# Internationalization of Higher Education in the Globalization Era

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**Abstract:**

*During the last three decades or so globalization has emerged as one of the most dominant trends around the world. Though implications of globalization may vary for different countries, it has been successful in augmenting the interaction amongst the people as well as institutions across nation-states. Institutions of higher education across the world are under intense pressure to adapt to the challenges posed by globalization. Internationalization is being adopted by increasing number of institutions of higher education as a way to deal with the challenges posed by globalization and ensuring their competitiveness in the academic field. Programme mobility, faculty mobility and student mobility are some of the key dimensions of internationalization. However, hosting international students has emerged as one of the most dominant strategies institutions have been resorted to. Whereas majority of international students come from the developing countries of the global south, countries of the global north tend to host the largest share of these international students.*

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**Keywords:** *Internationalization, higher education, student mobility, host countries, source countries*
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## 1. Introduction

Institutions of higher education across the world are under increasing pressure to adapt to the challenges posed by various social, economic and political developments. Increasing interaction among the nation-states facilitated by various international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank on the one hand and rapid advancements in the field of communication and transportation on the other hand have helped not only the cross-border flow of goods and capital but also the flow of knowledge, technology, and movement of people. Globalization has become "the dominant trend in the world economy" (Yelland, 2000) making it almost inevitable for every country to participate in the restructuring posed by it whether willingly or unwillingly. It is affecting different nations differently, particularly depending upon various factors such as the level of economic development in the country, access of people to education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, quality of education at each level and its consequent implications for the quality of human resources being produced by educational institutions, type of the political structure in the country and political willpower to take crucial decisions, and most importantly how it is managed within the nation as well as with other nations and international organizations at the global level. Experiences of globalization are not similar for all people throughout the world (Porter and Vidovich, 2000). Rather, globalization is usually perceived to be beneficial for the more efficient and more competitive with little to offer to the less efficient possessing lower competitive skills. Despite several concerns raised by people across the world against globalization, it has been widening its presence with more rapidity than ever before.

Globalization has vital implications for education, especially for higher, technical and professional education. Due to the ever expanding and comprehensiveness of the contemporary wave of globalization, higher education is under intense pressure to adapt to the social, economic, cultural and political changes and to respond to the upcoming challenges. It is passing through significant transformations in terms of institutional structure, demographic composition, sources of funding and management, curriculum and academic standards. The focus of higher education, which provides human resources for various occupations and professions, and contributes to the nation building, has gradually shifted to 'internationalization'. Universities across the nations, especially in the developed countries of the global north, are putting increasing amount of efforts and resources for internationalizing their campuses (Parsons, 2010). In the present era of globalization higher education has emerged as "a key international linkage" (Chen and Barnett, 2000) where internationalization of higher education is increasingly being promoted as an effective strategy to respond to the opportunities, challenges and demands of globalization (Knight, 2006). Internationalization "not only affects academic programs, faculty and students but also creates new administrative structures and privileges" (Stromquist, 2007). In the context of the present phase of globalization, the present paper aims to examine its implications for higher education. Remainder of the paper contains a brief analysis of the key drivers and dimensions of internationalization of higher education with specific focus on the contemporary scenario.

## 2. Conceptualizing Internationalization: Modes and Drivers

Internationalization of higher education is not entirely new to the contemporary times mainly because universities and the centers of higher learning have been amongst the oldest of human institutions with an international orientation in comparison other institutions of the society (Laves, 1949). Universities have been hosting students from various countries and used to send teachers to other countries with a view to promoting intellectual discourses. Martens and Starke (2008) observe that in Europe internationalization of "higher education goes back to the Middle Ages when 'wandering students' went across the continent to study at different centers of learning". The curricula of higher education have always been prepared and enriched by accommodating the contents that have been developed in many other parts of the world. Universities and institutions of higher learning have always promoted human values based on cosmopolitan philosophy, promoted the mobility of their teachers to far of places, and appreciated students transcending national or territorial boundaries. Notwithstanding, the scale of internationalization has always remained very low. But in recent decades the volume of internationalization has increased enormously. Altbach and Teichler (2001) rightly observed that "at no time since the establishment of the universities in the medieval period has higher education been so international in scope".

