

# The Role of Internationalization in the Higher Education Industry: An Exploratory Study

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## ABSTRACT

During the past several decades, as other business industries in the world, the higher education industry has also ventured into the internationalization arena through a variety of academic alliances and collaborations. This trend remains the same as of today and is believed to be even more vigorously pursued in the future given the fact that internationalization is a fundamental tool for higher education in the sophisticated knowledge world. Furthermore, the growing inter-organizational connectivity and the revolutionary effects of information and communication technologies on all segments of human societies are making the need and demand for internationalization increasing in all the fields, day after day. Therefore, this research is dedicated to the exploration and analysis of the internationalization phenomenon in the higher education. By doing so, all institutional factors and contextual forces which are behind the internationalization thrusts of academic institutions, in one way or another, will be explored. Then, this study analyzes the different modes and types of internationalization which could be available for the academic institutions. Furthermore, it focuses on the pros and cons of internationalization of the higher education institutions (HEIs). Finally, it puts forward some guidelines for HEIs to successfully build, grow and sustain internationalization programs in the long run.

Key words: Higher education, Higher education institutions, Internationalization, Types of education internationalization.

Note for the readers: The previous version of this paper has already been published as a chapter in *Diverse Contemporary Issues Facing Business Management Education*, <http://www.igi-global.com/book/diverse-contemporary-issues-facing-business/108290>

## INTRODUCTION

Universities are becoming globalized, similar to business institutions, as they have been looking into strengthening ties and forming strategic alliances with other universities abroad in order to offer an international experience to their students, and thus, to enhance their cross-cultural, as well as their hard and soft skills. As a consequence, they hope to form well-prepared students for future work in a changing, competitive and international workplace where foreign languages and experience outside one's country become the norm. In addition, universities' internationalization is done via online education and academic research links, as well as campuses abroad, between others. Internationalization among universities helps also to increase their scope and economies of scale, and to become truly globalized. In this perspective, the roles and core functions of worldwide educators in the

21<sup>st</sup> Century continue to change and evolve according to market forces (Khan et al, 2014). Globalization, as an influential force, has also transformed the higher education systems, policies and institutions (Held et al, 1999). Obviously globalization and higher education forces are highly inter-dependent and interconnected (Scott, 1998). HEIs produce skilled workers and contribute largely to research and development projects which are critical forces behind the international competitiveness of any institution or nation (Bloom, 2005; OECD, 2009). Furthermore, the evolution of global communities, combined with the emergence of knowledge societies, is the driving force behind modifications in the HEIs' management approaches, such as changes in managerial attitudes and cultures (Deem and Brehony, 2005). Universities are becoming more entrepreneurial and global. Thus, activities of HEIs are becoming more internationally and globally developed (respectively in terms of competition and cooperation) (Horta, 2009). In order to develop their internationalization, HEIs are called to adopt two complementary strategies (Knight, 1997; De Wit, 1995): program-related strategies (academic initiatives in education, research and services) and organization-related strategies (organizational initiatives to facilitate and institutionalize international activities through management and operating systems).

In business activities, the rationales behind internationalization are that firms are growing beyond their national borders to increase their profits, learn from other markets, share technological know-how, diversify risks and revenue networks, as well as look for business partners abroad. This process will evolve as long as collaborative prospects continue to generate value for the venture (Johanson et Valhne, 1977). Similar rationales are observed pushing higher education institutions (HEIs) to perform their internationalization and look for possible partners that will offer more choices for international exchanges (semesters or years abroad; dual degree programs; professor exchanges) to their students or professors (Khan et al, 2014). In addition to the intra-industry competition and needs for internationalization of HEIs, the demands emanating from the labor market (industry) are focused on graduates highly skilled in cross-cultural communication, global leadership, as well as open-mindedness. Therefore, HEIs have nowadays a unique alternative which might concern their internationalization in order to internationalize their professors, students, academic programs and other research projects.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review in this paper is based on the existing theories and researches on the demands and needs for internationalization of HEIs given the fact that the education industry, as any other one, is feeling the pressure for active innovation, scale and scope economies' performance in order to survive and grow. Because of the emerging modern education models and educational technologies, the internationalization of academic institutions in different angels becomes fundamental, as long as increasing demand emanating from nation states to upgrade their indigenous education culture and systems is increasing. Therefore, the need for studying such an important issue in the field of higher education management is upgrading at an accelerating pace.

