INTERNATIONALIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Purpose – to analyze the development of the concept of the internationalization process and the essential challenges and opportunities for internationalization implementation in higher education.

Design/methodology/approach – the article relies on the qualitative type research methods: content analysis, synthesis, comparison and analysis of scientific literature. The article consists of three main parts. First part deeply analyzing concept of development of internationalization processes, in the second part challenges of internationalization in higher education are analized and in the fird part possible opportunities and suggestions for solving the challenges of nternationalization in higer education are analyzed and presented.

Findings – The article showed that the development of the concept of internationalization, a clear paradigmatic change is observed, when the models and ideas of global cooperation in the context of higher education are replaced by the models and principles of neoliberal competition and economic benefits. The development of the concept of internationalization is promoted by the progress of modern technologies, which implies new forms of internationalization by distinguishing the virtual mobility of students or academic staff and the opportunities it provides. Also, the challenges of internationalization processes include both national, institutional and individual level components. Assessment of challenges and formation of potential solutions requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating the knowledge of psychology, law, management, sociology, and political sciences. On the other hand, by exploiting the opportunities offered by institutional juxtaposition, due to institutional mimetic and normative forms of pressure, the opportunities to solve these challenges based on the best international practices increase.

Research limitations/implications – The research paper has both methodological and theoretical limitations that need to be addressed in order to assess future research directions and improvement. The work lacks a more detailed analysis and evaluation of the political-organizational aspects of internationalization in higher education, and also presents a limited amount of empirical data that can demonstrate the dynamics and trends of results and activities. Also, artcle is mainly based on the theoretical analysis of scientific sources, so empirical research would be a suitable and significant addition to the article.

Practical implications – In the analysis the concepts and development of internationalization in higher education were explored in detail, as well as different analysis approaches were examined. The work also analyzes the current challenges and opportunities of internationalization in higher education. These findings can be implied as a standpoint both for future scientific research and practical discussion within higher education managers and specialists.

Originality/Value – Internationalization and its opportunities and challenges in higher education have recently been a less studied area in the scientific context, and the different levels of analysis are also poorly reviewed. Solutions and tools for overcoming the latest challenges are rarely found in scientific works, so the value of the work is theoretical insights and practical recommendations, taking into account the latest trends in higher education management.

Keywords: internationalization in higher education; internationalization evaluation; internationalization process

Research type: General review.

JEL classification: M10.

Introduction

With the growing importance of internationalization at the national and global levels, the analysis of this phenomenon is receiving more and more scientific attention. Topic is analyzed by such authors as Célio Conceição, 2020, Bashir and Mirza, 2019, de Wit, Deca, 2020, Sika, Othoo, 2022, Jiang, 2022 and others.

Most universities began to form in the 18th and 19th centuries and were characterized by a purely national orientation and operational and educational functions. In previous periods, mobility was not particularly emphasized, so it was rarely encouraged and sometimes even prohibited (de Wit, 2019, p. 9). However, globalization processes inevitably transform the traditional functions and responsibilities of universities and other higher education institutions, their role in society and the state (Zolfaghari, et. al., 2009 p. 6). As political, economic, social and cultural dependence increases, facing not only national but also global challenges, the need to increase interdependence also in the field of higher education, form inter-institutional networks, carry out joint scientific projects and programs, search for answers and create innovative solutions not only to solve the challenges of the present, but also of the future (Sika, Othoo, 2022, p. 170-171, Célio Conceição, 2020, p. 231-232). The mentioned processes are noticeably intensifying, especially the global development in the field of educational services has been noticeable since 1980. According to UNESCO data, in 1990 more than 1.5 million students were studying abroad in the mid-2000s. In retrospect, 1999 statistical information, it should be noted that extremely significant positions in the export of educational services were occupied by Anglo-Saxon countries, for example, the United States of America, which has as many as 29% and in the United Kingdom - 13% of students, in 2011. Asian countries such as China began to compete with the US. (Wadhwa, Jha, 2014, p. 105 -107). 2010-2020 the number of students studying abroad already reaches 5 millions (de Wit, Deca, 2020, p. 4). In the 21st century, in the post-pandemic context, there is no doubt that internationalization as a process is increasingly significant for the political, cultural and social development of states, on the other hand, this complex and extremely dynamic phenomenon is characterized by various challenges to which universities and higher education institutions must respond appropriately (Jiang, 2022, p. 181-184). The complexity of internationalization processes, emerging challenges and dynamic external environment

presupposes the need for methodological, management, technological, structural financial and other innovative management strategies, tactical and operational solutions for these processes.

