

Internationalization of Higher Education: Preparation Policy, Implementation and Recognition

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ABSTRACT

Globalization and democratization of education leads to the idea of internationalization of higher education, especially in developing countries. This paper describes briefly what is meant by internationalization of higher education and the rationales behind implementation of the idea. Players involve in the process are also identified, with the main focus is on the key roles of the institutional leaders. Barriers that may retard the process are also listed for the players to be aware of, and plan effectively. The paper also describes strategies for internationalization within the policies stated by the government. The strategies include steps that may be taken by individual institution to be recognized as international education provider. Finally the general Indian scenario with regard to international higher education is briefly described.

Keywords: International education, barriers, strategies, key players

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization is an ongoing and future-oriented process of integrating various international perspectives into our higher education. The perspectives may be related to the curriculum, programs offered, top managers, faculty members, students, facilities and even the institutional visions, to suit the diverse and ever-changing environment and demands that are more global now. In realizing the transformation process, strategic changes involving all the aspects including financial commitments need to be planned realistically by each institution and their respective stakeholders. Then, the issue of recognition needs to be addressed as well. The reasons or rationales for internationalization should be divided into two categories; the institutional level category and the national level category. The first category rationales will be mainly academic based, whereby among others it may facilitates exchanges and mobility of staff and students, carrying out collaborative research and projects, and enhancement in terms of quality and standard of the institutions. The national level rationales for internationalization generally are more related to the economic, technology, political and social and cultural aspects. The concept of internationalization of higher education is not new. In the more developed countries such as the USA, UK, Canada, Japan, France, the loose concept and definition of international higher education has long been practiced. Traditionally, students from former colonies were sent to universities in these countries to gain tertiary education and to come back and serve their native countries. This was seen as short-term training ground solution to fill the vacant administrative and technical posts in the native countries immediately after independent. Thus, this it looks like a “one-way traffic” of students movements from less developed countries. Although internationalization of higher education can be defined in many ways, but in general the definition should include the key elements such as Academic Program, Students, Academic Staff, Curricula, and Infra-structure and Facilities, that may also be considered as the bench-mark for internationalization.

- **Program or courses** – The program or courses of the program offered should be global in nature, accepted and recognized internationally.
- **Student Enrolment** – The acceptance of students into the institution should be country, region, race, religion or cultural independent. In other words, students' acceptance and enrolment should be multinational in nature.
- **Multinational staff** – The institution should be able to attract and gather expertise, especially teaching and research staff that is multinational in nature as well.
- **Curricular and Co-curricular competencies** – The co-curricular activities and informal non-academic training along with the formal academic activities should be able to prepare students to meet global challenges and needs related to the subsequent employability and marketability of the graduates.
- **Infra-structure and facilities** – The institutions' physical and information must be at

par with those used by top-rank. Resource centre (such as library and internet communication) classrooms, science and language laboratories are up-to-date with the latest appropriate facilities.

In the present internationalization concept in line with globalization and democratization of education, however, economic and financial exchanges are not the only major consideration. By internalization we wish to strengthen research and innovation activities in local universities through international collaborations and network, and wider recognition. We wish to attract international students to enroll in Malaysian universities, even in highly competitive programs. More international academic staff, either permanent or through exchange programs will be employed. Where human capital and capacity development is concerned, graduates are expected to gain wider employment opportunities.

Internationalization of higher education is not a "phrase concept". It a process with planning and analysis stages, glazed with human and financial commitments. The main initial objective is to gain international recognition on the local institutions and their respective academic curricula and programs. Then, nation's policies and quality assurance are to be deal with judiciously. To ensure its success, related individuals and organizations/bodies must execute their roles positively.

Transformation and Implementation

Physical transformation involves improvement in the internal infrastructure and environment of the institution, such that the physical beings and facilities are of "international nature". Other transformations are related to improvement in curriculum and programs, research activities, services and networking. And, to ensure continuous recognition and improvement, the institutions need to have a short and long term strategic plan of internationalization. Again, the realization of the transformation must be supported by ample financial commitment and able players in the institutions.

Having identified the needed transformations, the next step is to identify the key players that will ensure the success of the transformation to international status. A study by the International Association of Universities (IAU) in 2003 indicates that at institutional level the major impulse for internationalization is coming from the faculty members. Faculty member mainly will be involved in reevaluating and restructuring of programs offered, and internationalizing the curriculum. Enhancement of research, development and innovation through international networks, cooperation and linkages also lied on the shoulders of academician, and of cause with the support of institutional leaders. However, the main role of institutional leaders and administrators are inevitably important, especially where infrastructure transformations and formulation of internationalization strategic plan are concerned. They are also expected to be involved in generating or finding financial sources to implement the transformations Internationalization of higher education will involves high mobility of students from one nation to another. In fact, the same study by IAU found that respondents considered students mobility as the most important aspects of internationalization. Thus the role played by students and their presence in ensuring that higher education is really "international" must be appreciated by all quarters. However, the

programs offered, curriculum, services and facilities within the institutions will always be the pulling factor for international students.

