

# Pillar of Internationalization in Higher Education: The Contribution of International Collaborations and Online Delivery Approaches to Internationalization in HEIS

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## Abstract

The trend towards internationalization is becoming increasingly important in HEI (higher education institutions) and universities in many countries. As HEIs become more international, they are increasingly recognized as contributing to the competitiveness of its graduates. Conceptually, internationalization has long been understood as a focus on the transnational movement of individual students and scholars rather than as a strategy to influence higher education institutions and systems. The importance of internationalization in HEIs and universities has increased over the past two decades of globalization. The Internet will continue to play a significant role, opening opportunities to reach a wider global audience. Online and other forms of e-learning approaches continue to play a significant role, especially in the post-COVID\_19 era. This calls for adapting some of the higher education policies to new realities of future competitiveness in higher education deliver, and to ensure the demands of the labor market especially towards digitalization trends in the realm of work are realized. This paper discusses the components of internationalizations, the rationale for embracing multiculturalism in HEIs, internationalizations forms and drivers of Transnational Education (TNE) across different regions, contribution of collaborations and the Internet and contemporary modes of delivery in the growth of internationalization.

**Keywords:** *Internationalization, Multiculturalism, Digitalization, Collaborations, e-competence and Online Learning*

## 1. Introduction

The trend of internationalization is assuming a greater importance in higher education (HE) across several countries. There is an increasing acknowledgement of this trend contributing to institutional sustainability and competitiveness of graduands. Conceptually, internationalization was perceived as focusing on the worldwide movement of specific scholars and/or students rather than as a policy that changed systems and institutions of higher education competitiveness. For a university to be international, a few internationalization enablers of the university curriculum need to be present (Caruana, 2011), among them such as: the presence of international students (of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds), international collaboration and partnerships, links with all stakeholders (including businesses and the third sector), internationally accredited programs, international staff and staff who have experience in teaching and conducting research in other countries, learning material and resources originating outside the host

country, the opportunity to learn foreign languages (Zelenková & Hanesová, n.d.).

Internationalization provides room for student mobility which in turn contributes to their employability gained through foreign interaction and experience. Internationalization encourages the exchange of best academic and research practices through interactions between various educational systems and aids in the development of global citizens through student and scholar mobility, as stated in the guidelines for the university grants commission of India published in 2021. It has been customary for academics to move throughout the world to pursue their intellectual endeavors and use the immense resources of the higher education system. (Shah & Marg, n.d.).

The tenets of internationalization programmes and policies of higher education are in constant evolution, hence increasingly becoming intertwined (Knight, 2008). One facet of internationalization is defined as abroad, which is defined as all cross-border systems of education, including providers, projects, and person mobility. The second is internationalization at home, which is more curriculum-driven and focused on activities that foster cross-cultural and international understanding. There are limitations to such a difference because internationalization overseas can also be curriculum-related and foster intercultural competence and an understanding of the world.

## 2. Rationale For Multiculturalism in Higher Education Institutional Context

Over the past two decades, the scope of internationalization-related activities has expanded, moving from the previous focus on personal mobility to more advanced strategies like curriculum development, staff growth, enhancement of quality and research collaboration (Van der Wende, 2010). From exclusively focusing on personal mobility to more intricate strategies, the scope of activities linked to internationalization have expanded (Zelenková & Hanesová, n.d.). A multicultural environment provides room for diversity of skills and all rounded approach that benefits to multiple stakeholders including students, fellow teachers, administrative staff, international partners and other supporting services and overall contribution of the diverse groups capacity to function successfully in this environment. This also creates a positive and rich breeding ground for innovative ideas and new practices. An enhanced inter-cultural awareness and

intercultural skills showed by higher education instructors is essential for not only reducing the barriers between staff but also benefits students from various cultures. This reduces cultural distance and creates a positive room for learners to gain from mixed cultures. An international higher educational institution ensures a learning environment that genuinely and deliberately reflects international characteristics and responsiveness to students from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. The curriculum should respond appropriately to their learning and cultural needs. The international HEI learning environment should be capable of providing graduates who will be working in an increasingly international environment. An internationalized HEI should cover emerging and contemporary issues for students to get acquainted with and be prepared to deal with in their future jobs.

A number of western European universities focus on knowledge transfer, global research and progressive policies through the creation of strong international associations and networks towards internationalization of their programs. Further, the institutions are capitalizing on social media platforms and e-technology as critical tools for mobilizing public access to education, talent attraction and consequent retention of the same talents. Through using the two platforms, access to higher education among developing countries is enhanced and supplementing local institutions where the demand for education is high (Cohen et al., 2014). Cohen(2014) asserts that improved academic quality, international orientation among staff and students especially from developing countries and international citizenship are among the benefits of internationalization. Collaboration in the franchising mode has the potential to benefit developed nations in terms of brain gain and revenue generation.

