Internationalization of Higher Education: Rationale, Collaborations and its implications

Maket Lydia Jeptoo,
Lecturer, Moi University, P.o Box 9594 Eldoret, Kenya

Mbaraka Razia
Lecturer, Moi University, P.o Box 3900 Eldoret, Kenya

Abstract

The most significant global change in the institutions of higher learning has been manifested in form of internationalization. Higher Education is part of Globalization that has resulted in significant changes in the knowledge economy and ushered in new forms of provision of educational services. Internationalization has become increasingly important in the higher education sector. The academic and professional requirements for graduates reflect demands of the society, economy, labor market hence the need for higher education to provide an adequate preparation to cater for these factors. International bodies and private sector are so actively involved in international educative activities such that managers through the approach of strategic management can play the main role of leading their institutions towards the international market. The strategy of international partnerships in universities is built around the main strategic motivations and objectives the university is looking to achieve. The recruitment of foreign students has become a significant factor for institutional income. The issue is aggravated by the increasingly severe pressure on university resource levels which has driven institutions to implement aggressive marketing campaigns through collaborations, hence a sign of sustained development. Higher education can no longer be viewed in a national context but as a global process. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the rationale for internationalization of higher education and the collaborative implications of students and the institutions.

Introduction

The higher education systems around the world have presented a propensity for internationalization and in this direction therefore; higher education has become more international and subject to national culture and government (Zolfaghari (2009). There are various reasons for arguing that internationalization will become increasingly important in the higher education sector. Zha Qiang (2003) argues that academic and professional requirements for graduates increasingly reflect the demands of the globalization of societies, economy and labor markets and thus higher education must provide an adequate preparation for that. These requirements include not only academic and professional knowledge, but also multilingualism, and social intercultural skills and attitudes.
The Concept of Internationalization

Knight (1993) describes internationalization of higher education as the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution. This definition however carries several key aspects which include: the idea of internalization being a dynamic process and not a set of isolated activities, integration or infusion that contributes to the sustainability of the international dimension and the primary and universal functions of an institution of higher education, namely, teaching, research and service to society. Jowi (2009) attempts to include in the definition any systematic sustained efforts aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labor markets.

Approaches to Internationalization

Qiang (2003) asserts that several authors have used, over the decades, a similar typology of approaches. Approaches refer to the stances adopted by persons in leadership positions towards the promotion and implementation of programs aimed at internationalization. These approaches include: The activity approach: This promotes activities such as curriculum, student exchange, technical assistance, and international students. This approach is prevalent and is characteristic of the period when one described the international dimension in terms of specific activities or programs.

The competency approach: This emphasizes the development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values in students and staff. The issue central to this approach is how generation and transfer of knowledge help to develop competencies in the personnel of the higher education institution so that they become more internationally knowledgeable and intercultural in skills. In this approach therefore, the development of internationalized curricula and programs is not an end in itself but a means towards developing the appropriate competencies in the students and staff.

The echoes approach: emphasizes creating a culture or climate that values and supports international/intercultural perspectives and initiatives. The approach relates to organizational theories which focus on the creation of a culture or climate within an organization to support a particular set of principles and goals. It acknowledges that the international dimension is fundamental to the definition of a University or any other institutions of higher learning, and believes that without a strong belief system and supportive culture, the international dimension of an institution will never be realized.

The process approach; stresses integration or infusion of an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service through a combination of a wide range of activities, policies and procedures. A major concern in this approach is the need to address the sustainability of the international dimension. Therefore, the emphasis is placed on program aspects as well as organizational elements such as policies and procedures.

Rationale for Internationalization
In the 21st century, education has become more international. Governments emphasize on internationalization of higher education through international co-operation and exchange. Institutions develop their own strategies to internationalize their researches and their teaching, which is as a result of the importance of internationalization of higher education. Zolfaghari (2009) categorizes reasons for internationalization into four groups: political, economic, academic, and socio-cultural. The political reason is often considered more important at the national than at the institutional level. According to Kreber (2007), the political rationale is principally related to issues of national security, stability, and peace as well as ideological influence ensuing from internationalization efforts. The economic reason has increasing importance and relevance in developed countries around the world. An effective way to improve and maintain a competitive edge is to develop a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce and to invest in applied research. The academic reason is linked directly with enhancing the teaching and learning process and achieving excellence in research and scholarly activities. The socio-cultural reason for internationalization is changing in light of the potential impact of globalization. Higher education has traditionally been a part of cultural agreements and exchanges. Today’s globalized economy, information and communication systems suggest that the four reasons are not entirely distinct or exclusive. An individual’s, an institution’s, or a country’s motivation is complex and multileveled set of reasons evolving over time and in response to changing needs and priorities.

