

Article

Addressing the Limited Use of Africa-Related Content in International Business Courses

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This article provides a country-by-country baseline on the cases available to teach about the 54 African nations. It shows that despite the growing relevance of the continent for IB teaching, a very limited overall quantity of relevant content is obtainable, and that zero content exists about some countries. Most of the article focusses on actionable recommendations which address this issue. Opportunities abound to write cases, exercises or technical notes which are field based or based on published sources. Dozens of possible examples are provided. These include some drawn from specific *AIB Insights* articles, or from recent scholarly research articles about Africa.

This article focuses on what we teach about Africa, so is targeted at educators. It is intended to raise awareness of the growing relevance of Africa for international business (IB) teaching, and the limited quantity of current, Africa-related IB content. Most of the article provides specific recommendations which address these issues.

This article has been influenced by an important body of work which has emerged on research about Africa. This body of work lays out the various compelling reasons why scholars should place greater attention on Africa. The evidence they provide for doing so is strong, and from a multitude of perspectives, including economic, business, theoretical, methodological and demographic reasons. Their arguments equally apply to teaching about Africa. Due to article length limitations, all of these arguments are not fully repeated here. However selective ones are later referenced, particularly in regards to teaching implications.

The first part of this article now empirically examines the limited quantity of Africa-related teaching content available for international business courses, in order to have a baseline.

EVIDENCE OF LIMITED USE OF AFRICA CONTENT IN IB COURSES

To consider the current state of available Africa-related teaching content for all 54 African countries, a very large

subset of content is used as a proxy for all relevant content. The data source is familiar to most IB faculty members: the entire Ivey Publishing collection. Ivey is the second largest producer and distributor of business case studies in the world.

As of September 24, 2024, there were 46,790 documents publicly available on the Ivey Publishing website. Those were made up of: 27,872 cases; 10,030 practitioner-oriented articles; 3,814 supplemental cases; 2,519 (technical) notes; 1,494 supporting material files (primarily case-related spreadsheets), 901 books and book chapters; 493 exercises; 135 multimedia documents; and 24 digital learning experiences. This content was provided by over 20 organizations: Harvard (29,263), Ivey (8,777), Darden (3,013), MIT Sloan (1,626), IESE (697), Kellogg (668), Thunderbird (511), HEC Montreal (428), NACRA North American Case Research Association (339), and other smaller ones.

A keyword search was undertaken using the 54 individual African country names to determine the frequency with which each is mentioned by name anywhere in the title, abstract, front matter, or affiliation. This analysis was done over the entire period, and separately for the most recent five years (2020-2024). As with all datasets, there are limitations which can either overstate or understate the actual numbers.¹ While any of the limitations may slightly impact the number of mentions, they do not affect the overall conclusion.

¹ Cases (and their teaching notes) and articles may mention some of the African countries in the document body/analysis, but if they did not mention them in the title/abstract/front matter/affiliation, they would not appear. Two thirds of the mentions on the original search under the country "Chad" picked up authors named "Chad". The relevant number here was adjusted accordingly. There is sometimes confusion between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Republic of Congo, and between Sudan and South Sudan. The word "Guinea" can refer to the African countries of "Guinea", "Guinea-Bissau", and "Equatorial Guinea" as well as "Papua New Guinea" in Indonesia. Manual adjustments were required.

Table 1. African Populations and Mentions in Dataset

	Country	2023 Population (in millions)	% of World Total	Total Mentions	Mentions 2020-2024
1)	NIGERIA	223.8	2.79	84	21
2)	ETHIOPIA	126.5	1.58	28	10
3)	EGYPT	112.7	1.41	60	15
4)	CONGO (DEM. REP)	102.3	1.28	15	8
5)	TANZANIA	67.4	0.84	44	6
6)	SOUTH AFRICA	60.4	0.75	260	80
7)	KENYA	55.1	0.69	114	35
8)	UGANDA	48.6	0.61	28	11
9)	SUDAN	48.1	0.60	16	1
10)	ALGERIA	45.6	0.57	5	0
11)	MOROCCO	37.8	0.47	24	9
12)	ANGOLA	36.7	0.46	9	0
13)	GHANA	34.1	0.43	49	20
14)	MOZAMBIQUE	33.9	0.42	13	1
15)	MADAGASCAR	30.3	0.38	4	1
16)	IVORY COAST	28.9	0.36	7	1
17)	CAMEROON	28.6	0.36	16	0
18)	NIGER	27.2	0.34	3	0
19)	BURKINA FASO	23.3	0.29	3	2
20)	MALI	23.3	0.29	5	0
21)	MALAWI	20.9	0.26	4	1
22)	ZAMBIA	20.6	0.26	20	6
23)	CHAD	18.3	0.23	16	0
24)	SOMALIA	18.1	0.23	3	0
25)	SENEGAL	17.8	0.22	4	1
26)	ZIMBABWE	16.7	0.21	6	0
27)	GUINEA	14.2	0.18	5	0
28)	RWANDA	14.1	0.18	30	7
29)	BENIN	13.7	0.17	2	0
	Subtotal	1,349.0	16.82	877	236