### **3. Drivers of Growth in Cross Border Higher Education in Select Regions**

Over the past decade and with the advent of globalization; cross border schooling has gained prominence in Higher Education across countries. The EU countries with the signing and implementation of Bologna agreement did provide a lead in cross-border education initiatives and internationalization. By any measure—such as international student flows, controlling associates in the “twinning” academic arrangements, quality guarantors’ or international accreditors, or franchising education programs to foreign learning institutions- these countries gain high financial benefits and regulate majority of programs, according to Altbach and Knight (2007). The “buying” nations are primarily middle-income nations in Asia and Latin America, with a smaller percentage coming from developing countries. Whereas some countries adopted the approach of

attracting foreign universities from other countries to establish campuses in their countries, other nations do encourage collaborations model with local partners. The Singapore government's "Temasek model" aims to transform the nation into an "education and knowledge hub" through heavy focus on gifted learners and transnational institutions (Barnawi, 2022). Due to the presence of foreign campuses and collaborative arrangements, the countries provide their citizens with access to international higher education. The United Arab Emirates and Qatar also have adopted the approach of attracting foreign universities to set up campuses in their countries. The United Arab Emirates is the nation with the greatest number of transnational branch campuses in global higher education markets as of December 2021. It has thirty-one overseas HEI campuses from countries like India, Ireland, the United States, Australia, France, Switzerland, Russia, Morocco, Austria, Pakistan, Lebanon, the United Kingdom, and Iran. Its goals are to: re-educate its citizens; fulfill the expanding requirements of its expatriate population; entice investors, educators, and students worldwide and alter the regional HE landscapes (Barnawi,2022). The Chinese model to internationalization has been oriented towards matching and developing its long-term foreign policy goals. China did embark on a deliberate collaborative arrangement with foreign institutions to open Chinese language centers overseas as well as attracting foreign students to study majorly mandarin language. Besides this, it has opened room for foreign university collaborations with a significant western institution opening collaborative ventures in China. At the same time, the country continues to send a considerable number of students to study in foreign universities. Due to the increasing competition from global partners, Chinese higher education institutions have joined the practices of education internationalization, jumpstarting the process to overtake other countries which had started earlier. For instance, there has been an increase in the last two decades in Chinese higher education international enrolment. Zha et al. (2019) notes that 1022 institutions as well as 3.4 million students’ enrolment back in 1998 has transformed to 2596 universities and over 27 million students in 2016. The aggressiveness of the Chinese growth of its international stature towards internationalization of education continues to grow and focus on both inward bound flow of academic faculty as well to foreign research collaborations. Similarly, global engagement as well as internationalization of higher education in China has increased to another global engagement level. This shifts the focus from the one-way import of foreign (Western) knowledge into China to a much better balance between bringing China into the world and introducing the world to China. This could be viewed as a type of Chinese

history in which China's internationalization of higher education has taken many different forms over time. The focus of internationalization is moving to outcomes from output and input to outcomes, which are not location dependent (Aerden, 2014; Leask 2015). Online education approach involves student enrolling in a foreign university but remaining "at home" or in another location, which bears a site-independent approach. Secondly, a student can live in one country and attend a university that is located across country borders as is the case in some western European nations. This is the situation, for instance, when German and Dutch students study in the Netherlands and Belgium, respectively (Beelen & Jones, 2015). The post Covid 19 pandemic era experience has in a way shown capacity for institutional capacity and development of students that have embedded digital skills transferred at the point of instruction in their home country thus leading to embedded internationalization.

Transnational Education (TNE) has contributed significantly to the UK, Australia, and American Higher education sector. The British Council defines transnational education as "the mobility of higher education programmes and institutions/providers across international borders." It is an increasingly vital component of the UK's international education portfolio, accounting for 11% of total international fee revenues in 2015 and contributing an estimated £496 million to the UK economy. TNE is the delivery of degrees in a country other than where the awarding provider is based. Branch campuses, distance learning, online instruction, joint and dual degree programs, double awards, faculty who "fly in," and mixed models—traditionally referred to as blended learning—are all examples of this approach..(Ryan, n.d.) .This trend continues to contribute significantly to the growth in expansion of HEI whose focus is on reaching to wider international markets. It is distinct from both international student mobility and international research collaboration. The current growth of TNE is well documented and UK higher education institutions (HEIs) are at the forefront of this expansion(Lawton & Jensen, 2015). The rising demand of quality International Higher Education puts institutions and countries that have invested in growing this area at a vantage point in commoditization of higher education as a contributor to the socio-economic development of the nation. According to Lawton and Jensen (2015), transnational education has a clear and growing impact and significance on the economic and politics goals of several countries. While providing increased resilience to international recruitment when direct entry of international students to the UK is under pressure due to the political dynamics experienced in the European Union, it also meets the needs of new cohorts of students around the world and is more consistent with partner countries' aspirations for