The motivations for wanting to integrate an international dimension into higher education are various. Among these are: the interest in international community; Secondly, there is the maintenance of economic competitiveness and thirdly, there is the fostering of human understanding across nationals. Others, according to Scott (1992) include economic competitiveness, environmental interdependence, increasing ethnic and religious diversity of local communities, the reality that many citizens work for foreign-owned firms, the influence of international trade on small business, the fact that the college graduates will supervise or be supervised by people of different racial and ethnic groups from their own, and national security and peaceful relations between nations. However, Kreber asserts that whilst internationalization of higher education was largely understood to be a cooperative effort with its rationale based primarily on political, cultural and academic arguments, and many observers today feel that internationalization has become increasingly economically motivated. While the political, cultural and academic rationales are based on an ethos of cooperation, the economic one is based on an ethos of competition.

Implications Of The Rationales To The Students

Economic Rationale

One fundamental problem with the economic rationale, that is efforts aimed at developing the human resources needed for a nation to stay internationally competitive and/or efforts geared towards generating income by providing education abroad or attracting more foreign students, is that it can all too easily become the principal driver in how the purposes of higher education become defined.
Interest in internationalization has increased in the recent past with critics suggesting that this is principally a result of economic considerations and perceptions of external pressure. On the other hand as Kreber notes, is that the key reason for internationalization is ethical. Internationalization helps students to examine their implicit and explicit beliefs about whose wellbeing matters, and to develop a more globalized sense of responsibility and citizenship. Since internationalizing higher education has been taken to mean integrating international context or perspectives in each of the academic disciplines, the reasoning is that it is through exposure to these international perspectives, and a better understanding of the international circumstances of other people or cultures, that students are adequately prepared for the world in which they are living.

Murphy (2007) attests to the positive effects of internationalization efforts on students. She reports that governments and universities hold the view that students who study on internationalized universities demonstrate greater knowledge of international events, perspectives and methods. The students are seen to be better prepared to contribute positively to local, regional, national and international progress because they develop skills deemed necessary for the modern workforce and global conditions, such as second-language acquisition, cultural awareness, international contacts and adaptation skills.

Szelenyi & Rhoads (2006) examined internationalization in the context of citizenship education. They argue that studies of international students are largely limited to examining adjustment, psychological well being, and educational engagement, with rare attention to how students experiences shape, challenge, and build upon their existing views and experiences as citizens.

Internationalization is closely linked to financial reduction, the rise of academic entrepreneurialism and genuine philosophical commitment to cross-cultural perspectives in the advancement and dissemination of knowledge. This view reflects the tight fiscal situation facing universities today and places international activity in the context of revenue producing work. According to Quiang (2003), the dominant argument for internationalizing higher education is that it will ensure the nation’s economic competitiveness. Pritam (2008) sees economic rationale as the globalization of world economy, growing interdependence among nations and the information revolution, where he argues that countries are focusing on their economic scientific and technical competitiveness in order to increase productivity. On the whole, Altbach (2007) asserts that the main rationale for internationalization is not financial but to enhance research and knowledge capacity and to increase cultural understanding.

The economic rationale is therefore expressed in terms of, first, the emphasis on internationalization because of the requirements of the modern, more global labor force needed. Secondly, joint internal research and development projects to compete internationally in new technology and thirdly, more attention to marketing of higher education on the international market.

Academic rationale
Internationalization of higher education is directly linked with quality improvement. The reason for internationalizing higher education is the achievement of international academic standards for teaching and research by the presence of international students. Qiang (2003), views academic rationale as that, that include objectives related to the aims and function of higher education.

It is often assumed that by enhancing the international dimension of teaching, research and service, there is value added to the quality of a higher education system. It is also viewed as a positive change agent for institutional building. Wit (1995) asserts that the academic environment has changed radically and hence higher education has become more deregulated, diverse in economic sources, privatized and market oriented. The entrepreneurial university feels an inside need to become more international and therefore, in addition to searching for universal knowledge, and understanding, has become more modern.

