The Internationalization of Higher Education: An Effective Approach for Iran Higher Education

Ali Ghasempoor (Corresponding Author)

Department of Education, Payame Noor University, PO Box: 19395-3697, Tehran, Iran

Tel: 98-937-547-9760   E-mail: alighasempur@gmail.com

Mohmmd Javad Liaghatdar

Associate Professor, School of Education and Psychology

University of Isfahan, PO Box: 81746-73441, Isfahan, Iran

Tel: 98-311-793-2500   E-mail: javad@edu.ui.ac.ir

Ebrahim Jafari

Associate Professor, School of Education and Psychology

University of Isfahan, PO Box: 81746-73441, Isfahan, Iran

Tel: 98-311-793-2500   E-mail: jafari@edu.ui.ac.ir

Abstract

In recent years, the subject of internationalization has been one of the most discussed issues in academic and university centers. Experts in the higher education believe that this subject is a new paradigm and inevitable approach in the universities and curriculum. Internationalization refers to the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution. It is a term that is being used more and more to discuss the international dimension of higher education. It is a term that means different things to different people and is thus used in a variety of ways. The purpose of this study is, surveying the nature of internationalization of higher education and its causality, practical models and specifying it holistically for stakeholders of higher education systems.

Keywords: Internationalization, Approach, Higher Education, Iran

1. Introduction

In global and knowledge-based societies, where advanced information and communication technologies are of great importance, an increasing emphasis has been placed on the internationalization of higher education. Universities around the world are increasingly aware that they are functioning in a progressively internationalizing and globalizing milieu. Universities today are key drivers of internationalization and global communication with regard to intellectual property and knowledge production. Parallel to the processes of globalization and the advent of the knowledge economy, internationalization has become a major trend in higher education (HE), and a major force in the globalised marketplace; this is the topic anatomized here. However, to develop comprehensive international strategies involves more than just an investigation into the internationalization of HE. A practice model for the internationalization of HE is needed to facilitate the design of new policies for universities and to improve existing practices. Internationalization has a profound effect on today's political, economic and cultural life. This wide-ranging process also has a major impact on institutions of higher education; colleges and universities are highly sensitive to international developments and they contribute to the internationalization of key areas in society. The increasingly international character of higher education means that colleges and universities have to work together to help shape the worldwide "knowledge-based society" (EUA, 2003, p.1) and promote scientific exchanges.

2. The Conceptualization of Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization is a term that is being used more and more to discuss the international dimension of higher education and, more widely, postsecondary education. It is a term that means different things to different people and is thus used in a variety of ways. Scholars from different parts of the world have made efforts in the conceptualization of internationalization of higher education. Among these scholars, Knight (1994, 1997, and 2003) has made remarkable theoretical contributions to the field. She defined the internationalization of higher education as "the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the higher education institution" (Knight, 1994, p.7). In 2003, Knight redefined it as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2003, p.l). This widely-used definition contains some important connotations: it takes account of internationalization as a dynamic process; of integration (rather than homogenization) as a contributor to maintaining the international dimension in HE; and of internationalization as a response to globalization but distinct from the globalization process itself. Also, it points out the basic functions of an HEI, that is teaching, research and service to society, as well as considering "international and local elements (intercultural)" (de Wit, n. d, p.2).

3. Forms of Internationalization

Various theorists have developed models of internationalization mainly at institutional level. Internationalization can be observed at a number of levels in higher education. For example, in a virtual sense, new knowledge can only be produced through international exchanges, primarily using established forms of communication. University researchers and professors do not need to travel abroad for their groundbreaking work to be recognized around the world. Thanks to the internationalization of curricula, students can also learn about other academic concepts without crossing international borders. This virtual form of internationalization has made foreign language skills an essential part of the domestic research and learning process. Without a certain proficiency in English, it is nearly impossible to search for information on the Internet, which has become the main driving force behind this virtual internationalization. While this virtual form of internationalization through the Web has become a perfectly natural and integral part of the academic process, another form of international exchange requires actually physically crossing borders. International student exchange programs, based on the concept of reciprocity, bring foreign students to a host country or send domestic students to foreign colleges and universities for specific academic experiences.