economic development. The UK continues to take lead in TNE and has substantive mechanisms aimed at growing the TNE model. Branch campuses, distance learning, online provision, joint dual programs, double awards, fly-in "faculty" programs, and blended learning are some of the diverse ways education is delivered overseas, according to a report from the UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

#### **4. The Future of Collaborative Arrangements in HEI Internationalization**

Partnerships and collaborations continue play a pivotal role in the fast and rapid growth of HEI internationalization. Partnerships refers to organizational pairings that may range from the informal to the more formal approaches aimed at the mutual benefit of the partner institutions. Individual faculty can also collaborate on specific projects hence referred to as collaborators rather than partners. International partnerships are thought to be a key vehicle that supports growth of institutions through joint shared skills, knowledge experience that is of mutual benefit to partnering institutions towards achieving their goals. This can be attained through developing strategic partnerships with similar international institutions for collaborations, benchmarking and other purposes; partnering for knowledge and skills creation, partnering for quality enhancement as well as through twinned educational institutional programmed for access, student transfer and progression; collaborating between staff in various areas including curriculum design and research initiatives, students other technical aspects to co-create and engage in developing new and adaptable curriculum as well as other areas of mutual benefit.

The increase of international collaboration in higher education, the emergence of online courses, offshore campuses, and other developments has become a norm in higher education sector to become competitive in a globalized and liberalized economy. There is a growing need to draw students from non-traditional markets as competitive pressure on the higher education industry increases. This may necessitate taking steps to tap into global student mobility. With governments willing to offer chances for the establishment of branches or collaborative arrangements in higher education and a high migrant population because of foreign labor working in the gulf region, the gulf region remains a key region where many foreign institutions continue to focus on attracting students. Currently based on government policy requirements in Oman; there are various institutions collaborating with HEI partners from other countries mostly hinged on curriculum and quality control aspects. This goes a long way to meet the counties national human resource needs, provide

learners with the required skills and offers chance to access world class education in the local context .

### **5. The Role of Contemporary Delivery Modes Towards Internationalization**

The proliferation of e-learning across all university systems and HEIs exemplifies not only the application of innovative technologies to the delivery of higher education to achieve economies of scale but also the need for resilience in the enhancement of revenue generation. The Internet has significantly expanded the potential of internationalization since it became possible to conduct a full exchange of information flows without physical transporting of people. In Europe, many universities successfully implement projects on E-Learning, to assess the quality of such training in Brussels was founded the association, whose members include The University of Zürich's E-Learning Center in Switzerland ,Estonian online university, Russia's Eurasian Opening Institute, United Kingdom's European Distance and E-Learning Network (EDEN), The Netherlands' Intercultural Open University (IOU), Spain's Open University of Madrid, METID- Italy's Politecnico di Milano among others.(Vitenko et al., 2017) .

Given the flexibility that Internet based learning approaches to both learners and service providers to meet real-time market requirements and expectations, the degree of responsiveness to exploit and adopt the use of E-Learning and online approaches is likely to shape the future of internationalization in higher education. The Internet continues to offer a platform for continued interaction with multiple channels and tools being available to ease online education .In tandem with these changes ; other associated industries such as book and journal publishers going digital compliments the access and reach of this medium by learners . This is further being reinforced by the millennial learners and consumers who are digitally savvy and are prone to adopt to use on internet-based learning approaches. With a proliferation of high-speed internet access and improved technology, the future of Higher Education will move towards adopting this E-learning approach to meet the significant shift in the global population that is leaning towards digitalization . Educational establishments are under pressure to provide education in a way that makes it simple for students to access it due to the growing demand for technology and adoption of digital trends. Given the possible expansion of the remote working model, adopting learner processes that are in line with digital skills required by the market is essential. Given the changing nature of the job market, which now allows for remote work, this may prove to be a vital method of reaching a population in need of applicable skills. Utilizing opportunities with virtual spaces that are made possible by internet connectivity could also