Besides the institutional players above support from the government, private sectors and accreditation and recognizing bodies are also important in internalization of higher education. Although a study by IAU indicated that the idea of internationalization was some-what “bottom-up”, initiated by faculty members and institutional leaders, the role played by government through the related ministries in facilitating the efficient implementation either in the form of policies (for public and private institutions) and financial support (mainly for public institutions) is crucial. The implementation of internationalization policies in terms of student intake, visa requirements, programs available to international students, international academic staff, setting-up private universities or collages, etc are to ensure the smooth internationalization process without denying the tertiary education opportunities to local students.

For private sectors, their contribution will be more on the linkages, collaboration and cooperation in research enhancement, input for curriculum development, training for graduating students and staff, as well as recognition on the graduates. These roles are crucial since they are the one will be the main supply of employment market and job opportunities for the graduates.

Key Roles of Institutional Leaders

The policies laid down by government regarding internationalization of higher education serve as guidelines and pointer to be followed by the individual institution. The roles of private sectors will only appear after the blue print of internationalization has been sturdily laid down by the institution. Therefore, the onset or commencement of internationalization of an institution depends very much on the institutional leaders. Many studies have shown that much are expected out of institutional leaders in leading their institutions to become globally recognized international higher education institutions **Making case for paradigm change** to stake holders, academic and administrative staff, students and community towards successful internationalization, effectively will be the first and important role of institutional leaders. The leaders have the necessary institutional rank and leadership abilities to engage the symbiotic coalition between the parties to work together towards the goals of internationalization. They should be able to develop the necessary organizational structure in the institutions that could facilitate internationalization smoothly. Setting up some central and visible unit to become the standard bearer for international activities is very much recommended.

The ideas, plans and implementation of successful internationalization need to be made known, especially to those who are not directly involved in the activities. The institutional leaders need to **stay focus and communicating effectively**, by shining the importance of internationalization regularly and at any opportunity available to him. As the journey for internationalization is long and winding, and the destination will keep on changing and improving to suit the local and global policies, demands and situations, staying focus is crucial. They must be focused on their goals, and able to steer the institutions to face all the unexpected challenges in the course of achieving the intended goals. Every information, directive, policies and rules related to internationalization must be able to be communicated effectively through what ever means of communication within the institution.

Internationalization of higher education is attached with recognition for the institutions, both internal and external recognition. **Gaining recognition** is another key role of institutional leaders. Generally, recognition is related to the programs, curricular and co-curricular activities offered and run by the institutions. In India, the UGC, University grant commission and AICTE, is the body that actively monitoring and regulating the higher education institutions especially for recognition purposes. However , the programs, especially the professional programs such as medical, engineering, architecture, law etc., must also be recognized by the regulating bodies of that professional fields. The issue of non-recognition of qualification might affect the prospects of getting international students. To meet this ever-changing requirement, leaders, such as deans and heads of departments

at faculty level must be given the encouragement and support to regularly and continually review and improve their programs and curricula. Internationally recognized programs would be able to attract international students as well as academic staff to enroll and serve the institutions. The graduates in that field would be able to compete in the job market both at home and abroad. Gaining recognition must be complimented by **recognizing transnational and foreign preparatory programs and foreign university degree programs**. Foreigners graduated from these programs are the prospective feeders for undergraduate and post-graduate programs in the institutions. However, except for developed countries such as UK, USA and Australia, provision for recognizing such transnational programs from developing and undeveloped countries remains unregulated. The institutional leaders must be proactive in evaluating feeders from target countries such as China, West Asia and Africa, especially in terms of English language proficiency and the required level of basic knowledge in the respective fields. This will involved the evaluation and comparison of secondary education practice in the countries to what is presently practiced in India, in terms of both subject matter or contents and number of residential years in the level.

On the onset of internationalization plan, the institutional leaders must realize that the plan will by no mean be a “single person war”. Therefore they must **encourage the wide involvement and participation** in the internationalization movement, especially among his subjects at all levels. As mentioned earlier in the definition or bench mark of internationalization, all levels of staffs have their respective roles to play to full-filled the requirement of the bench-marks. Their task and goals need to be clearly specified and monitored, and the appropriate recognizing awards are given for active and effective participation the internationalization movement. Institutional leaders should also appreciate that the public, private sectors and NGO have roles to play as well. The government is encouraging the establishment of linkages between institutions of higher learning with these sectors of society, especially in terms of training, research, innovation and commercialization. Some public universities in India are encouraged to create a post of Vice Chancellor in charge of Industrial and Society Linkages.

Institutional leaders must **share the leadership aspiration** for internationalization with his subjects, especially the young middle leaders and managers in their institutions, to continually identify and mobilized new leaders and followers. As internationalization of higher education is a constantly changing and continually improving movement, the traveling time span involved to reach the perfect goals will be long. There will be a time when new leaders undertake the present institutional leaders’ task and roles, smoothly without creating harmful vacuum to the internationalization movement.

