed solely at hitting applications and enrolment targets. At the end of the day, African parents want their children to be in good programs — in a safe and supportive environment — that allow them to graduate with career-ready skills. Look closely at what your brand can offer students, for example:

- Small class sizes or a great student-to-faculty ratio;
- Affordable cost of living;
- Co-op/internship opportunities;
- Strong industry linkages;
- Proof of solid graduation outcomes;
- Presence of a vibrant African community on campus or in the town/city;
- Popular and relevant credentials.

[TIP]

Illume's in-country representatives and top agents in West Africa note that students are very attracted to Post-Graduate Diploma programs in Canada. These programs are especially popular among students who cannot get into a master's program and who want to be eligible for Canada's Post-Study Graduate Program (PGWP). Similarly, the one-year master's in the UK is also extremely popular.

“Competition is very intense now in Kenya for students. Whereas a few years ago, families might only have thought of the UK or US for a foreign degree, now there is awareness of other options including Canada, Ireland, China, Slovenia, Slovakia, and other countries. There is now always a Plan B if Plan A doesn't work out or if it is too expensive.”

—Rahim Kassam, Chief of Operations, Uniserv Education



“As well as parents, school counsellors are very influential in terms of who students listen to about what they should study, which countries are best, and which programs are the ones to apply to. It's essential to respect the role of school counsellors.”

—Feona Julius, Illume in-country representative for University of Windsor in Kenya



5. COMMIT TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The universities and colleges that are doing well in Africa are often ones that have seriously committed to making Black students feel comfortable and safe. For example, Dalhousie University set aside 40 seats in its nursing program for Indigenous and Black students in the 2022/23 school year. University of Waterloo has diplomas focused on anti-racist communication; and Toronto Metropolitan University and University of British Columbia have piloted physical spaces on campus devoted to Black students.

Including Black leaders in recruitment activities is also extremely effective. In 2022, Dr. Christopher S. Taylor, associate vice-president, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-racism (EDI-RO) at University of Waterloo, visited Zimbabwe, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, and Mauritius last year in coordination with Illume to meet with parents and students.

Dr. Taylor, who is also a history professor, [noted](#):

“The reception our team received was outstanding. Many remarked that it was exhilarating to see someone who looked like them, someone who understood firsthand the unique challenges that they would face as international students in Canada, and someone with the capacity to advocate for proper supports to be available to help them thrive after they are admitted.”

The University of Waterloo has a comprehensive anti-racism mandate, including a newsletter devoted to the effort to make the campus more inclusive.

Every student on campus — regardless of colour, ethnicity, income, or religion — deserves a campus environment where they can thrive. An institution-wide commitment to diversity and inclusion is a necessary corollary of this idea.

6. BE FLEXIBLE ... BUT ALSO FIRM

How can you be both flexible and firm in admissions policies? By being student centric. For example:

- Do not bend on admissions requirements. If a student needs a certain grade, level of English proficiency, and pre-requisite to be successful in a degree program — they just do. It would not be in the student’s best interest to be accepted to a program without the academic preparedness required for the coursework (nor would it be fair to other students in the program). In this way, admissions policies should be firm.
- Where flexibility does have a place is in creating a pathway for a student who cannot yet enter a program based on their academic/language profile. This could include a year of preparatory studies, or a language course. Another option would be to have the student attend a college (with lower admissions

requirements) for two years of a four-year program, then transfer to a university for the final two years. This also works for students who need a relatively affordable way to complete a foreign degree.

A consistent admissions policy is an integral part of sustainable recruitment in African markets. So, too, is being transparent if you are promoting especially challenging programs. Success should not be measured in how many applications or enrolments your institution receives — it should be measured in terms of student satisfaction, retention, and post-graduation outcomes.

“Ideally, what you’re looking for in terms of first-year international enrolments is a student who has been in high school within the past two years who also can make a one-year tuition deposit. Academic preparedness plus financial commitment tends to lead to higher student retention rates and student success.”