be necessary to achieve efficiency and drastically reduce the time and money spent traveling to realize access to in-person education. this is often likely to form a substitution effect to traditional brick and mortar physically hosted education and notable change the upper education competitive landscape. The competitive landscape for educational activity will be significantly altered because of this, which is going to lead to a substitution effect for traditional physically hosted education. For educational institutions to be effective, they need to be at the forefront of technological and scientific advancements. If they don't, there will be a delay between what employers need and what universities teach. This will result in students acquiring knowledge that is outdated and no longer needed.(Razavi et al., 2011a).The future of Higher Education is likely to be influenced greatly by technology and the institutions occupying huge virtual spaces in deployment are likely to win the discerning technologically savvy customers in the sectors. These advantages include the ability to train more people, more frequently, and in shorter, easier-to-coordinate sessions, as well as a reduction in the amount of money and time spent by employees traveling for training. (Jeffcoat Bartley & Golek, n.d.) The post Covid 19 - pandemic educational trends could see a growing number in students who would consider studying remotely which is a norm adopted by some HEIs especially for working students and part time learners. The COVID 19 pandemic had a significant impact on higher education, which has already undergone reforms to meet the needs of the dominant economy. The world has embraced the reforms, particularly the method of teaching and evaluation, thanks to the pandemic lockdown.(Gurukkal, 2020).The influence of the pandemic is not only an eye opener to new institutional offerings with an emerging opportunity for online education as opposed to the norm of studying in person. This approach favors international learners who may be cushioned from likely disruptions or constrains in completion of their programs in event of threats such as experienced by Covid-19 pandemic. According to Gurrukal (2020), teachers and students will be forced to use the online mode because of the lockdown-induced closure of higher education institutions. Additionally, there will be calls for a de facto switch to the virtual learning system. The online teaching method, hailed as faster, cheaper, and more effective, would enable all Open and other universities to offer diverse programs online, forcing an unprecedentedly considerable number of teachers into a new setting. The scale of disruption was notable over the pandemic majorly to learners whose mode of study was physical, and this was compounded by the international border closures as part of restrictions in the spread of Covid\_19. According to Gurrukal, students at

renowned campus learning institutions are utilizing a variety of online lessons in European languages offered by Coursera, EdX, Future Learn, Udacity, Canvas Network, and several other providers as supplements. The knowledge of the students would be augmented by online instruction from world-renowned scholars, forcing ordinary teachers to be more academically challenging in their instruction. This calls for national education policy makers to rethink policy that accommodates online education as alternative equivalent to specific programs that can otherwise be taught without need for hand on practical components. There is need for policy realignment and infrastructure readiness to accommodate embedding technology especially online learning in HEI. Gurrukul asserts that in order to facilitate the new normal in higher education, institutions and governments must effect the necessary organizational restructuring. For the purpose of conducting examinations that are guaranteed to be reliable and of high quality, numerous technologically advanced proctored centers will need to be established by universities themselves. Online teaching/learning and evaluation tools of high quality are high-input facilities that necessitate significant investment in order to establish the technological infrastructure required for their production. This demands institutional readiness in terms of infrastructure, staffing and structural changes to accommodate these emerging changes and environmental dynamism. While embracing internationalization, it is important to engage with different political, economic, social, and historical factors in regional settings. According to De wit (2022), some of the issues to be considered in these emerging contexts past political legacy issues, social cultural identities, institutional values, increasing competitive pressures, balance between local, regional, and global objectives, sustainability and emerging global challenges. There are emerging post pandemic changes in Higher Education industry that will impact on institutional competitiveness and eventual graduate outcomes. Competence, outcome, teaching, learning, evaluation, quality, access, equity, and excellence will all be different, according to Gurrukul. Quality will be e-competency-related, access will be technology-dependent, competence will be e-competence, outcomes will be computational, teaching will be connected to ICT, evaluation will be online, and equity will be merely rhetoric. It can also be seen that post pandemic research will focus on knowledge universes and interdisciplinary in nature due to increased connectedness of knowledge usage as seen in case of smart cities. HEI should be prepared to focus on solution to contemporary and emerging issues and disciplines in line with supplying solutions to emerging problems and this calls for local and internal collaborations given scope of solutions,