Strategies for Internationalization

Full-filling and sustaining the bench-marks of internationalization need appropriate and workable strategies. The University of India spelled out five strategies in their internalization promotion plan These strategies can be considered as universal in nature, and may be applicable to any other institutions in trying to emulate their plan. Again, in implementing the strategies every individual from all levels in the institution must understand and effectively execute their roles and duties. Briefly, the five strategies are

a. Provide internationally high standard of education

- Strengthening constructive and creative learning in the interdisciplinary fields, and actively expanding cooperative learning.
- Publicizing overseas through internet and providing advice program for prospective overseas students
- Students exchange and credit transfer programs with international alliance universities
- Improving and providing external funds and scholarship for best students from abroad
- Having international interim program for best students from the university, through alumni network
- Exploring the potential of establishing overseas branch campuses.

b. Enhancement of research culture through international network

- Establishment of advanced research institute for top level researchers to conduct research and academic activities
- Inventory and mapping of international research network of individual faculty members
- Foster joint research and exchange of faculty members with major foreign universities
- Organizing international symposia and forums.
- Consolidate system for visiting researchers from foreign countries.

c. Promoting cooperation with international society

- Facilitate support and contribution system from international institutions and aid agencies for international development program
- Establishment of foreign liaison offices
- Central role played by Corporate and International Division of the university to promote collaboration between industry and academia
- Public relation activities to create excellent international reputation.

d. Improve infrastructure

- Training of staff to improve relevant skills to handle international support services within the university
- Provide comfortable and conducive living, study and research environment for foreign students and researchers
- Encourage local and state government to improve regional infrastructure such as schools and hospital.

e. Formation of long term strategic plan for internationalization

- Obtain and exchange of information with foreign universities to draw strategic plan
- Evaluate the current status of internationalization
- Based on examination results, evaluate the current progress of internationalization of the institution, and incorporate the changes needed with respect to goals and plans.

Challenges for internationalization

As in any other processes of implementing a plan, implementation of internationalization of higher education is also faced with multitudes of challenges that need to be overcome by the key players. Since the major tasks of the implementation rest on the shoulders of faculty members, with the support of institutional leaders, a study by Madeleine Green in the USA found that the challenges can be individual or institutional in nature. Although the study was carried out in the USA, it is expected that these challenges are applicable in our present scenario in India. As movers of internationalization plan in our institution, knowledge of these challenges would ensure us to be more prepared in our planning by finding ways to neutralize and minimize the retarding effects. Some of the individual challenges or barriers are

a. Lack of competency – especially the cognitive competence, whereby due to the lack of international experience and mindset, the faculty could not be able to connect knowledge to their teaching of international students.

b. Negative attitudes – Individual perception of internationalization is often correlated to their personal experience with people from other cultures. They may doubt the importance of global competencies through internationalization of higher education as compared to competencies in their own field.

c. Absent of incentives – Players for internationalization plan in an institution mainly are academic staff with teaching and research loads. Without appropriate incentives either in financial, promotional or

“equivalent time off” form, the individuals may feel unappreciated by the institution in performing their internationalization tasks.

d. Lack of personal knowledge and expertise – The willingness of an academician to engage with internationalization activities depends on his personal capacities and experience with other cultures and languages. Lack of this will likely lead to opposition, unwillingness to participate or indifference towards internationalization movement.

Some of institutional barriers or challenges that may hinder the internationalization of higher education, and applicable to any institutions need to be appreciated as well. Briefly some of them are

- a. **Lack of financial resources** – Finding sufficient fund to bear the initial cost of internationalization especially in providing the physical infrastructure, program development and review, traveling and accommodation for fact finding and promotional work is the main challenge of an institution. As for students, lack of financial support either from government or private sector is the main significant barrier to study abroad.
- b. **Scarce of human resources** – This is related to the provision of international standard programs and curricula, and promotion. Without competent human resources in the related academic fields, the intended program could not be developed. Without competent promoter, the internationalized institution will not be promoted effectively.
- c. **Educational structure** – Each country in this world has their own educational structure starting from pre-school, through primary, secondary, pre-university and terminating tertiary education. Mismatch between educational structure of host institution country to that of prospective international students’ countries would create problem even in the beginning of the study. The challenges will be even greater if the students were inferior in their pre-university preparation in their own country.

CONCLUSIONS

This presentation has loosely discussed the aspects of internationalization of higher education in terms of definition, policies, preparation, implementation and recognition. Roles of leaders in higher education, strategies for implementation, and possible challenges have been listed. These listings are by no means exhaustive. They were listed with the assumption that they are generally applicable to any institution. However it must be appreciated that each institution is an individual of their own right, they may have their own strategies, and facing challenges peculiar to that institution only. In this presentation no specific solutions to the challenges were given. It is hoped that by knowing the roles and the possible barriers that they may faced, the main players would formulate their own solutions, acceptable within the constraints of their institution. As a concluding remark, let us look at the present scenario of higher education in India that may give some ideas to the internationalization movement.

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