— Chelsey Acierno, International Recruitment Manager and Refugee Resettlement Project Coordinator, Columbia College



7. BE RESPONSIVE

As Illume’s Duarte Dias emphasizes, “time is money.” This is so true in Africa. The competition for students is only heating up and many students will accept the first offer they receive. Those institutions that drag their heels getting back to in-country representatives, agents, and students on key questions or take too long to extend an offer to a good student will be at a serious disadvantage.

AI/chat automation is being used widely now precisely because marketing and admissions teams have so much on their plates. An article in [ICEF Monitor](#) elaborates on how AI can help:

“Sophisticated chatbots have already changed the way that schools and universities communicate with students, and they have been shown to boost conversion rates from 3% (without AI) to 8% (with it). In other words, if 3 of 100 students visiting an institutional website normally go on to enrol, AI can change that proportion to 7 or 8 who enrol as a result of visiting the website.

Some schools are using AI-supported admissions processes that crunch vast amounts of data to help admissions staff identify and focus on the candidates that are best fitted to the institution or school in question. And “best fit” in this sense can include sweeping considerations around not only which students are most likely to be successfully admitted, but also those that are most likely to secure a study visa, graduate, and even have a successful career after their studies.”

While AI is a powerful resource, it doesn’t replace the value of human connection. AI should help admissions and marketing staff — it should not replace them.

8. SUPPORT YOUR TEAM AND INSIST ON ACCOUNTABILITY

If in-country representatives are part of your recruitment strategy, they should be considered part of your marketing team. At Illume, we have seen what happens when an institution doesn't value and include their in-country representatives and it isn't pretty! Essentially, it's a waste of resources because the institution will not get the results they're looking for. By contrast, we can look to the example of Wilfred Laurier University (WLU). That university held a welcome party for their in-country representatives, sent WLU hoodies and other swag, scheduled regular Zoom meetings, and made sure to provide positive reinforcement for every success. WLU is doing great in their priority African markets and still works with the same in-country representatives.

For an in-country representative to be able to deliver results, they need to know what is expected of them. It is crucial to communicate the activities you want them to organize — and how often — and to attach KPIs to performance. For example, they will want to know what you expect on a weekly and monthly basis regarding such activities as:

- FB Live events or Q&As
- Agent training sessions
- School visits
- Student follow-ups
- And more

Remember to provide your in-country representatives (and agents) with everything they need to achieve success. That includes a strong onboarding and training program, access to the CRMS, and anything required to launch effective promotions. If you don't equip your in-country representatives with what they need, they won't be prepared to respond well to students and agents, and in the end, students and agents will bypass them.

[TIP]

Before partnering with a new agent or representative, take the necessary steps to ensure they are committed to the high standards your institution expects from all partners. At Illume, we work only with agents we know — we have visited their offices and have shared meals with them. We would recommend:

- *Looking for agents with an AIRC/ICEF certification;*
- *Asking for recommendations from a colleague or a company with extensive agent networks such as Illume;*
- *Visiting a new agent's office before signing a contract.*

9. USE EFFICIENT PROCESSES

Machine automation (aka AI) can heighten the efficiency of recruitment. Before deciding on how you will use AI, it's a good idea to identify the low-value and high-value tasks that are part of your recruitment team's efforts.

Low-value tasks are necessary but often tedious (e.g., responding to initial inquiries, tracking payments, etc.). They often take up the bulk of employees' time and are thus often "high-volume." The volume of these low-value tasks can swamp an admissions or marketing team and prevent them from performing high-value activities associated most strongly with conversions.

High-value tasks require a high level of skill and experience — and generally they are best done by humans. Using automation to deal with low-value tasks frees up time for admissions and marketing staff to focus on high-value tasks such as:

- A crucial phone call or meeting with the parent of a Kenyan student who is deciding between your school and another;
- A well-considered intervention — such as an early-application discount or application-fee waiver — to convince a Ghanaian student who can't decide which program they will apply to.