Columns 1 and 2 in [Table 1](#) list the 54 countries in descending order according to overall population, and % of World Total. Columns 3 and 4 list the Total Mentions for each country and the Mentions in the 2020-24 period. Even a cursory look at the numbers in [Table 1](#) shows that the results are highly mixed. A mere 5 of the 54 countries make up a whopping 59% of all the 955 total mentions: South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt and Ghana. These countries receive an even greater proportion of the mentions in the most recent five years: 69%. The top 11 countries make up 75% of the 955 total mentions, and 88% of the mentions in the past five years, suggesting a lot of concentration.

In contrast, over half of the entire set of African countries (29 of 54) had ZERO mentions in the past 5 years. And of these 29 countries, only one has ever had more than 10

mentions in total. Partial explanations for so many countries with zero mentions may be due to either very small populations, or reduced interactions during some of the COVID pandemic years. Yet a dozen of these countries have populations over 10 million.

Consider just two examples. Algeria has a population of 47 million people. It is a major exporter of natural gas and petroleum and other goods. It has welcomed investments in healthcare (life expectancy there is within a year of that in the USA), technology and food production. It is the largest country by land mass on the entire African continent (over 3x the size of Texas). Much of the country is desert. There is a major renewable energy thrust underway to produce over one-quarter of its electricity from solar and wind within a decade. They are making investments in infrastructure and

Table 1 (continued). African Populations and Mentions in Dataset

	Country	2023 Population (in millions)	% of World Total	Total Mentions	Mentions 2020-2024
30)	BURUNDI	13.2	0.16	4	0
31)	TUNISIA	12.5	0.16	8	3
32)	SOUTH SUDAN	11.1	0.14	4	0
33)	TOGO	9.1	0.11	0	0
34)	SIERRA LEONE	8.8	0.11	7	0
35)	LIBYA	6.9	0.09	3	0
36)	CONGO, REP.	6.1	0.08	1	0
37)	CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	5.7	0.07	1	1
38)	LIBERIA	5.4	0.07	15	5
39)	MAURITANIA	4.9	0.06	7	0
40)	ERITREA	3.7	0.05	0	0
41)	GAMBIA, THE	2.8	0.03	0	0
42)	BOTSWANA	2.7	0.03	6	1
43)	NAMIBIA	2.6	0.03	5	2
44)	GABON	2.4	0.03	2	1
45)	LESOTHO	2.3	0.03	4	0
46)	GUINEA-BISSAU	2.2	0.03	1	0
47)	EQUATORIAL GUINEA	1.7	0.02	0	0
48)	MAURITIUS	1.3	0.02	3	0
49)	ESWATINI (FORMERLY SWAZILAND)	1.2	0.01	1	0
50)	DJIBOUTI	1.1	0.01	3	0
51)	COMOROS	0.9	0.01	1	0
52)	CABO VERDE	0.6	0.01	0	0
53)	SÃO TOMÉ and PRÍNCIPE	0.2	0.00	1	0
54)	SEYCHELLES	0.1	0.00	1	0
	Subtotal	109.5	1.36	78	13
	Total Africa	1,458.5	18.18	955	249

Source of population data: Annually updated version of the "Where Have You Been? exercise" (2023)(W34034) using World Bank data.

have the funds to pay for them. Angola has a population of 37 million people. Its main exports are crude petroleum, diamonds, natural gas, and various rare metals. While the largest investor in Algeria is the USA, the largest investor in Angola is China. The Angolan government is pursuing economic diversification, so investment opportunities exist in many sectors. Yet neither Algeria nor Angola received any mentions in the previous five years.

The mentions are not proportionate to population, nor are they expected to be. Countries such as Kenya, and especially South Africa, have more total mentions than population alone would suggest, but this would presumably relate in part to economic strength, stable government, FDI potential, and dozens of other possible variables, including GDP, primary language, political stability, etc... Some of these would presumably provide a clearer explanation for some countries versus others, but will never explain all the ZERO mentions. There are a lot of countries which are lit-

erally invisible in our collective teaching, at least in terms of case study teaching material.

ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

The balance of this article focuses on actionable recommendations regarding the limited quantity of current Africa-related teaching material. [Table 2](#) clarifies the stakeholders who can help address the issue, and provides an overview of the specific recommendations for addressing it.