respectively. Gurrukul asserts that as an increasing number of cross-disciplinary areas of knowledge emerge, disciplines will become increasingly intertwined. Cross-disciplinary literacy among educators and adaptability among students will be required as disciplinary boundaries in higher education are blurred. The development of the sciences via narrow specializations, which in turn become more rigid subdisciplines, will necessitate breaking down disciplinary silos and allowing flexibility in choice of specialization across disciplines. The competition in future will shift to the ability to lead, embrace, integrate and incorporate new forms of online and E-learning modes towards delivery of quality Higher Education especially in a boundaryless world focusing not only on national markets but wide international and global audiences. Razavi et al (2011a), proposed a shared option where one institutions program can be accessed and used (and even be included in a degree program offered) by one or several other institutions resulting in reduction of time spent in creating a new program and simplify access to the new knowledge, allowing for greater degree of customization of educational services while reducing the overall cost of education for the public and businesses alike. (Razavi et al., 2011b). The HEIs have realized and made the cost of e-learning to be effectively lower compared to the traditional and common class-room approaches. For instance, the many tutorial rooms and classes are replaced by one single e-platform, where thousands of learners can attend to classes at their comfort of homes. The e-platforms also reduce the resources used, as many teachers can be represented by one instructor and course designer, leading to reduced cost. Similarly, the e-learning platforms have no limit, hence one class can be shared among many students and in many lessons (Rumbley & Altbach, 2016). Higher learning institutions are faced with addressing the needs of increasing enrolments and declining funding from state, forcing the need for innovative teaching. The e-learning platforms provide an opportunity for economizing learning while using new learning technologies, as the same time generating funds. The competitive pressure and cost implications will play a key role in the direction of the mode of education delivery at an international and global level given the global drive for cost pressure across different industries including Higher education sector.

The growing expansion for e-learning across the higher education sectors globally is exhibited by the growth and uptake of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) by leading US learning institutions like Stanford, Yale, and Harvard since 2012. Online learning is strongly associated with corporatization and commodification of knowledge, which leads to changing nature and role of higher education (Teichler, 2017).

## 6. Realigning to New Internet Based Trends Towards Internationalization

Higher education Institutions are expected to develop new methods of delivery because of the competitive pressures as a result of declining enrollment while also dealing with a decrease in state funding. According to Gurukkal (2020), the internationalization of higher learning has enabled sustenance of scholarship and science through dynamic scholarly exchanges and promoting economic and social ability of developing nations. The advent of COVID-19 led to creation of unfamiliar environment in delivering education across the world. Online mode has potential to stay as a new normal and as the most important complementary to the present mode, if not a de facto substitute. Incorporation of the online tools will not be optional anymore. Webinars and Teleconferencing will become the regular practice (Gurukkal, 2020). The increased massification of higher education through the Massive online courses (MOOCs) needs to be looked at a having potential to render most physically offered courses redundant given their relevance, recency and convenience. The massification of Higher education and internationalization uptake across the university sector globally is accelerated through MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) introduced by renown US universities, notably Harvard, Yale, and Stanford. This continue to offer a greater choice to the learners who might consider this as a better learning alternative to the traditional physical based institutional offerings. It should be noted that the MOOCs are being championed by globally renown branded institutions which makes them alternative certifications of choice from an employability perspective. There is need therefor to rethink ways and instructional methods as well as courses that are in tandem with the contemporary dynamic business world in terms of relevance but also the content, speed, pace and approach of their roll out. Virtual spaces, multidisciplinary knowledge development artificial intelligence components and smart learning approaches are potential fertile grounds to the HEIs in terms of innovation for the future.

## 7. Methodology

This study used a systematic literature review methodology. The methodology involved identifying concept related to the study objectives. In identifying the relevant literature the following keywords were used in different search engines: HEIs internationalisation, TNEs, collaborations, partnerships, Online learning, eLearning Approaches and e-competences. A cross section of academic and research papers from universally recognized and authenticated across different regions were reviewed for this study. Relevant studies on Internationalization of Higher Education were

reviewed with an emphasis on recent research on the subject.

## 8. Conclusion

To deal with the dynamism and disruption of the post-Covid era, higher education institutions need to rethink competitiveness, focus on emerging knowledge spheres, continuously learn to adjusting to new areas and adopt faster durations of changes in their offering in line with the speed of changes in the markets. A key requirement for HEIs to sustain growth is through scalable options by identify gaps provided by Internet-based platforms in knowledge creation and sharing. HEIs that are ready to embrace and lead novel changes in delivery might stay ahead of their peers. In tandem with the evolving connectivity and digitalized world, rethinking internationalization and collaborative approaches would provide shared pathways to the development of new knowledge. Emerging work patterns will require aligning to shifting labour market to prepare roll out smart knowledge workers with multi-disciplinary skills and beyond specialization compartments. Rethinking competences from the learners and employers perspective would require staying ahead of emerging domain area and digital trends to suit the labour market while looking at the future in develop resilient products and sustainable learning approaches.

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