### ***What is internationalization of HEIs?***

In international business, the term internationalization is defined as the outward movement of a firm's operations (Piercy, 1981; Turnbull, 1985) or simply as the process of increasing involvement in international operations by a business firm encompassing both inward and outward growth (Welch and Luostarinen, 1988). While internationalization in business is not a new concept or practice, it is relatively novel in the field of HEIs (De Wit, 1995). In the current literature related to internationalization in higher education, a variety of terms exist, such as international education, international studies, internationalism, transnational education, and globalization. There are also different categories of internationalization branches such as academic mobility, international cooperation, studies abroad, and international exchange. Other specific academic related terms could encompass: multicultural and intercultural education, cross-cultural education, education for international understanding, peace education, global education, transnational and international studies (De Wit, 1995; De Wit, 2002,).

Numerous studies (i.e., Stearns, 2008; Wildavsky, 2010; AACSB, 2011) have been undertaken in order to explore and understand the HEIs' internationalization phenomenon. This latter is defined as the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institutions in order to improve the quality of education and research for students, faculty and the society in its whole (Knight, 1994). In other words, the internationalization of higher education institutions is the process of integrating the institution and its key stakeholders, such as students and staff, into a rapidly changing and globalizing world (Hawawini, 2011).

### ***The Internationalization Background of HEIs***

The current globalization processes are mainly driven by market forces, and as business barriers have fallen in the last decades of the 20th Century, regional and multinational free trade relations and agreements have accelerated at an unprecedented pace. They lead to an unlimited amount of choices for the consumer as trade patterns have accelerated. As the resulting exchange of goods, services and people seems unstoppable, international human resources with the necessary skills for this new economy need to be provided. They will help develop a well-functioning economy where all citizens can contribute not only to the well-being of their immediate surroundings, but also to this of the whole world. Hence, the easiest and most effective way of achieving this is to internationalize people, by giving persons the opportunities and possibilities of getting and receiving a "process of De Wit, 2002, internationalization". How do we achieve this? Universally, as every child should in theory go to school, the easiest way seems to be via education (Khan, et al, 2014). Knight and De Wit (1995) explore the historical roots of globalization in higher education starting from the Middle Ages until today in an attempt to fill the gaps in the scant amount of literature in the field. The model of western world education has thus been mainly modeled by the original European models (and may have served as seedbeds for 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century revolutionary ideas against these colonial powers). Nowadays, the American model is the dominant one in terms of internationalization. It has been nimble and has

innovated in response to worldwide market forces (Altbach, 2008). As globalization has affected the internationalization of education, HEIs have seen demand for students' exchanges growing in the last few years, with over 20 percent of business students' internationalization. In addition, data show that, in terms of geographical priorities, Europe (Egron-Polak and Hudson, 2014), but also the United States, get most of these students, despite the distance, Australia and New Zealand are becoming also more attractive (Varghese, 2008).

### ***The Benefits of Internationalization of HEIs***

Internationalization of HEIs can bring out a range of benefits from different perspectives (institutional and strategic) and at different levels (faculty, students, research collaborations and academic programs). Combined all these together, the following potential benefits are associated with the internationalization of HEIs' programs and initiatives:

1. Internationalization increases awareness among students about global issues including cultural diversity and making students open-minded and global citizens (Denson, Loveday and Dalton, 2010).
2. Learning and teaching activities including core-curricular and co-curricular activities are adjusted to international standards. Also, curricula can be jointly developed by international partners and thus offering international curricula to national students as well as offering national curricula to international students (Luijten-Lub, 2007).
3. Sharing knowledge, experience, and best practices improve gradually and definitely the quality of teaching and learning both for the institution and the students (Van Der Wende, 2006).
4. Internationalization strengthens institutional research and knowledge production capacity by complementing resources, skills and knowledge (Knight, 2009) through a variety of inter-universities alliances and collaborations.
5. Internationalization is considered as an effective strategy in order to enhance the international presence, brand, profile, reputation and ranking of the university (Chan and Dimmock, 2008; Saisana et al, 2011).
6. Academic institutions develop their internationalization in order to benchmark and measure their positions in the context of international standards and consequently improve their practices and performance comparatively to their competitors and peers (Knight and De Wit 1995; European Union, 2015).
7. Internationalization contributes to ensuring international cooperation and networking, and thus creating synergies, as well as capitalizing collective efforts and investments (Altbach and Knight, 2007).
8. Internationalization is also seen as a source of increased and diversified revenue generation since it can expand the number of full-fee paying foreign students (Knight and De Wit, 1995).