The cross-border mobility of student exchange programs requires that students come to terms with the cultural aspects of studying in a foreign country and adapt to different personal, social and economic living conditions. Evaluations of the process of internationalization often underestimate the importance of these social issues.

4. Different Motivations for Internationalization

Internationalization has become a prevalent and strategically significant phenomenon in the field of HE, bringing about an increasing growth in the cross-border delivery of education, resulting in a substantial market in the export and import of HE products and services. Following Knight (1997), Qiang (2003) provides a useful conceptual framework of four different possible rationales for internationalization in higher education: the political, the academic, the cultural/social, and the economic. The political rationale is principally related to issues of national security, stability, and peace as well as ideological influences ensuing from internationalization efforts. The academic rationale is principally linked to the goal of achieving international standards for both teaching and research. More generally, the reasoning goes that by encouraging greater internationalization across teaching, research, and service activities, the quality of higher education can be enriched. The cultural/social rationale is based on the view that the "homogenizing effects of globalization" (Knight, 1997, p.11) need to be resisted and the culture as well as language of nations be respected. This view places particular emphasis on understanding foreign languages and cultures, the preservation of national culture, and respect for diversity. Finally, there is the economic rationale, which, by many, is considered to be a direct response to the market forces associated with the economic dimension of globalization. On the one hand, the economic rationale underlies efforts aimed at developing the human resources/capital needed for the nation to stay internationally competitive; on the other hand, it underlies efforts geared towards increasing the institution's (or sector's) income by providing education abroad or attracting more foreign students. Although until the 1990s internationalization in higher education was largely understood to be a cooperative effort with its rationale based primarily on political, cultural, and academic arguments, many observers today feel that internationalization has become increasingly economically motivated (e.g., Kälvermark and Van der Wende, 1997; Van der Wende, 2001; see also Grabove in this volume). While the political, cultural, and academic rationales are based on an ethos of cooperation, the economic one is based on an ethos of competition.

Surely, both these overarching rationales—cooperation across state borders and competition—can be observed in contemporary efforts to internationalize higher education but it is the latter which is more and more seen to dominate the internationalization agenda. Relatedly, it has been proposed that it might be useful to distinguish between "internationalization" and "internationalism" (Stromquist, 2007; Jones, 2000), as they are informed by different considerations. According to this framework, internationalism emphasizes notions such as "international community, international cooperation, international community of interests, and international dimensions of the common good" (Jones, 2000, p.31). Internationalization, on the other hand, is seen to refer to "greater international presence by the dominant economic and political powers, usually guided by principles of marketing and competition" (Stromquist, 2007, p.82). Stromquist concludes that internationalization in higher education is therefore closely associated with the "entrepreneurialism" or "academic capitalism" that Slaughter (1998) and colleagues observed among universities in the 1990s (in the United States, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom) as these were competing for external funds.

If one were to adopt these definitions of internationalism and internationalization, a concern over internationalism could be observed among scholars who call for the raising of intercultural awareness and development of global citizenship through schools and colleges (e.g., Gacel, 2005; Nussbaum, 1997; see also several contributors to this volume). Then again, as we saw in the earlier discussion of the cultural and political rationales underlying internationalization efforts, the term "internationalization" can be interpreted to include "internationalism" as well. Murphy (2007), for example, suggests that "Internationalization of education is seen as one way to bridge the gap between developing and developed countries and as a strategy for the formation of citizens adept at and functioning in a multicultural global system" (p.198). What can we conclude from this? Surely, the actual terms we employ to describe our "cross-border" activities and policies ("internationalism" versus "internationalization") are perhaps less critical; what is very important, however, is to be clear about the assumptions and motivations driving our efforts.