1. Concept and development of internationalization processes

When explaining the concept of internationalization in higher education, it is useful to use the classic definition describing internationalization as an integration process that includes various institutional policies, international - intercultural activities, research, teaching and learning services (Bashir, Mirza, 2019, p. 3). The concept of internationalization is increasingly used in the strategic documents of universities and other higher education institutions, but it is characterized by different processes, goals, structural factors, forms of implementation and desired and achievable results (Célio Conceição, 2020, p. 233). Internationalization can often be seen as a multifaced concept (Sika, Othoo, 2022, p. 170): in order to compare and objectively assess the concept of internationalization, it is explained that internationalization should include the following key components (see Figure 1.): 1) study/training programmes and courses; 2) admission of students; 3) international staff / faculty; 4) professional and general competences; 5) infrastructure and resources (Koskey, 2013, p. 11). It can also be simplified to three essential functional dimensions of universities, distinguishing between teaching, research and service (Zolfaghari, et. al., 2009 p. 2). However, the concept of internationalization and the phenomenon itself in the 21st century. becomes extremely complex and heterogeneous.

Studies / trainings programmes and courses

Admission process

International faculty

Professional and general competencies

Infrastructure and resources

Source: Prepared by authors of the article, based on Koskey, 2013, p. 11.

Figure 1. Internationalization aspects

First of all, the complexity of the phenomenon of internationalization is determined by the extremely large number of interested parties, including state management institutions, universities, academic staff, students, their parents, business structures, various non-governmental organizations, supranational institutions and others (Koskey, 2013, p. 12). In retrospect, traditional internationalization processes in higher education were primarily associated with international inter-institutional cooperation, intensifying globalization, ideas of knowledge society and academic progress. This complex process and its genesis can be interpreted as an effort to ensure the mobility

of students and teachers, academic staff, talent mobilization, pedagogical and scientific cooperation, improve the quality of services provided by focusing on international standards, strengthen cooperation in the context of various scientific and study projects, increase the institution's awareness and competitiveness in the international space, to attract new students. It should be noted that internationalization has created and continues to create particularly great value for developing countries, ensuring the dissemination of knowledge, investments, technologies and competences, and improving the quality of processes at various levels (Wadhwa, 2016, p. 227-230, Sika, Othoo, 2022, p. 170-172). Supranational and various international institutions, such as the World Bank, OECD, UNESCO, the European Commission and their signed agreements and adopted documents, such as - *General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS)*, Bologna process agreements and such international associations as the *International Association of Universities (IAU)* or *the European Universities Association (EUA)* had a great significance for internationalization (Wadhwa, Jha, 2014, p. 101-102, de Wit, Deca, 2020, p. 4).

In order to reveal the content of the concept of internationalization in more detail, it can be noted that in the academic discourse, various approaches to how this phenomenon can be analyzed can be found. Internationalization can also be analyzed by distinguishing four types of analysis approaches: 1) *The Activity approach*, which promotes exchange of students, teachers, academic staff, international programmes, technical assistance; 2) *The Competency approach,* which emphasizes the improvement of skills and the development of competences, the knowledge, didactic abilities and values of teachers and employees, the development of intercultural; 3) *The Ethos approach*, which emphasizes the formation of an organizational culture or climate focused on international practices and initiatives; 4) *The Process approach,* which emphasizes the integration of internationality and interculturality into education, research and other educational services through various activities, institutional policies and procedures (see Figure 2) (Qiang, 2003, p. 250-251).