We can conclude that internationalization has become a need or a must and not an option for the HEIs all over the world. The effects of rapid globalization are strongly felt in social, economic, business and political environmental aspects. In the same velocity, globalization has also affected and is affecting HEIs. Therefore, internationalization is the only way-out

that helps institutions to succeed in facing the globalization waves for several reasons (Cantwell and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009). First of all, it gives competitive advantages to participative institutions by updating their academic programs and services in line with the demands of their present and future students (Mansor, 2009). Secondly, international student exchange programs allow students to go abroad and learn from foreign countries. It is learning by doing and learning from the reality on ground. These programs help students to learn the language of host countries, build intercultural management competencies and promote universal knowledge (Daly, 2011). Thirdly, international recognitions, accreditations and rankings represent also emerging forces behind the growing internationalization programs in HEIs. This is due to the fact that the degree of potential competition for attracting faculty students in the education industry has increased tremendously (Knight, 2009). These reasons complete those related to the growing demands for international research resources, facilities and needs for the support of federal governments.

### ***HEIs Internationalization modes and steps***

In a globalised world full of free markets, higher education, as most products and services, is also up for grabs. Universities need expansion, not only geographically, but also in terms of programs they are offering (keeping the pace of other institutions) in order to grow and prosper. Most HEIs have a varying degree of networks and alliances, mostly via international offices in charge of such links with other international HEIs. The academic achievements and other class work of those students who are abroad are important to continue building “hard” skills (finance, accounting, economics, international business, regional studies, among other), and “soft” skills, such as language and intercultural competence. Those ones are the important outcomes for such an exchange, as they are most easily acquired “by doing and living” in a foreign country (Khan et al, 2014). Additionally, universities’ international responses to globalization differ according to the university’s individual approach of its administrators. Therefore, there is not only one specific way of doing it. It may include different dimensional steps (Knight, 2009). This “internationalization in universities’ cycle” includes the phases of awareness, commitment, planning, operationalization, revision and reinforcement. It emphasizes the need for a supportive HEI culture throughout the cycle (Poole, 2001; Mansor, 2009). Although student exchanges contribute to reach the institutions’ internationalization objectives, other academic exchanges, such as short/sabbatical visits to each other’s institutions or research networks, could also be advantageous for the institutions.

In the existing literature on the issue of HEIs’ internationalization, Hawawini (2011) presents the following modes of internationalization:

1. Import and export modes: academic institutions which have recourse to import bring “the world” to their campus. Those ones which rely on export send their students abroad through different ways such as: student-exchange agreements deliver programs abroad, visits to foreign universities (to teach and do researches). This mode is also called inward and outward internationalization.

2. Academic joint ventures: universities that offer complementary and supplementary academic programs and services choose this mode of internationalization (which is also called international joint venture). This latter incorporates collaborations such as student exchange programs (inward and outward) under different agreements including dual and double degree programs, certifications, specialization and internships that a variety of students can benefit from (between two academic institutions).
3. Academic partnerships, alliances and consortia: Under such partnerships, two or more academic institutions are joint together. They could build international partnerships and commit to collaborate by several initiatives (students and faculty exchanges, joint programs, faculty researches, etc.).
4. Campuses abroad: academic institutions can also expand abroad through physical presence like the direct foreign investment of firms (Kim and Zhu, 2010). They can establish campuses abroad offering a variety of academic programs and services to local and international students.

Establishing and managing successful collaborations and partnerships abroad is a key aspect of internationalization for many institutions. Such relationships can provide international experiences for students, enhance the curriculum, generate revenues, and raise the visibility of institutions all over the world. The American Council on Education (2016) recommends several approaches for creating and managing international partnerships:

1. Planning and preparing. The planning process is critical for the success of international partnerships as it leads to identify and clarify international goals and objectives of the partnership.
2. Aligning the organizational goals and objectives with overall missions and priorities of the institution. This alignment should include the assigning of sufficient tangible resources and the institutional support on a constant basis.
3. Identifying and studying modes and alternatives of possible and potential collaborations. Optimal modes' selection is fundamental for the success of any international collaboration.
4. Partner evaluation and selection is equally important for the partnership to succeed. It is necessary to study the higher education environment in foreign countries (target markets) including policies, structures, and operations etc. Benchmarking and learning from other associates are helpful in the process of information collection.
5. Partnerships need on-going management, evaluation and feedback. Coordination and communication are keys for collaboration, as they help manage and resolve any conflicting issues on the spot.

### ***Factors Limiting Internationalization of HEIs***

There is no doubt that internationalization of academic institutions contributes in improving the overall quality and well-being of the programs and services offered by the university. In many ways, advances in educational technologies, innovation in pedagogical strategies, and adoption of new management styles are shared across partnerships and associations. The overall learning and teaching environment becomes competitive, and thus, producing of

globally competent workforce. Nonetheless, as there are no roses without thrones, there are no gains without pains. Evidently, internationalization may pose threats to the host countries by encouraging universities and other related institutions to rush to the attractive places (academic hubs and cities, knowledge cities) and overcrowding the supply of education. This may cause declining quality, cultural degradation, and social problems in the host country (Baburajan, 2011). Such realities on ground may hamper further internationalization or globalization of academic institutions. Additionally, several other factors may limit the growing internationalization programs between HEIs.