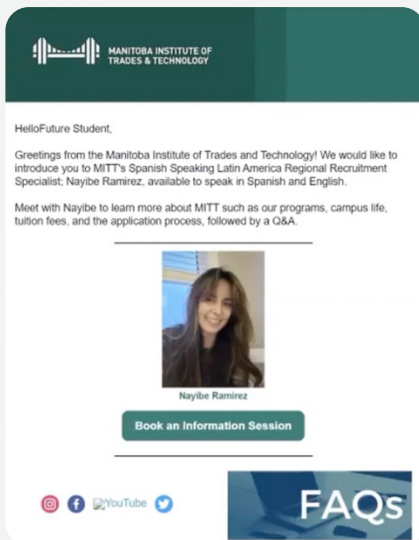
CASE IN POINT

A good example of how the Illume team used automation to free up "high-value" time for a client-institution was when we:

1. Conceptualized and created six different email templates to respond to inquiries from students with specific profiles and program interests;
2. Integrated those templates in the CRM system and associated them with each type of inquiry;
3. Had the system automatically (and immediately) reply to inquiries with the most relevant of the six emails.

It took about a week to craft the templates and integrate them into the CRM, but once that was done, staff no longer had to deal with that stage of student inquiry — it was all automated. Automating these responses allowed staff to:

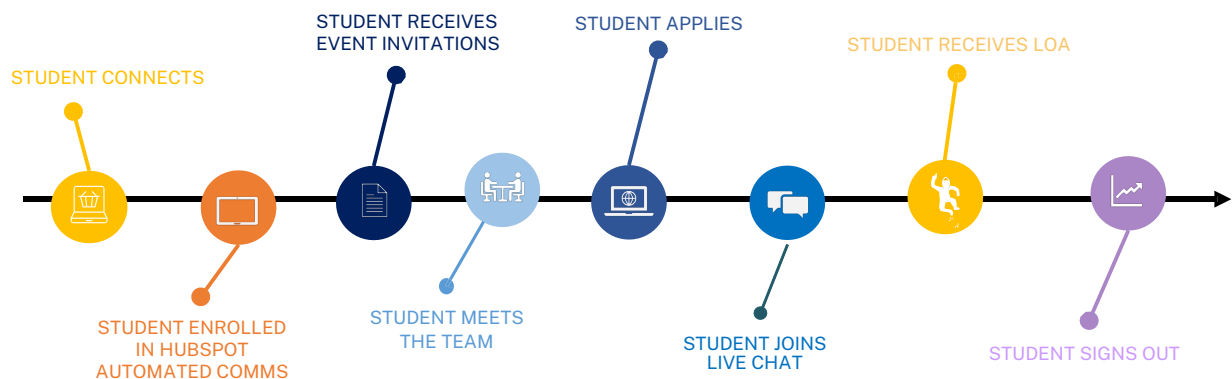
- Narrow down leads, as only some students would keep engaging with the institution after receiving one of the six emails;
- Connect thoughtfully and strategically with students who remained interested and engaged after that stage of inquiry/response;
- Rest assured that students' initial inquiries had been quickly responded to (without their needing to do anything!).



Manitoba Institute of Trades & Technology automated this invitation (triggered by an action/inquiry received from the student) for a meeting with a real student ambassador. This is an example of a smart balance between automation (for a low-value activity) and human skill (for a high-value activity).

This graphic further shows the mix of automation and human intervention along the enrolment funnel.

STREAMLINING THE STUDENT JOURNEY



“Efficiency ties into quick response times. The better processes you have in place, the quicker you can get back to students on their questions and the more rapidly you can identify what it will take to enrol a promising lead. Top-quality students in African markets can easily see which institution wants them more, so being agile is essential.”

— Rahim Kassam, Chief of Operations, Uniserv Education



10. MAKE THE MOST OF A MULTI-CHANNEL STRATEGY

Many institutions are using several channels to recruit African students. Not as many are connecting the dots between the various channels and allowing each channel to strengthen the power of the others.

For example, let's say you have a social media ad. Have you thought about what you want that ad to do? Maybe the ad drives students to the institutional website. This is great — unless the website isn't well designed and optimized. If it doesn't convey the information students are looking for quickly, it loses its power as a channel, and the social media ad has correspondingly also under-performed.

