



The Process of Internationalization of Universities and its Impact on Student's Decision Making

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Abstract

As higher education institutions increasingly embrace a global outlook, this study aims to explore the complexities of internationalization and provide insights into how it shapes students' choices when selecting universities. The research seeks to contribute to an understanding of the interplay between university internationalization and student decision-making. The research initiates with an exploration of the internationalization process within universities, examining the motivations, strategies, and challenges faced by institutions as they navigate the global landscape. A central focus of this study is the examination of how the internationalization of universities influences the decision-making criteria of students. It also considers the role of global rankings, institutional reputation, and cross-border partnerships in shaping students' choices within an internationalized higher education framework.

Keywords: Process of Internationalization, Universities, Impact, Students

1. Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education is a relatively new phenomenon, but one that has evolved into a broad range of understandings and approaches. Universities have always had some international dimension, either in the concept of universal knowledge and related research, or in the movement of students and scholars. However, the international dimension of higher education has changed dramatically over the centuries into the forms, dimensions and approaches that we see today. These range from the mobility of and competition for students, teachers and scholars; export of academic systems and cultures; research cooperation; knowledge transfer and capacity building; student and staff exchange; internationalisation of the curriculum and of learning outcomes; and cross-border delivery of programmes, projects and institutions; to virtual mobility, digital learning and collaborative online international learning.¹ What we now term 'internationalisation of higher education' is a phenomenon that has emerged over the last 35 years or so, but its roots lie in several manifestations of increased international orientation from the previous centuries, in particular in the period from the end of the Second World War to the end of the Cold War.

Internationalization is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education describing clearly the process in a general and value-neutral way.²

The internationalization of higher education can be beneficial in sustaining and growing science and scholarship through dynamic academic exchanges; and building social and economic capacity in developing countries. The positive

1 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU\(2015\)540370_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU(2015)540370_EN.pdf), pg.41

2 Knight, J. (2008). *Higher education in turmoil: The changing world of internationalization*. Sense Publishers

aspects of internationalization include improved academic quality, internationally oriented students and staff, and national and international citizenship for students and staff from underdeveloped countries. Other key benefits of internationalization include diversifying and enhancing the learning environment for the benefit of domestic students, the University, and the nation. Further, it has the potential to change the lives of international students as it helps in producing graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and cross-culturally sensitive. The student mobility allows them to transfer to a different environment, where they can understand the connections between the local environment in which they live, and the global environment. The internationalization of education also facilitates in engendering the "international characteristics" fostered in students that are desirable in a global economy such as international-mindedness and open mindedness, second language competence, flexibility of thinking, tolerance and respect for others.

National governments increasingly see internationalization of higher education as an important factor in national economic development, trade and reputation. In light of enhanced student and staff mobility, the increased presence of branch campuses and international providers, and booming competition for international talent, tertiary education institutions and national governments are mobilizing to both leverage and steer internationalization. A worldwide census of explicit national policies, reveals that only 11% of countries have an official strategy for internationalization, most having been adopted in the last decade. Such strategies have been developed predominantly by developed countries—3 in 4 come from members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)³. European countries have taken the lead in promoting strategic thinking about internationalization at the national level—2 in 3 come from this world region, and programs such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 have led to further regional harmonization of higher education systems⁴. It is forecasted that by 2025 the demand for international education will grow to 7.2 million students—a quantum leap from 1.2 million students in 2000. Some, but certainly not all of this demand, will be met by student mobility. Consequently, the number of new providers are delivering programs to students in their home countries is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. It is no longer just students, faculty, and researchers who are internationally mobile - academic programs are being delivered across borders and branch campuses are being established in developing and developed countries around the world.

Whereas, as far as Albania is concerned, based on the data of the Ministry of Education, it appears that the number of students and academic staff who have been able to benefit from mobility exchanges within international programs has increased.⁵ Also, universities in Albania have improved and adapted their curriculums with the international ones. For example, "Aleksander Moisiu" University of Durres has actually international collaboration in terms of mobilities of staff and students and possibilities of students in receiving double diplomas by universities such as Sapienza University of Rome, University of Genova, Cote d'Azur University of Nice etc.

2. Literature Review

According to Jane Knight (2015), Internationalization is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education describing clearly the process in a general and value-neutral way. There is a newly articulated definition of internationalization that offers a reminder that internationalization also must fulfil societal purposes. De Wit has developed a new definition of internationalization, using the classic Knight definition of internationalization and has added a few key aspects.

Internationalization becomes the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society⁶.

Internationalization is the process of integrating international dimensions into teaching, research and educational provision (Knight; De Wit, 1995 , 1999).⁷

³ Crăciun, D. (2018). *Navigating national internationalisation policies: Moving internationalisation from the periphery to centre stage*. Forum. Amsterdam: European Association for International Education.

⁴ British Council (2017). *The Shape of Global Higher Education: International Mobility of Students, Research and Education Provision*. Retrieved from www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe

⁵ <https://arsimi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Draft-Strategjia-per-Arsimin-2021-2026-1.pdf>

⁶ De Wit, H., Hunter, F., Howard, L., & Egron-Polak, E. (Eds.). (2015). *Internationalisation of higher education*. Brussels, Belgium: European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies. Pg. 29

⁷ Knight, J.; De Wit, H. *Strategies for internationalisation of higher education: historical and conceptual perspectives*. In: De Wit, H. (ed.). *Strategies for internationalisation: a comparative study of Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States of America*. Amsterdam: The EAIE, 1995.