The first one is the lack of foreign languages which deters some students existing outside their national countries (Daly, 2011). Differences in languages spoken in the host and home countries of the academic institutions are also hampering factors in the faculty exchange programs and other joint collaborations such as research ones. The second reason of hesitation for travelling internationally to study is financing (the budget) related to the costs of travelling, lodging, university fees and other related costs (books, foods, etc.). These ones are also given as reasons for non-mobility, especially for students of developing and emerging nations, and those whose currency exchange rate tends to rank lower than a currency of a developed economy (Daly, 2011). The same reason explains in a way the non-mobility associated to faculty collaborative international projects between academic institutions. The third reason is linked to the institutional leadership of HEIs in itself: it means that some institutional leadership styles are more forward-looking, efficient, and visionary than others. Some institutional leaders take initiatives, support and implement internationalization programs as one of their leadership priorities. Concerning the fourth reason, it refers to several macro variables such as the economic situation of the country, international conflicts, relationships and geographical locations of a particular country. In many countries located in Africa, Latin America and some countries in Middle East and Asia, where conflicts, security and other national factors combined with poor education standards and facilities have made it impossible for their academic institutions to have internationalization programs for local students. Such factors can demotivate students who want to go abroad to study or for other rationales. On the contrary, some other countries in Europe, Asia, North Middle East America have political and fiscal stability, combined with an excellent quality of education. They have been magnets for students all over the world for many decades (Khan et al., 2015). The report suggests that while the trend for mobility is positive, there are still constraints. Issues linked to credit recognition, the perception of 'academic tourism', and access for disadvantaged and disabled students still need better solutions. Imbalance between countries and institutions is another challenge, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, where the interest in outgoing mobility is often stronger than the ability to attract incoming students (Khan et al, 2015).

### ***Factors Encouraging Internationalization of HEIs***

There are forces which have caused and reinforced to a greater extent the increasing and emerging mobilization of students across the globe. Some of those factors are briefly explained below:

1. In order to meet the increasing demand for courses and programs taught in English language, higher education institutions have responded by opening programs which are totally taught in English (which tends to be the *French language* in business and science). The hope was that students will be attracted to their institutions (Cantwell and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009).
2. Academic mobilization becomes a trend. Despite all the limiting forces, the mobility among students and universities is also growing among faculty from one year to another.
3. Investing in researchers at home and abroad is seen as a dedicated interest in becoming globally relevant, as these links create a sense of belonging and greater commitment to their country of origin (Cantwell and Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009). This community of intellectuals will find other international scholars to communicate with and participate in global scientific research, thus deepening the existing alliances and exchanges (Khan, et. al., 2015).
4. Employment and professional development opportunities around the globe are also encouraging students to move around the world, train themselves, learn from different cultures and find out attractive and well-paid jobs. Especially, professionals from developing and emerging nations are moving towards developed nations to study and stay for a longer period of time or even permanently (Altbach, 2009).
5. Although mobility issues, by definition, are concentrated in bringing and taking students from one campus in one country to another campus in another country, there are many other ways for achieving this fact. Some Australian universities, for instance, recruit international students, but also develop campuses abroad to deliver Australian degree programs in these locations, in partnership with local HEIs, the private sector and the professional associations (Poole, 2001). As some Middle Eastern countries have been planning for a future without oil and with an emphasis on a knowledge economy, the United Arab Emirates, for instance, is building an “international higher education hubs”, or what Naidoo (2010) calls “transnational higher education programs”, where foreign campuses are being established with much government support (tax-free trade zones, funding and infrastructure packages, for instance). These forms of sponsorships have lowered long-term costs and risks involved in opening branches abroad (Becker, 2010) as foreign investment policies have been liberalized by governments.
6. In addition to granting HEIs increased revenues, students’ mobilization also gives them name recognition and brand management abroad (and may also increase its standing at home).