The present-day discourse on conceptualizing the term internationalization of education is widely characterized by the frequent use of terms like international education, transnational education, cross-border education, global education, international university, global university, multicultural university and so on. These kinds of expressions can be found not only in the brochures and pamphlets of educational institutions but also in the education policy related document of various governments across the world. For example, majority of research universities in the United States mention internationalization in their mission statements (Siaya and Hayward, 2003). According to Dirk Van Damme (2001), internationalization 'refers to the activities of higher education institutions, often supported or framed by multilateral agreements or programs, to expand their reach over national borders". Providing a more detailed description of the concept, Ellingboe (1998) writes that internationalization is "the process of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system. It is an ongoing, future-oriented, multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many stakeholders working to change the internal dynamics of an institution to respond and adapt appropriately to an increasingly diverse, globally focused, ever-changing external environment".

The role of nation-states is an important defining feature of internationalization. It is seen as a strategy by the governments as well as by educational institutions to cope with the challenges of globalization. Pressure of recruiting the best and the brightest students and faculty from around the world for ensuring competitive edge in the global competition for talent, generation of economic resources by exporting education, promotion of intercultural understanding, enhancement of quality, preparing a pool of global workforce, and forging strategic alliances through the mobility of academics and students can be identified as some of the key drivers of internationalization in the present day world. Internationalization of higher education is taking place mainly though four modes, viz., cross-border supply, consumption abroad, commercial presence and movement of natural persons. Among all these four modes cross border mobility of students is the most prominent mode of internationalization of higher education. A large number of students are pursuing higher education in countries outside the countries of their citizenship. While majority of students usually go abroad for pursuing higher education as full-time regular students, increasing number of students are opting for short-term study abroad programmes for internship and student exchange. Besides students, increasing number of teaching faculty are also crossing national borders for seeking employment in foreign universities or to teach in a branch campus of their own universities in foreign countries or as part of academic partnerships between the universities located in different countries. Some educational institutions are promoting internationalization through programme mobility, i.e., educational programmes are being offered in the foreign countries either through e-learning modes or in collaboration with foreign institutions such as joint degree programmes and franchisee. Institutional mobility is taking place by opening up campuses abroad or buying educational institutions in a foreign country. Table 1 provides a summary of various concepts, major diving factors and modes of internationalization.

### Table 1: Internationalization of Higher Education – A Conceptual Overview

| Related Concepts | Modes of Internationalization | Key Drivers of Internationalization |
|---|---|---|
| •Cross-border education; <br>•Borderless education; <br>•Transnational education; <br>•International education; <br>•Global education; <br>•International university, etc. | •Student mobility; <br>•Faculty mobility; <br>•Internationalization of curriculum; <br>•Transnational virtual delivery through ICT; <br>•Twinning programmes; <br>•Student exchange programmes; <br>•Faculty exchange programmes; <br>•Branch campuses abroad; <br>•Setting up of universities abroad, etc. | •**Economic factors** such as increasing competitiveness and compulsions for raising per capita factor productivity, income generation, improving earnings prospects, meeting labour market requirements, correcting demographic imbalances; <br>•**Political factors** such as increasing democratization, preparing international ambassadors, gaining political supremacy, strategic importance, global citizenship; <br>•**Socio-cultural factors** such as increasing people to people contact, increasing mutual trust and cultural understanding; <br>•**Academic factors** such as improving quality of teaching and research, broadening of academic horizon, improving the status and profile of individuals and institutions, bringing transparency and equivalence, etc. |