5. The Changing Nature of the Internationalization of HE

The external factors of globalization, the knowledge economy and technological advances and their impacts have intensified the internationalization of HE. HEIs have to face both predictable and unpredictable challenges and that requires them to continually reassess their role in the internationalization of HE. Accordingly, they cannot be isolated in their 'ivory tower' but need to establish links with the outside world. Internationalization, as a key global trend in the field of HE, "is contributing to, if not leading, a process of rethinking the social, cultural and economic roles of HE and their configuration in national systems of higher education" (Kehm and Teichler, 2007). Universities today are key drivers of internationalization and global communication with regard to intellectual property and knowledge production (Blackmore, 2002). Parallel to the processes of globalization and the advent of the knowledge economy, internationalization has become a major trend in higher education (HE), and a major force in the globalised marketplace; this is the topic anatomized here. However, to develop comprehensive international strategies involves more than just an investigation into the internationalization of HE. A practice model for the internationalization of HE is needed to facilitate the design of new policies for universities and to improve existing practices.

Thus, it is important to note that internationalization of HE has gone through a period of rapid developments since the mid-1990s. A growing number of HE institutions are emphasizing the importance of internationalization in their institutional policies and strategies, and internationalization has become one of the driving forces behind the HE policies in many countries (Van der Wende 2002; James, 2005). There has been an impressive expansion of various initiatives; for example, the movement of education programs and providers across national boundaries and the development of e-learning (Knight, 2005).

Huisman and Van der Wende (2004) make distinction between the more traditional forms of internationalization and the new forms. The traditional forms of internationalization have been an add-on activity, marginal and short-term policy based on temporary funding mechanisms as projects, and focusing mainly on the international mobility of students and academic staff. In general internationalization was not integrated to regular planning and evaluation, and hardly in any form of regulation (Van der Wende, 2001, Virkus and Tammaro, 2005, Kehm and Teichler, 2007). According to Maassen and Uppstrøm (2004) the new internationalization consists of:

• New student and staff mobility patterns funded and regulated through specific international or national programs.

• New geographical destinations for students and staff.

• New forms of cooperation as part of formal institutional agreements.

• New providers coming on the scene, many of them dependent on ICT, many of them for-profit oriented in their international teaching activities.

• New conditions for internationalization, for example in Europe, formulated by the EU, by the Bologna Declaration, by the WTO/GATS negotiations. Also new motives for internationalization can be observed, emphasizing economic arguments instead of cultural and academic ones.

• New realities for universities and colleges in their national context as a consequence of the greater national emphasis on internationalization, including in the public funding mechanisms and quality assessment structures. For many institutions, quality is linked to the increased internationalization of HE. Quality Assurance audits have started to take seriously into account the international dimensions of universities. (Virkus & Tammaro, 2005). Thus, internationalization of HE is entering a new phase. With these kinds of comprehensive approaches, internationalization is becoming a central strategic issue at the institutional as well as at is becoming stronger (Virkus and Tammaro, 2005).

In this new phase of internationalization two main trends or approaches can be identified:

• One is the growing imperative of HE institutions to internationalize – to integrate an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and community service – in order to enhance their academic excellence and the relevance of their contribution to societies.

• The second trend is the growth of market-driven activities, fuelled by increased demand for HE worldwide, declining public funding in many national contexts, the diversification of HE providers, and new methods of delivery (IAU, 2006). Thus, cooperation and competition are regarded as two paradigms in internationalization in Europe. One is the more traditional framework of networking and collaboration and the other is placing internationalization activities in a market competition framework (Wende et al, 2002). Van der Wende (2001) notes that Anglo-Saxon countries have chosen an explicit competitive approach to internationalization of HE and most continental European countries a more cooperative approach. It should be also noted that the cooperative approach is reflecting the traditional values of HE and has an important place in the European Union's agenda. However, the trend towards more economically oriented rationales for internationalization is continuing and it appears to be the dominant driver of HE internationalization policy. Even in many European countries the approach that favors cooperation in HE is still prominent, the countries are moving, more slowly, in a similar direction (Leask, 2007).