On the top of all those factors described above, the role of information and communication technologies in influencing the internationalization of academic institutions and their programs and services cannot be denied. Indeed, information and communication technologies are one of the key parts of the academic transformation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Altbach et al, 2009). The internet, e-mail, and online social networks have provided new ways of attracting and reaching out to ever more students (and thus, sources of revenues for universities), who can learn remotely, as other pedagogical choices may not be available or may be severely limited. Online, virtual and hybrid academic institutions and their



programs will be open to anyone, who can then study anywhere at any time for a fraction of costs, as Harden (2012) explains “that universities will extend their reach to students around the world, unbounded by geography or even by time zones”. In 2012, Harvard and MIT announced the creation of a new online educational venture called edX (Harden, 2012), whereby anyone in the world with an internet connection can access the kind of high-level teaching and scholarship previously available only to select a group of the best and most privileged students, and where scalability is the name of the game. Tens of thousands of students can enroll at the click of the mouse, and see a well-known professor from an elite university deliver a class. This reinforces the commoditization of education, the rapid expansion of an “education of and for the masses”. Such programs are easily accessible and cost-effective. However, recent studies have shown that this type of education makes students experience a significant less sense of community, with fewer opportunities for bonding together and socializing (Heinze and Procter, 2006). Academic mobility enhances research and teaching internationally as well as general professional development activities and programs of the academic institutions (Colucci, Ferencz, Gaebel and Wächter, 2014). Obviously, academic staff with international experience and exposure can add value to all academic activities and support systems (Colucci et al., 2014).

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the globalized knowledge society, international competition in the area of higher education has become more intense and the interest in measuring this phenomenon has increased simultaneously (Delgado-Márquez, Hurtado-Torres and Bondar, 2011). Many HEIs are becoming global as competition has accelerated, and exchange programs and international branches have proliferated decreasing the “psychic distance” between all involved, and increasing the “push-pull” experienced by students, professors or whole institutions (Khan, et. al. 2014). In this way, the new “academic capitalistic system” has pushed universities towards higher degrees of competitiveness and merit, thereby competing more successfully with each other in attracting the best students, the highest quality of professors and funding so as to increase their status, prestige in an ever reinforcing circle. Similar to the business sector, this service industry is vying for resources, faculty and students as HEI management decision-making is being constantly tested for (may bring resources) or against (may use too many resources) internationalization of the institution. Hence, the impact of HEI internationalization is being widely felt everywhere and should be helped along, promoted and supported by both the private and public sectors to increase innovation and competitiveness within and among institutions, and in countries at large (Khan, et. al. 20015).As global education becomes even more demanding, complex and competitive, international alliances in the forms of partnerships in diverse activities, which enhance the links and mobility issues between universities of different countries and regions, should become the main strategy of these institutions. Not only will they attract the most talented student body, but will further enhance the competitiveness of faculty, which in turn, will continue attracting the best students, thus increasing the international prestige of the institution. And finally, as universities are relying ever more on their own sources for self-financing, these international alliances seem to be the most efficient strategy for

acquiring the necessary assets for its long term survival. Added to this, are an ever increasing number of online programs which will bring paying “customers” to an efficient and relatively low cost platform of exchange and learning. As our society changes, the definition and purpose of a university of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is bound to change accordingly. Only time will tell if these changes are the right ones for our society as a whole (Delgado-Márquez, Hurtado-Torres and Bondar (2011).

A few recommendations are put forward for internationalization of HEIs to succeed, grow and sustain not only in the short but also and most importantly in the long run. First, academic institutions (universities, schools and colleges) should incorporate the internationalization program in the mission of the institution and in order to adequately support the mission, the institutional culture and policies should be re-organized (Parkhe, 1991) and re-energized. Second, the commitment and enthusiasm of the university’s staff let it be the international office in charge of these exchanges or the faculty itself, who understands the importance of these experiences, must be secured, as their institutions continue creating opportunities for intellectual stimulation and learning. These include the promotion of exchange opportunities, selection mechanisms and criteria, a range of relevant and attractive agreements with host partners, recognition of overseas study, financial support and a credit transfer system to participate in an exchange program (Daly, 2011). Third, in developing internationalization planning, academic institutions involve key stakeholders in order to reflect the institution’s commitment to internationalization and receive support from various interest groups in the implementation process. Fourth, any internationalization program within an academic institution must encompass these strategic actions:

1. As mentioned earlier, internationalization must be given an important attention, place and space in the strategic planning of the institution.
2. Internationalization activities and programs must be institutionalized. It means that establishing a full-fledged international program office with enough resources (people, budget and technology) is essential for planning, implementing and following up initiatives.
3. All key stakeholders must contribute in regular meetings, revisions, and feedbacks in order to learn from the current practices of internationalization and remain informed.
4. Formal and continuous assessment mechanisms and systems must be put in place in order to assess goals, progress and outcomes of internationalization.
5. Internationalization models and alternative revisions, negotiations and renegotiations should be an ongoing process and activity on the campus.

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