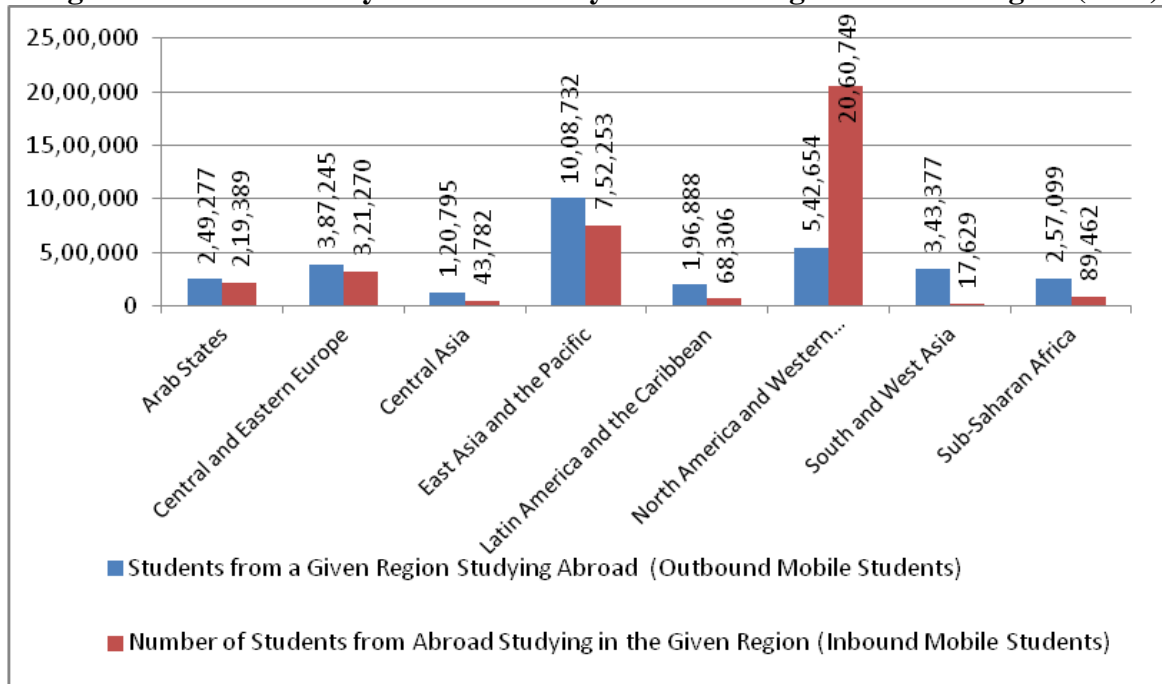### 3. The Most Prominent Mode of Internationalization: International Student Mobility

Cross border student mobility is a very old phenomenon. Even centuries ago when physical mobility of people to far off places was very inconvenient and used to take long duration, some students

crossed national boundaries. For example, many foreign students, mainly from China, have studied at Nalanda University, one of the well-known seats of learning in ancient India. Scholars and professionals migrated to Athens as early as 500-300 BC (Fry, 1984). European universities during the Middle Ages attracted students from all over the continent. During the colonial period, majority of students from the colonies pursued higher studies mainly in the universities of their colonial rulers (Dunlop, 1966). However, the number of people crossing national borders for education remained very small due to several political, economic and physical constraints. It is only in the latter half of the 20$^{th}$ century that the cross-border mobility of tertiary students gathered such an unprecedented momentum.

The number of international tertiary students has increased rapidly. According to the OECD (2010) between 1975 and 2008, number of international tertiary students have grown from 0.8 million to 3.3 million, registering more than a four-fold increase in a period of just 33 years. The number of international students is estimated to reach at 7.2 million by 2025 and 8 million by the year 2030 (Boehm, 2002; UIS 2009). Majority of international students come from developing countries and most of them go to developed countries (Wagner and Schnitzer, 1991; Li and Bray, 2007). China and India, the two most populous countries in the world, are also the two largest sources of international students, respectively. The Republic of Korea, Germany, Japan, France, the United States, Malaysia, Canada and the Russian Federation are other important source countries of international students. The United States hosts the largest number of the world's mobile students. The United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Japan, Canada, South Africa, the Russian Federation and Italy are other most popular host countries of international students. Business and administration, science, engineering, manufacturing and construction, and humanities and arts are among the most preferred disciplines for international students.

Figure 1, which provides the distribution of international tertiary students by sending and host regions, shows that excepting 'North America and Western Europe' all the other regions are mainly source regions because they send more students to other regions than they receive. 'North America and Western Europe' hosts about three-fifth of all foreign students followed by 'East Asia and the Pacific' which hosts about one-fifth of all foreign students. These two regions, therefore, host about four-fifths of all foreign students. On the contrary, 'South and West Asia' hosts less than one percent of all the foreign students while it is the source region of about one-tenth of all international students in the World. Notably, the top two countries of origin of international students, viz., China and India belong to this region. Majority of international students come from less developed/developing countries and most of them tend to go to the developed countries. The OECD countries enjoy 'competitive advantage' in attracting international students (Larsen et al., 2004: 3) as these countries host more than four-fifth of all international students.