The Activity Approach	The Competency Approach	The Ethos Approach
	The Process Approach	
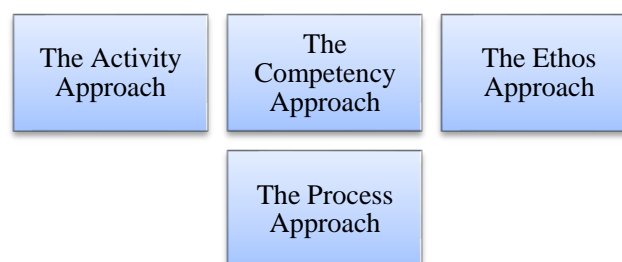
Source: Prepared by authors of the article, based on Qiang, 2003, p. 250-251

Figure 2. Internationalization by distinguishing four types of analysis approaches

However, current internationalization processes can increasingly be explained by economic motives, especially in developed countries. The decreasing funding of universities and the role of the state in higher education, neoliberal, competition-based policies encourage higher education

institutions to look for alternative sources of funding and new means of increasing intellectual potential. It should be noted that this is also influenced by the transition from a purely public sector of higher education, which was dominated by the public sector until around 1970. to a mixed public-private model. In order to achieve these goals, internationalization is increasingly used. It should be noted that the economic argument in the context of internationalization is significant not only at the institutional level, but also at the national level, given that internationalization can be seen as a tool to increase the economic competitive advantage of the state by forming high skills and knowledge of potential employees. The change in the concept of internationalization was also caused by the transition to a global knowledge-based economy, placing increasing demands on the skills and knowledge of employees (de Wit, 2019, p. 13). On the other hand, these processes can be viewed critically: some authors, for example, Célio Conceição (2020, p. 232) states that the instrumentalization of universities and other higher education institutions, when they are forced to adapt to economic and cultural circumstances, often based on financial criteria alone. This trend can also negatively transform the traditional mission and values of universities and other higher education institutions. Evaluating these reasons, it can be said that it promotes a change in the traditional concept and principles of internationalization. H. de Wit (2019, p. 18) after systematizing the changes and fundamental principles of the concept of internationalization, claims that the internationalization in higher education in the last 30 years is characterized by the following features: 1) *ad hoc*, fragmented, rather than strategic internationalization is more typical; 2) focus more on small, elite groups of students or faculties; 3) internationalization is particularly related to national, regional and global rankings; 4) priority is given to more developed economies rather than developing ones. The ongoing change in the concept of internationalization can even be equated to a paradigm shift, replacing the global cooperation model with a competitive one. (de Wit, Deca, 2020, p. 4). Other authors point out that, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to discuss and create sustainable higher education internationalization models and strategies (Jiang, 2022, p. 181). Perhaps the integration of the ideas of cohesion and internationalization could become a counterweight to the ideas of internationalization based on competition and the economic dimension.

2. Challenges of internationalization in higher education

When analyzing the fundamental challenges of internationalization, it would first be appropriate to differentiate them into *individual* and *institutional* levels. The individual level can be associated with lack of competences, motivation, knowledge, negative attitudes, linguistic barriers, lack of social connections (for example, lack of social connections with the community, family, friends in the context of academic mobility). When assessing institutional challenges, the lack of funding, lack of strategy, problems of reliable and valuable partnerships, lack of institutional support

culture and technological infrastructure, constant competition for evaluations and rankings, lack of awareness of universities, limited communication channels, lack of internationalization programs, projects, and scientific research supply are often distinguished (Sika, Othoo, 2022, p. 174- 178). For example, in Sudan, there are significant challenges to ensure the funding of institutions, to gather a sufficient number of students, and sometimes it is not even possible to accept students to study, because there is a lack of basic infrastructure, resources and other tools necessary for teaching and learning. Similar problems are observed in Bangladesh and Bulgaria (Zolfaghari, et. al., 2009 p. 6) and other developing countries.

These individual and institutional challenges can be explained by the lack of centralized, integrated and systematic access (de Wit, 2019, p. 17). A significant macro-level challenge for the internationalization of higher education can also be considered the peculiarities of national policy, assessing aspects such as visa policy, infrastructure provision and financing, granting and ensuring autonomy to higher education institutions. When dealing with the specifics of national and institutional policies, both students and faculty may encounter complex legal environments and inefficient procedures (de Wit, Deca, 2020, p. 8, Jiang, 2022, p. 183). The need for process standardization can also be mentioned. On the other hand, the standardization of internationalization could, on the contrary, reduce academic mobility, given that if learning and scientific practices are the same, there would be fewer reasons for students and researchers to leave and experience mobility in other higher education institutions (Célio Conceição, 2020, p. 232). It should be noted that modern technologies and the learning experience of COVID-19 also contribute to the development of the virtual aspect of internationalization, when students or academic staff increasingly choose virtual mobility and the opportunities it provides (de Wit, Deca, 2020, p. 6). It can be assumed that virtual mobility has the potential to reduce the aforementioned institutional and individual challenges. In the context of macro challenges, it should be emphasized that not all countries have the same internationalization opportunities, so this can also be considered a certain internationalization challenge. This is associated with the dominance of several countries in the global scientific systems, their available financial resources and competences, so, for example, some African countries are extremely dependent on them and do not have equal competitive opportunities in order to attract the most talented students, teachers and other academic staff, to provide high-quality studies connected services, carry out scientific activities and implement other relevant projects in higher education (Koskey, 2013, p. 9). In this context, it is worth mentioning the dichotomy of private and public sector institutions, when in some developing countries, private universities may be considered more attractive for foreign interested parties to visit.