BACKGROUND

Faculty members may wish to use more African content for the most basic of reasons: a desire to stay relevant. Some educators are aware that academic professional associations in business are placing greater emphasis on Africa, whether through special issues of journals, or the estab-

Table 2. Actionable Recommendations Regarding the Limited Africa-Related Teaching Content in IB Courses

Issue	Stakeholders Who Can Help Address The Issue	Recommendations For Addressing The Issue
Limited quantity of current Africa-related teaching material.	- Educators with expertise in writing practitioner articles and/or writing teaching cases - Educators interested in engaging in content development.	- Engage in new content development, ideally with African co-authors. - Build on the themes from recent articles which argue for more Africa related research, as well as previous <i>AIB Insights</i> articles.

lishment of African Interest Groups (such as the AIB Africa Chapter). Other educators focus on the region in order to help Africa move more quickly out of poverty, because the largest group of economically poorest countries is located there. Yet many educators do not have a deep awareness of the growing relevance of Africa to their teaching. Consider just three, of many variables.

(a) Economic Size. The continent's average GDP growth rate actually exceeds the global average (3.2% versus 2.9%). It would be a poor business practice to ignore a dynamic, growing market of that size.

(b) Population and Core Demographics. The combined population of the continent is 1.4 billion, more than 18% of the world total. One in five of all countries are in Africa, and 19 of the 20 countries with the fastest growing population rates are in Africa. There is also a growing middle class, and an increasing urban population on the continent.

(c) Foreign Investment in Africa. Much of western countries' involvement with Africa historically emphasized humanitarian aid and peace-keeping. More recent major foreign investors in Africa however are there for the business opportunities, and often originate from countries such as China, India, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Every IB course considers FDI. Yet many educators are unaware which African country regularly receives the highest amount of FDI, those countries which are the largest investors in Africa, or the companies from their home country/state/province with investments anywhere in Africa. These are important considerations for industry and therefore for educators who wish to be relevant.

LIMITED QUANTITY OF CURRENT, AFRICA-RELATED TEACHING MATERIAL

The initial section of this short article provided a baseline of the available stock of Africa-related, practitioner-oriented teaching material available, be it case studies or practitioner articles. While progress has been made in increasing the body of relevant content, there remain many gaps in its coverage and recency. The balance of this article provides more specific recommendations on how this issue can be addressed.

New teaching cases (with accompanying teaching notes) can be written based on either published sources, or be field/interview based. If field based, one can either travel to the particular country and/or seek a co-author with country-specific knowledge. Such a person may be based in the country, or a national who works outside of the country. If one is unable to travel, one can either join the company

interview via WhatsApp (far more commonly used there than Zoom) or have the co-author do the interviews. There are many sources available to help find case co-authors in Africa. A few examples would include the AIB's Africa interest group, the 39 Country Initiative, and active case-writing institutions on the African continent (GIBS in South Africa is likely the largest).

Numerous local companies in every African country are suitable as potential case sites. Some are publicly traded and quite large with a lot of online content available. Other sources include the African subsidiaries of foreign MNEs, or companies which already import from or export to Africa, or wish to potentially do so. See [Table 3](#) for examples.

In addition to cases, educators can develop exercises or technical notes. Technical Notes can take many forms with the most obvious one being "Doing Business in (country)". Such Notes can be used on a stand-alone basis in class, or paired with specific cases. There is no reason why there are not such Notes available for every country in Africa, ideally with a coauthor from the particular country. If students are to understand any local economy and the business opportunity there, we need additional relevant content.

There are also opportunities to develop Africa-related practitioner-oriented and/or pedagogy-oriented articles. In addition to *AIB Insights* and the journals mentioned on the Ivey Publishing site, one can consider *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *Journal of International Business Education*, *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, *Journal of Teaching and International Education in Business*, *International Journal for Business Education*, *Journal of Management and Business Education*, among many others. Many university faculty members in African countries would welcome the opportunity to co-author publications in English language refereed journals.

It is also possible to build on *AIB Insights* article recommendations ([Table 4](#)) and recent academic articles which argue for more Africa-related research (see [Table 5](#)).

FINAL THOUGHTS

This article has focused on the limited quantity of current, Africa-related teaching context, and the ways in which this short fall can be addressed.

International business (and other) educators worldwide have the opportunity to both use the extant body of Africa-related content in their courses, and especially, to help increase the supply. To those who have not started, consider two questions. If not you, who? If not now, when?

