

Internationalization of Higher Education: Potential Benefits and Costs

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization of higher education is the top stage of international relations among universities and it is no longer regarded as a goal in itself, but as a means to improve the quality of education. The knowledge translation and acquisition, mobilization of talent in support of global research and enrichment of the curriculum with international content are considered to be the benefits of internationalization of higher education. Though, internationalization holds many positives to higher education, there are grave risks associated with this multifaceted and growing phenomenon including commercial profit, academic colonization and difficulty in ensuring quality education. The current review has implications for educational policy makers to ensure positive benefits to the higher education institutions and the countries concerned.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization affects different sectors of society including higher education as it has intensified the mobility of ideas and people in this sector [1]. As the role of global interdependence has been accepted in economic, political, and social dynamics; academe's internationalizing function too has become more absorbent of interdependence. All over the world, universities respond to challenges presented by globalization in various ways. One response is the internationalization of the university campuses. In order to get benefit from the global trend, many educational institutions are trying hard to establish agreements and collaborations with regional, international and even intercontinental universities [2].

The international relations among universities have expanded significantly during the past two decades [3]-[5]. The definition of internationalization of higher education refers to the process of integrating an international or intercultural aspect into the teaching, research and service functions of internationalization [6]-[7]. Worldwide, the majority of educational institutions place a high importance to internationalization, with Europe topping the list in this regard, followed by North America, the Middle East, the Latin America and the Caribbean. Usually, the large English-speaking nations provide most services related to international higher education initiatives and control most programs whereas Asian, Latin American middle-income, and poor nations of the developing world are the "buying" countries as they are unable to meet growing demand [8]-[9].

While discussing its scope and volume in future, Australian experts argued that currently two million students are studying as international students, but approximately 15 million students will study out of their countries by 2025 [8]. The scope of internationalization of higher education has taken on various degrees of interests and areas of focus that range from traditional study abroad programs, taking courses at colleges or universities in other countries through internet or face to face arrangements such as branch

campuses or franchises. Other activities include international partnerships, academic programs and research activities that emphasize advancement of international students' perspectives and skills, promotion of foreign language programs and access to cross-cultural understanding [10].

2. POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND COSTS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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 western universities are establishing powerful international networks and associations to mobilize aptitude and ability in favor of transfer of knowledge, advanced policies and global research for enhancing investment and measuring impact. Moreover, they are using e-technology and social media as important and influential tools for increasing public access to relevant information for aiding talent recruitment and retention [10]. In this way, access is provided to higher education in countries where local institutions cannot meet the demands.

The positive aspects of internationalization include improved academic quality, internationally oriented students and staff, and national and international citizenship for students and staff from underdeveloped countries. For developed countries, revenue generation and brain gain are potential benefits. In every respect including ratio of international students, franchiser of academic programs to foreign providers or quality guarantors, Western developed countries gain the main financial benefits [11]. 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 [12].

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 [13]-[14]. This phenomenon also develops ethical commitment to allow students to examine their implicit and explicit beliefs and develop a sense of responsibility and civic engagement [9].

Though a lot of positive attention has been given to the internationalization of higher education and this process holds many benefits to higher education, severe risks, challenges, and controversies are part of this multifaceted and growing phenomenon [15]. In many countries, series of discussions have been taking place regarding the directions as well as its positives and negative aspects. In these discussions, it has been pointed out that too many efforts have primarily favoured universities in the West, while doing little to promote long-term advances for those in developing nations [16]. The International Association of Universities (IAU) Survey (2005, as cited in Knight, 2007) indicated that internationalization is beneficial to the higher education but approximately 70 % of the sample suggested that significant risks are associated with the international dimension of higher education [17].

It is important to note that the most of the countries identified commercialization, brain drain and low quality education as the majors risks associated with internationalization of higher education. Moreover, each of these risks relates more to the cross-border aspects of internationalization than the campus-based activities [17]. One of the salient motives behind internationalization efforts is profit motive as many universities see international efforts as a way to attract "revenue to balance their budgets". The international universities are eager to recruit international students so that they can charge higher fees [16]. The western universities are establishing the branch campuses but these branches are making money and profit that go back to the main campus. In other words these branches charge heavy fees from the students of the developing countries to finance the developed institution. As stakes get higher, pursuing goals which are more commercial than academic in the long run, come at a cost. This kind of internationalization is unlikely to bring the type of improvement in the quality of higher education—the enriched learning environment—that was to be gained.

The loss of cultural or national identity, homogenization of international curriculum and "brain drain" are threats that are inherent in the internationalization of higher education [18]. It is important to note that these campuses are serving as "a threat to cultural values of the host society". According to Knight (2007), the loss of cultural identity is definitely the most significant risk factor attached to the process of internationalization [17]. Moreover, the internationalization of higher education system is widening the gap between socioeconomic classes and thus creating discrimination among developing societies' students [19]. It is considered to be a threat to the intellectual, cultural and economic fortune of underdeveloped countries

as developed countries are preparing these students for further higher or professional studies or job acquisition in their home land. Internationalization of education by western advanced universities has also been equated with academic colonization that seeks to increase their academic influence into developing nations [20]. For example, higher education institutions that are based in European nations now have branch campuses in places such as Vietnam, Singapore and Qatar. This colonization includes internationalization of curriculum, programs, academic staff and the students moving towards developed countries for admission [8]. The academic colonization process centers on productivity and skill exchange rather than on meaningful transformation of cultural ideals. Instead, these institutions seek to expand their status and name recognition while remaining competitive with other industrialized nation's academic institutions [21].

Quality insurance is another main problem as many objections have been raised regarding the low standard of the international higher education programs. As the quality of education is at serious risk, it deserves great attention that providers, programs, credits, and qualification must be recognized at national and international. The other issues related to the internationalization of education include registration, licensing and recognition by the sending or the receiving countries. It has been found that many countries do not have the rigid systems to register or assess out of country providers making monitoring of their activities difficult. Secondly, it is difficult to standardize and maintain the quality of the academic experience of students studying as international students in developed countries [22]. Though authentic national and international accreditation agencies work in many countries ensuring quality and high standing of the programs, but non recognized and illegitimate accreditation services do not make objective assessment of the programs. It is not known whether the existing national level accreditation and quality assurance system address education mobility across countries, cultures and jurisdictions. The students, employers and the public needs to be aware of these accreditation (and degree) mills which are often no more than a web address and does not fall under the jurisdiction of national regulatory systems [23].

3. CONCLUSION

Since higher education institutions are the essential actors in creating well-balanced and constructive internationalization strategies, they must advocate for policy change at the governmental level if the policies are driving internationalization in directions that might not serve long-term academic purposes. In this regard, the most important and on-going task for all higher education stakeholders remains the continuous examination and evaluation of the effects of internationalization. It includes examining the impact of a more internationally open program, classroom, and institution on students and effects on creation of new knowledge influenced by exposure to scholars and researchers from other parts of the world. Furthermore, the internationalization of the higher education should not be just a mere paper agreement; as the true essence of such collaborations requires execution in an environment which is favourable to the development of the international process by all means. In assessing the impacts that graduate from these institutes going to have on the society or community in which they live is also the duty of all higher education stake holders.

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