Another significant institutional challenge at the micro level is culture: the values, traditions, norms and beliefs prevalent both in society and in higher education institutions. Different experience

of academic staff and students, lack of intercultural communication can make internationalization processes and effective adaptation of activities extremely difficult (Jiang, 2022, p. 183). The experience of the authors of the article in higher education in cooperation with international students and teachers confirms this, highlighting the different perceptions of time, responsibility, orientation to the result, communication, etiquette, leadership, teamwork and individual work and other factors of the interested parties, which can reduce the effectiveness of internationalization in the academic process. Individual negative experiences with individuals representing other cultures can form negative preconceptions towards internationalization (Koskey, 2013, p. 14). Intercultural tensions are also noticeable in the face of forced internationalization, especially with the intensification of illegal migration flows from Muslim countries, such as Greece, Italy, Germany and other European Union countries. In the context of these phenomena, value contradictions emerge and at the same time the need for integration into the national education system (de Wit, Deca, 2020, p. 10).

3. Possible ways of solving the challenges of internationalization in higher education

The article analyzes internationalization processes and their challenges, presupposes the need for effective and efficient solutions. At the institutional level, it is important to focus attention on: 1) financing and diversification of its sources; 2) governance, especially including aspects of integration and inclusion; 3) educational programmes and their quality, increasingly using modern technologies and other innovative means; 4) improvement of personnel competencies; 5) ensuring equality (especially at the economic, social, cultural levels); 6) actualization of societal problems in higher education institutions; 7) improving students' living conditions and experience (Koskey, 2013, p. 12). The formation of long-term goals and a suitable strategy should also be noted. Institutional strategy and policy should be focused primarily on establishing one's own identity, taking into account the local, national and international contexts, and not on the mere competitive struggle for university evaluations and rankings. Taking into account the specifics of the current internationalization processes, focusing on fragmented - elite groups or structural units, it is recommended to take into account all students and academic units (schools, faculties) in the institutional strategy, update the infrastructure, revise the teaching materials, prepare educational programs according to the needs of society, emphasize English, as the importance of an international language, implementing modern technologies in educational processes, promoting effective interaction between various parties interested in higher education, for example between student representatives and various scientific institutes (de Wit, 2019, p. 32, Zolfaghari, et. al., 2009 p. 5-8). The juxtaposition of processes, legal environment and other factors is particularly suitable for the implementation of the above-mentioned solutions. This approach is inseparable from the mimetic or normative isomorphism mentioned in the context of institutional theory, where higher education institutions could adopt the best proven

practices voluntarily or adapt the most effective processes and structures due to legal pressures in the face of accreditations carried out by various institutions. (Bashir, Mirza, 2019, p. 21).

4. Conclusions

Analyzing the development of the concept of internationalization, a clear paradigmatic change is observed, when the models and ideas of global cooperation in the context of higher education are replaced by the models and principles of neoliberal competition and economic benefits. The development of the concept of internationalization is promoted by the progress of modern technologies, which implies new forms of internationalization by distinguishing the virtual mobility of students or academic staff and the opportunities it provides.

The challenges of internationalization processes include both national, institutional and individual level components. Assessment of challenges and formation of potential solutions requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating the knowledge of psychology, law, management, sociology, and political sciences. On the other hand, by exploiting the opportunities offered by institutional juxtaposition, due to institutional mimetic and normative forms of pressure, the opportunities to solve these challenges based on the best international practices increase.

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