**Socio-Cultural Rationale**

This refers to internationalization of higher education and the preservation and promotion of national culture being strong motivation for countries which consider internationalization as a way to respect cultural diversity. It involves the role and place of the country’s own culture and language and on the importance of understanding foreign languages and culture. Giang (2003) sees socio-cultural rationale as the preservation and promotion of national culture as a motivation for those countries which consider internationalization as a way to respect cultural diversity and counter balance the perceived homogenizing effect of globalization.

**Political Rationale**

From a political point of view, Pritam (2008) asserts that internationalization can be considered a denationalization and used as a way to strengthen and promote national identify. Political rationale relates to issues concerning the country’s position and role as a nation in the world, that is, security, stability and peace, ideological influence etc.

However, it is important to know that the above rationales overlap within and between different stakeholders which are described in terms of the hierarchy of priorities for each stakeholder. These rationales may change with time noting that there is no exclusive rationale that suits one but a combination based on the priorities set.

International education is seen as a way of peace making force hence the promotion of internationalization of institutions to promote global competence and student literacy in pursuit of a more peaceful world where international understanding and co-operation in solving problems will be increasingly critical for the quality of life.
Student Mobility Through Internationalization

Institutions of higher learning all over have manifested a substantial growth in international students opting for other countries as a knowledge hub. Formal agreements through MOUs have been a common mechanism for international collaboration where the presence of international students in universities and institutions of higher education impacts upon teaching, curriculum development, cultural interaction, etc, international research collaboration either through formal agreements or personal contacts, faculty exchange, borrowing for best practice in teaching and academic management and through curriculum change or adoption. Collaboration as defined by Heide, 1994, Lawrence et al, 1999 and Phillip et al, 2000 is a cooperative, inter-organizational relationship that is negotiated in an ongoing communicative process and that relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control. Student mobility through international exchange is important as a sense of identity one feels as a foreigner in a foreign country. This according to Hansen (2002), causes students to make some keen observations about their home country that they would not have made had they never traveled out, while at the same time exposes the student to a broader understanding of society, culture and business in another country.

As Wit (1995) asserts, studying abroad do not change much the student attitude on their host country, and that there are clear indications that overcoming mistakes and prejudices of their own culture are as much important effects as overcoming those of other cultures. Studies examining motives for collaboration cited reasons for collaborations as access to expertise; access to equipment or resources one does not have; to encourage cross fertilization across disciplines; to improve access to funds; to obtain prestige or visibility; to learn tacit knowledge about a technique; to pool knowledge for tackling large and complex problems; to enhance productivity; to increase specialization of science and for fund and pleasure (Bozeman & Corley 2003). Collaborations often begin informally and stem from informal conversations between colleagues; spatial proximity also seems to encourage collaboration because it often leads to informal communication, Allen (1997).

Implications For Educational Policy Makers

Several issues emerge from the discussion on internationalization and collaborations and therefore education administrators and host government policy makers who deal with education services must face. Internationalization of education services appears to be developing faster hence the education institutions’ international experience increase as they adapt to the pressures and policies of host governments, hence forward integration is likely to be a more common strategy to follow. This will involve increases investment and increased control or participation by host institutions. Institutions may need to differentiate themselves in order to remain attractive to students who can undertake high quality foreign supplied courses in their home country. However, in the present climate of falling higher education resources, institutions will need to be very clear about their choices of location alliance partners and market positioning. Moreover, policy makers may seek to stimulate cross-
institutional collaboration and therefore, they must be cosmopolitan in the selection of the collaborators.

Conclusion

The current world events are important to international education in that they help us to see and ideally understand where patterns in cultural beliefs and behaviour come from. Sustainable development in this case will mean meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet our needs. Education is humanity’s best hope and most effective means in the quest to achieve sustainable development. It makes people wiser, more knowledgeable, better informed, ethical, responsible, critical and capable of continuing to learn. The mobility of students and teachers is an important element in making internationalization a priority and can be seen as the fastest growing aspect of internationalization. The importance of internationalization should be stressed since the journey is long and will involve changing and improving the current trends to suit both local and foreign policies, demands and situations.

References


IAU Survey Report, International Association of Universities, France.


Van der Wende M. (1997). *Missing Links, the relationship between national policies for internationalization and those for higher education in general.*