Table 2 provides the distribution of international tertiary students in the most favoured educational destinations in the world. It can be observed from the table that the destinations of international students are becoming increasingly diverse. Whereas it is true that the majority of international students are hosted by the developed countries, few countries like China have also emerged as major destinations. Table 2 also shows that the proportion of international students going to the United States has substantially declined from 28 percent in 2001 to 22 percent in 2014. However, the US still remains the top most destination country for international students. The UK, Australia, France, Germany and Japan host substantial proportion of international students.

**Figure 1: Internationally Mobile Tertiary Students Origin and Host Region (2010)**



*Source: UIS (2012)*

**Table 2: Global Destinations for International Students Tertiary Level, 2001 and 2014**

| 2001 (2.1 million students) | | 2014 (4.5 million students) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Host Country | % of International Students | Host Country | % of International Students |
| United States | 28 | United States | 22 |
| United Kingdom | 11 | United Kingdom | 11 |
| Germany | 09 | China | 08 |
| France | 07 | Germany | 07 |
| Australia | 04 | France | 07 |
| Japan | 03 | Australia | 06 |
| Spain | 02 | Canada | 06 |
| Belgium | 02 | Japan | 03 |
| Others | 34 | Others | 31 |

*Source: Atlas of Student Mobility (Open Doors)*

Hosting of international students is a major component of the assessment of higher education institutions also. Presently, several organizations evaluate higher education institutions on the basis of several criteria such as teaching, research, publication and citations, and international mix and publish the ranks of universities every year. Times Higher Education Supplement, for example, brings out an annual publication giving ranks to the tertiary level institutions on the basis of a composite index which is prepared taking into account the above-mentioned factors. All the top-ranking universities host very high proportions of foreign students. The high proportion of international students in a university shows the openness of the institutions to the people of other countries and therefore ensures larger participation of people across the world.

**4. Student Exchange Programmes: The New Mode of Internationalization**
Cross border mobility of students has been a very popular mode of internationalization of higher education. During the last few decades of the 20th century, especially in the late 1980s and after, a different mode of student mobility has gained popularity amongst the universities and institutions of higher education throughout the world. Under this mode, students spend a specified period of their

course duration in the institution other than at which they are primarily enrolled. Besides studying at the parent institution, students enrolled under this mode are provided the opportunity to visit and study in institutions of tertiary education abroad without formally seeking fresh admission there. This mode of internationalization of higher education, known as 'student exchange programme', functions through Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) signed between the universities and institutions of partner countries. The ERASMUS (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) programme, started in 1987 to encourage and support academic mobility of tertiary students in Europe, is a well-known international student exchange programme. It has soon become very popular throughout Europe. Its popularity can be assessed from the fact that "in the year 2004/2005 alone 144,058 students undertook Erasmus mobility periods in 31 countries, with an average duration of 6 months per period" (Otero, 2008).

Educational institutions across countries are engaged in signing MOUs with partner institutions for faculty and students exchange programmes. Many universities have established and many more are establishing their offices in foreign countries and many educational administrators are visiting foreign universities in order to explore the possibilities of tie ups and student and faculty exchange. For example, the United States has established United States Education Foundation of India (USEFI) in India to promote the exchange of students and faculty between the institutions of the two countries. The University of Edinburgh opened a new liaison office in Mumbai on February 14, 2011 to simplify communication and collaboration between its partner institutions in India (HT Horizons, February 16, 2011). Besides, there are many organizations promoting international student exchange such as Worldwide International Student Exchange (WISE), International Student Exchange Programme (ISEP), which provide counseling and necessary support for students and institutions for international exchanges.

## 5. Conclusion

In the present phase of globalization, the objectives, structure, content and the outcomes of higher education are not decided by the national priorities alone; rather higher education is now perceived as an important component of the development discourse and a commodity of global importance. Developed countries have an obvious advantage in this internationalization as they possess state of the art infrastructure and a tradition of quality education widely acknowledged by the people not only in their own countries but across the world. In many countries of the developed world such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore higher education has emerged as a major export good. There is an intense competition among the developed countries for recruiting international students, especially from the developing countries like India and China. Thus, it is very obvious that countries of the global south are at a great disadvantage in this phase of internationalization of higher education and remain the source of international students losing a major chunk of their revenue to the host institutions and host countries.

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