By contrast, the social media ad could lead students to an attractive site with well-presented information and some or all the following options:

- A Unibuddy link
- A live Q&A event
- An invitation to connect with an in-country representative via WhatsApp

The in-country representative could then discern whether a student has a reasonable chance of being accepted. A student with strong potential could then talk with school representatives or attend events, driving them further towards enrolment. A follow-up strategy would include personalized material from the institution and the involvement of agents to help with details such as study permit advice.

With each step across a well-connected multi-channel network, the student becomes more engaged with the institution. That's a very different result than a social media ad that takes students to a boring institutional website that might end their interest in a school.

[TIP]

Consider your enrolment funnel. Then, consider how you can personalize your marketing and communications. Do you have the right marketing and communications at each step of the buying cycle? Communications should be based on what students have asked for, where they are based, and where they are in the cycle. For example, at a certain point, students will need to know how much time they have left to apply — if that information isn't provided to them when they need it, they could easily miss the deadline.

“Don't underestimate the role that trusted agents play in Africa. Give them as much training as you can — for example, educate them on the type of student profile your country's immigration authorities are looking for. They can easily identify those students and spend their energy on those students rather than ones that don't stand a chance of being accepted. Empower them with training and materials so they can run effective co-promotions with you.”

— Duarte Dias, Director Client Relations & Partnerships, Illume Advisory Services



[TIP]

In marketing, select your target regions and cities carefully so that you are talking to the right prospect pools for what you have to offer. This is always true, regardless of where you are recruiting. In-country representatives and agents can provide the guidance you need in this respect.

MARKET FACTS: 14 AFRICAN COUNTRIES IN 2023

Country	Region	Total Outbound*	Top Destinations	Population*	Religion	Main Cities	Language(s)***
Algeria	North	31,000+	France, Canada, Turkey, UK	46 million	98% Muslim	Algiers, Oran	Arabic, Berber
Cameroon	Central	28,000+	France, Germany, Canada, Belgium	28 million	69% Christian, 21% Muslim	Yaounde, Douala	French, English
Côte d'Ivoire	West	17,000+	France, Germany, Canada, Senegal	28 million	42% Muslim, 34% Christian	Abidjan, Bouaké	French, many other Indigenous languages
Egypt	North	47,000+	Germany, UAE, UK, Saudi Arabia, US,	108 million	Mostly Muslim with 5-15% Coptic Christians	Cairo, Alexandria	Arabic
Ghana	West	18,000+	US, UK, Canada, Germany	33 million	Christian 75%, Muslim 16%	Accra, Kumasi	English, Akan, Dagbani, others
Kenya	East	14,000+	US, Australia, UK, Canada, UAE	57 million	Christian 86%, Muslim 11%	Nairobi, Mombasa	English, Swahili
Morocco	North	63,000+	France, Canada, Germany, UAE	31 million	Muslim 99%	Casablanca, Rabat	Arabic, Berber
Nigeria	West	72,000+	UK, US, Canada, Malaysia	222 million	Muslim 55%, Christian 46%	Lagos, Kano, Ibadan	English, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and more
Rwanda	East	7,800+	Europe (small #s in several countries), Canada, US	14 million	Over 90% Christian, Muslim 5% or less	Kigali, Gisenyi	Kinyarwanda, English, French, Swahili****
Tanzania	East	7,000+	India, Canada, Kenya, UK	65 million	Christian 63%, Muslim 34%	Dar Es Salaam, Mwanza	Swahili, English
Senegal	West	16,000+	France, Canada, Morocco	18 million	Muslim 95%	Dakar, Touba	Wolof plus 30 others
Tunisia	North	25,000+	France, Germany, Canada, Russia	12 million	Muslim 98%	Tunis, Sfax	Arabic
Zimbabwe	East	19,000+	South Africa, US, UK	16 million	Christian 87%	Harare, Bulawayo	Shona, Ndebele, English
Uganda	East	6,000+	US, Kenya, UK, South Africa	50 million	Christian 83%, Muslim 14%	Kampala, Nansana	Luganda, English

*Total outbound reflects the most recent UNESCO data (2020) on international students abroad in higher education programs. Destinations such as Canada, France, Germany, and the UK have welcomed record numbers of African students since then, so the totals in this table will have mostly gone up since 2020, sometimes dramatically.