6. Conclusions

Research on the international dimensions of higher education has substantially expanded in recent years. Just as internationalization in higher education has become clearly more multidimensional and multifaceted, so has research about internationalization in higher education. Possibly, our overview of the major thematic areas of research on internationalization in higher education allows a few further conclusions for future research on this topic. In our view, there are four themes that should be given particular attention.

i. In recent years, the influence of what could be called the "periphery" on international activities in higher education has increased. Supranational organizations and national governmental authorities and agencies, institutional management, and international offices at higher education institutions, the latter having management support and service functions, are trying more than before to shape the international profile of higher education institutions. The question is, however, whether the "periphery" will be successful in influencing the core areas of higher education (i.e., research, teaching, and learning and thus academic staff and students or, as Burton Clark has called it, the "academic heartland"). A similar trend holds true for research about internationalization of higher education. Researchers in this field must take care that they do not turn too much to the issues of the "periphery" from which they often receive the financial support to carry out their research and evaluations. Instead, they should be analyzing what their research activities might actually contribute to the knowledge base in the field of research on higher education.

ii. Existing research has shown that internationalization activities of higher education institutions are less strongly driven by the political and societal *Zeitgeist* than could be expected and public debates might imply. A complete substitution of the paradigm of cooperative internationalization by the paradigm of competitive globalization has not occurred, although public debates and a substantial body of research about internationalization of higher education have been shaped by such a polarization. Possibly, a new focus can be found in this debate. In our view, debates about the paradigm of competitive globalization are focused on neither the attempt to clarify opportunities and problems concerning the payment of tuition fees by international students, nor the strengths and weaknesses of the competitive orientation of public and private higher education institutions, nor the advantages and disadvantages of high stratification or flat hierarchies in national higher education systems. Rather, public debates are centered on the question of whether and how much internationalization policies and strategies of international organizations, governmental bodies, and institutional management are based on educational and knowledge-related meritocracy or

whether such policies and strategies are trying "to sell" particularistic advantages to their respective groups of stakeholders.

iii. For a long time, physical mobility was the core activity for the internationalization of higher education. The value of experiences abroad during studies or in the framework of a research biography has been described and analyzed so often that it needs no further affirmative words. But physical mobility also has limits. First, international experiences in the framework of studies, teaching, and research have quantitative limits. If "internationalization at home" cannot be realized to a higher degree, internationalization efforts of higher education institutions will lead to a polarization of winners and losers. Second, despite all organizational and substantial accompanying measures, the support of physical mobility relies on the fact that the immersion into a foreign environment as such triggers important experiential learning. Therefore, study abroad has effects similar to those of an immersion into the world of work through practical placements and internships. However, the genuine strengths of higher education lie in surpassing experiential learning by systematic learning set apart from daily life. For both reasons, it seems to be more important that higher education institutions strengthen international learning in their core activities of teaching, learning, and research and that research on higher education analyses the effectiveness of such core activities more in depth than it has been the case up to now.

iv. Through international mobility and other international activities, higher education institutions were able to be quite successful because international learning in everyday life was limited, whereas internationalization became increasingly important. However, for some time now, we have been observing an increasing internationalization of everyday life as well. Many students newly entering higher education have already experienced stays abroad or have gained knowledge about other countries through the media and actual encounters with people from other countries in their daily life that the "added value" of study abroad is most likely decreasing. Furthermore, if international dimensions are gradually integrated into study programmes, the special character of study programmes explicitly designed as international ones and of temporary study abroad will be reduced as well. Higher education institutions are faced with the question of whether they regard the decreasing distance between international experiences as something special and as something normal as an acceptable development or whether they develop new emphases to make international mobility and special international study programmes more valuable. For research about international aspects in higher education it is therefore important to analyze this dialectic of normalization and specialization of internationalization. For policy makers in higher education, research about higher education is a more valuable partner for dialogue if it tries to generate probable future developments of higher education systems and to guide its attention as early as possible to those problems that might soon become manifest in higher education practice. (Kehm and Teichler, 2007). If research about international aspects of higher education picks up on themes such as the four elaborated above, it will very likely be able to offer already important concepts and information when in the near future the public debate about higher education picks up on such themes.