Healey (2008) identifies the globalization and internationalization of higher education as follows: It is a widely accepted maxim that, like business generally, higher education is globalizing. For many countries, higher education is now an important export sector, with university campuses attracting international students from around the world....It has been the internationalization of the student body, rather than the internationalization of either the faculty or research/teaching, that gives rise to the perception that universities are beginning to mimic corporations in their orientation⁸.

Internationalization increases awareness among students about global issues including cultural diversity and making students open-minded and global citizens (Denson, Loveday and Dalton, 2010). 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. 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). 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). Internationalization contributes to ensuring international cooperation and networking, and thus creating synergies, as well as capitalizing collective efforts and investments (Altbach and Knight, 2007). 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)⁹.

3. Methodology

In order to contribute to the understanding of how students choose a university, we conducted a qualitative study in UAMD university. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires (Silverman D. 2000)¹⁰. Students were asked about the process of internationalization of the university and if this was one of the main reasons they chose internationalized programs. Actually, we interviewed 35 students who are part of the Bachelor program "Cooperation and economic development" that has a double diploma with Sapienza University and Scientific Master Program "Public Administration", that has also a double diploma with Cote d'Azur University.

4. Data Analyzes

The students who took part in the interview are 15 students from the Bachelor program study and 20 students from the Scientific master program study. Academic reputation and quality are the most important attraction factors for students, in choosing the study program. A very important part of the quality is also the internationalization of resources, curricula, services etc.

30 of the students, were aware that these programs offered opportunities for internationalization, while the other 5 were informed about this when they were already registered as winners in these programs. The interview also showed that the information on the internationalization of the university was more widespread among the master's students as well as among the students who started their studies this academic year, due to the marketing developed by the department recently.

Results show that out of 35 students who participated in the interview, 57% of them had chosen the program based on the opportunity to obtain a double diploma. While the rest, 43% of them, were registered in these programs because they had won there. After the registration, out of 35 interviewed, 86% of them expressed their desire and readiness to be included in the internationalization process, either through Erasmus+ or through double degrees. The remaining part is not interested and indifferent due to family and economic conditions, lack of knowledge of the requested foreign language, etc.

Results also show that students seek an international experience for personal, academic and professional

Knight, J.; De Wit, H. (eds). *Quality and internationalisation in higher education*. Paris: OECD, 1999.

8 Healey, N. Nigel, *Is higher education in really "internationalizing"*, Springer, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44838773_Is_higher_education_in_really_internationalising

9 Khan, M. A., Omrane A., Bank D., *The Role of Internationalization in the Higher Education Industry: An Exploratory Study* <https://ipcco.com/ESMB/ESMB/2.pdf>

10 Silverman D. *Doing qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications, 2000

development reasons. Students interested in benefiting from internationalization opportunities want to do this experience because of the broader outcomes for students as they enter the global workforce. It gives them the opportunity to gain cross-cultural competencies, a global citizenship, an academic program that fulfills the demands of an increasingly interconnected job market.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Leaders in higher education and practitioners in international education perceive the key benefits and reasons for pursuing internationalisation as the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning and preparing students to live and work in a globalised world. They also, view regional/national-level policy as a key external driver and influencer of institutional policy on internationalization. Increasing international (and especially outbound) student mobility is a key policy focus in institutional internationalisation policies. As well as international student mobility, international research collaboration and international strategic partnerships are given priority among the internationalisation activities undertaken by European institutions.¹¹ These are conditions to be taken in account for the future of internationalization of higher education.

This research provides a comprehensive overview of the relationship between university internationalization and the decision-making processes of students. By blending theoretical insights with practical considerations, the study aims to inform universities, policymakers, and prospective students about the implications of internationalization, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the evolving landscape of global higher education. Internationalization is not a goal in itself, but needs to be directed towards quality improvement, that it should not be of interest only to a small elite of mobile students and scholars, but directed to all members of academic communities, and that it should make a clear contribution to society. In summary, internationalization in higher education is an evolving process and changes in response to changes in the local, national, regional and global environment.

Higher education is seen by most scholars as a central factor in the economic future (Altbach & Teichler, 2001)¹². At the same time, internationalization is recognized as a key element of the future of higher education. This is one of the reasons why more and more countries are creating well structured programs and increasing the quality of their education in order to make sure they are not marginalized in the future.

Students are very interested in gaining an international diploma or having the possibility to make a mobility exchange through European programs. This is now a reality in a few universities in Albania. Results show that students seek an international experience for personal, academic and professional development reasons and that an international diploma would be their first choice if they were to choose between study programs that offers and do not offer such possibility. That is why the focus will be to help senior administrators, staff, and faculty at universities, support international students, implement inclusive programming for international and diverse cohorts of students and promote internationalization strategies. These include, internationalization of the curriculum, development of intercultural competencies for faculty/staff/students and providing support for internationalization activities.

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¹¹ De Wit H., Hunter F, Egron-Polak E., Howard L. and Coelen R. "Internationalisation of higher education shifts in response to new opportunities and challenges" , Pg.45-46 Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371077326_Internationalisation_in_higher_education_Responding_to_new_opportunities_and_challenges

¹² Altbach, P. Teichler, U. "Internationalization and Exchanges in a Globalized University", 2001, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240056351_Internationalization_and_Exchanges_in_a_Globalized_University

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