**Youth aged 15–24 make up at least 20% of the population in all countries.

***This is a [great primer](#) on how much English, or French, is spoken in various African countries

****Read this [fascinating article](#) on the balance of English and French in Rwanda

AFRICAN ENROLMENTS AND Y-O-Y GROWTH TRENDS* IN SELECT DESTINATIONS

	Canada 2022	US 2021/22	Australia 2022	France 2021/22	Germany 2022	UK 2021/22
Algeria	7,510 (+44%)	617 (+15%)	-	31,032 (+6%)	-	-
Cameroon	4,075 (+59%)	930 (stable)	-	9,037 (+9%)	7,690	-
Egypt	2,985 (+4%)	3,965 (+8%)	505 (+26%)	-	7,215	3,065**
Kenya	2,310 (+13%)	3,800 (+9%)	4,245 (+42%)	-	6,575	2,585**
Morocco	7,220 (+23%)	1,465 (+13%)	-	46,371 (+3%)	-	-
Nigeria	21,660 (+60%)	14,440 (+12%)	2,370 (+22%)	-	6,695	44,195
Tunisia	3,265 (+34%)	615 (+15%)	-	13,661 (+4%)	-	-
Zimbabwe	1,050 (+27%)	1,505 (+15%)	1,160 (+19%)	-	-	-
Ghana	3,475 (+88%)	4,915 (+16%)	465 (+4%)	-	-	2,670**

*Where available. Data is straight from government sources (e.g., IRCC, IIE, Australian government, DAAD, HESA).

**We only have 2022 data for Nigeria — other African markets reflect the 2020/21 academic year.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS: GHANA, KENYA, NIGERIA, TUNISIA, EGYPT, RWANDA

	Ghana	Kenya	Nigeria	Tunisia	Egypt	Rwanda
Currency	Cedi	Shilling	Naira	Dinar	Pound	Franc
Projected economic growth (2023)	3.1%	5.3%	3%	2.3%	4.8%	6.5%
Main sectors	Agriculture, mining, oil and gas production, digital, financial services, education	Agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, construction and real estate, telecommunications and ICT, roads (which are meant to be an “enabler” for the goals of Kenya’s Vision 2030).	Oil and petroleum, agriculture. Between one-third and one-half of Nigerians derive their income from agriculture, but farmlands and forests are under intense pressure from climate change.	Agriculture, oil, manufacturing (especially of textiles, automotive and electrical parts, and chemicals).	Agriculture, media, petroleum imports, natural gas, and tourism.	Agriculture, energy, tourism, financial services. The World Bank notes that nature-based economic tourism holds tremendous potential for Rwanda’s economy.
Inflation (2023)	45%	9.4%	22%	10%	40%	31%
Youth unemployment	10%	14%	19.5%	38.5%	24%	3%

*According to most recent (2021) World Bank data.

Source: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/youth_unemployment/Africa

Conclusion

Done right and responsibly, recruiting students in Africa can be a very fulfilling task. There are thousands upon thousands of African families who are determined to send their children abroad for an excellent higher education experience. Students from these families know how much is at stake and tend to work diligently to succeed in their coursework.

Are there challenges? Of course, as there are in many markets. Perhaps the most talked-about issue right now with respect to Africa are high rates of study visa refusals encountered by many African students. Those rates can of course feel daunting, but we would recommend not being too discouraged by them. Many institutions we work with encourage students (who they know have a good chance of succeeding in a program) to apply again for a visa after an initial refusal. A strong proportion of those students are successful on this second attempt.

Overall, the balance of opportunities to challenges in African markets is heavily weighted to the opportunities side of the scale. We hope this whitepaper will help readers to develop exciting, sustainable strategies that will work both for the diversification of their campuses and the African students who cannot wait to study abroad.

If you have any questions — even something small — do not hesitate to contact us at info@illumestudentservices.ca and one of our team members will be pleased to assist you.

Thank you,
Mike Henniger
President & CEO
Illume Student Advisory Services Ltd.