Table 3. Possible Case Examples

1. Voodoo (Vodun) is one of the official religions of Benin, and integral to the country's culture. Yet there are no cases about this unique cultural dimension.
2. Burundi and other East African countries produce banana beer, often as a traditional drink at weddings. None of the hundreds of existing cases about beer are about the product.
3. Well-known American companies such as Levi's draw on Lesotho's 40,000 textile workers to produce jeans which they import to America. Per Table 1 , there have been zero-mentions of Lesotho in the past 5 years.
4. With the introduction of US Tariffs on imports to America, countries now understand the need to urgently explore different markets. Market selection is a mainstream IB teaching issue. Many cases are needed on this current context, as the degree of urgency varies by country and industry.
5. There are 15 countries in Africa producing diamonds. Yet of the 27 existing cases about diamonds, over a third are about one company.
6. There are over 50 cases in the international tourism sector. Africa has innumerable sights which tourists would be interested in, and located in countries which are safe to visit. Yet the extant tourism cases are highly concentrated in a few countries with zero tourism cases set in most of the 54 countries in Africa.
7. Africa's share of global reserves of critical minerals for renewable energy technologies include 55% of cobalt, 47.6% of manganese and 21.6% of natural graphite. Zimbabwe is the world's third largest producer of platinum. The continent has up to 90% of the world's chromium (the key ingredient in stainless steel).

Table 4. AIB Insights Article Recommendations and Possible Africa Content

Cooke et al. (2020) contended that consideration of dark side activities should have a more mainstream place in IB coursework, given the importance to students. There already exist some such Africa related cases, ^a but not enough.
Paik (2020) argued that in order to develop global leaders, IB education should focus more on breadth of learning. One element of breadth would be to include content on African countries which students have not previously studied.
Relatedly, Berg (2020) argued that in-class exercises/assignments for country comparisons should draw on less familiar countries.
Debeule, Jaklic, and Voss (2024) argued for the merits of teaching IB through video cases. Some videos already exist on YouTube about Doing Business in most African countries. And Teaching Notes increasingly contain a Supplemental Materials section which includes media clips on YouTube about the particular company.
Ilona and Littrel (2025) discussed the 5 major regions in Africa and provide relevant market entry strategies for each. These in turn could be the basis for cases.

^a Consider: Tony's Chocolonely: Taking on "Big Cocoa and West African Child Slavery in the Supply Chain" (case W27672_P); Attadamoun Co-operative (Morocco): Women's Emancipation and an Existential Dilemma (case W27678); SEEMA Center: Eradicating Female Genital Mutilation in Sudan (case W34758); Sasol: Tradeoff Considerations for a Just Transition (case W31485).

Table 5. Potential Case Applications from Extant Scholarly Research about Africa

Barnard, Amaeshi and Vaaler (2023) consider three types of MNEs operating there: advanced, emerging and nascent. It would be straightforward to compile one (or more) published cases on each type for a module within an IB course. The authors go deeper and consider how MNEs are simultaneously embedded in four contexts (local, national, regional, supranational). It would be feasible to identify (or write) case studies for each context.
Getachew, Fon and Chrysostome (2023), similarly drill down on mainstream IB issues. The point here is that there is a clear line between theoretical/conceptual writings, and how we can both organize our IB courses and supplement it with fresh content.
Reuber, Alkhaled, Barnard, Couper and Sasaki (2022) respond to the call for IB scholars to study a greater diversity of IB phenomenon in underrepresented settings, such as Africa. They examine some of the difficulties in using qualitative methods. Interview based case writing uses a qualitative methodology. Educators interested in case writing in Africa can draw relevant insights from the toolkit presented in Reuber et al. (2022).
Nachum, Stevens, Newenham-Kahindi, Lundan, Rose and Wantchekon (2023) write "Africa is rising, but IB scholars have largely failed to take notice" (pg 38). The same sentence would be equally true if one was to substitute the word "educators" for "scholars". The authors argue that Africa is a source of theoretical puzzles which call conventional IB wisdom into question. Whether these puzzles are rare events or outliers (Beamish & Hasse, 2022) or not, they are real and warrant attention. Table 2 in Nachum et al (2023) is quite useful. It highlights 10 topical issues and their relevance to Africa, as well as implications for theory. Consider one of the 10 topical issues: the diaspora market. Only two of the total of 12 extant diaspora-related cases deal with Africa.
Kamoche and Wood's (2023) counterpoint to Nachum et al (2023) points out that while IB scholars may have been slow to engage Africa, related disciplines have paid greater attention, and provide useful insights. Both papers draw attention to cultural concepts such as ubuntu, indaba and ujamaa. Kamoche and Wood (2023) place particular attention on ubuntu and its broader interpretation. Yet a search of business case studies on all three concepts shows only four cases in total.

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