References

De Wit, H. (2000). Changing rationales for the internationalization of higher education. In Barrows, L.C. (Ed.), *Internationalization of higher education: An institutional perspective. Papers on higher education* (CEPES/UNESCO). Bucharest. pp. 9-22

Gacel, J. Avila. (2005). The Internationalization of Higher Education: A Paradigm for Global Citizenry. *Journal of Studies in International Education,* 9(121). http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1028315304263795

James, K. (2005). International Education: The Concept, and its relationship to intercultural education, *Journal of Research in International Education,* Vol. 4, 313-332. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1475240905057812

Jones, P. (2000). Globalization and Internationalism: Democratic Prospects for World Education. In N. Stromquist and K. Monkman (eds.), *Globalization and Education: Integration and Contestation across Cultures.* Boulder: Rowmann and Littlefield. pp. 27-42

Kalvermark, T., & Van der Wende, M. C. (1997). *National Policies for Internationalization of Higher Education in Europe.* Stockholm: National Agency for Higher Education.

Kehm, & Teichler. (2007). Research on Internationalisation in Higher Education. *Journal of Studies in International Education,* Vol. 11, 3-4, 260-273. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1028315307303534

Knight, J. (1994). *Internationalization: Elements and checkpoints* (Research Monograph, No. 7). Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Bureau for International Education.

Knight, J. (1999). *A time of turbulence and transformation for internationalization* (Research Monograph, No. 14). Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Bureau for International Education.

Knight, J. (2003). Updated internationalization definition. *International Higher Education*.

Knight, J., & deWit, H. (Eds.). (1997). *Internationalization of higher education in Asia Pacific countries*. Amsterdam: European Association for International Education.

Knight, J., & de Wit, H. (Eds.). (1999). *Quality and internationalization in higher education*. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development. *Case Studies and Stocktake*. Canberra: DEETYA.

Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: Definitions, approaches and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education,* 8(1), 5-31

Leask, B. (2001). Briding the Gap: Internationalizing University Curricula, *Journal of Studies in International Education,* Winter 2004, Vol. 8, 4, 336-351. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/10283152002

Murphy, M. (2007). Experiences in the Internationalization of Education. Strategies to Promote Equality of Opportunity at Monterray Tech. *Higher Education,* 53(2), 167-208

Nussbaum, M. (1997). *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, Cahners Publishing.

OECD. (2004). *Education in a New International Setting: Curriculum Development for Internationalization — Guidelines for Country Case Study*. Paris: OECD (CERI).

Qiang, Z. (2003). Internationalization of Higher Education: Towards a Conceptual Framework. *Policy Futures in Education*, 1(2), 248-270

Slaughter, S. (1998). National Higher Education Policies in a Global Economy. In J. Currie and J. Newson (eds.), *Universities and Globalization. Critical Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications. pp. 45-70

Stromquist, N. P. (2007). Internationalization as a Response to Globalization: Radical Shifts in University Environments. *Higher Education*, 53(1), 61-105

Taylor*, J. (2004). Toward* a *Strategy for Internationalisation*: Lessons and Practice from Four Universities, *Journal of Studies in International Education,* June 2004, Vol. 8, 2, 149-171. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1028315303260827

Van der Wende, M. (2001). Internationalization Policies: About New Trends and Contrasting Paradigms. *Higher Education Policy*, 14(3), 249-259