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## **Internationalization of Higher Education: towards a conceptual framework**

**ZHA QIANG**

*Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada*

**ABSTRACT** Higher education has now become a real part of the globalization process: the cross-border matching of supply and demand. Consequently, higher education can no longer be viewed in a strictly national context. This calls for a broader definition of internationalization, which embraces the entire functioning of higher education and not merely a dimension or aspect of it, or the actions of some individuals who are part of it. This article provides a conceptual and organizational framework of internationalization of higher education, which includes a discussion on the meaning and definition of the term, a description of the various rationales for and approaches to internationalization, and an analysis of strategies of integrating international dimensions in a higher education institution.

### **Introduction**

There are various reasons for arguing that internationalization will become increasingly important in the higher education sector. First, there are two widely recognized arguments, which have so far served as main driving forces for internationalization.

Academic and professional requirements for graduates increasingly reflect the demands of the globalization of societies, economy and labour 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 and intercultural skills and attitudes.

The level of specialization in research and the size of the investments that are indispensable to certain fields of research and development require collaborative efforts and intensive international cooperation.

Second, the following two developments are increasingly influencing the international dimension of higher education:

The recruitment of foreign students has become a significant factor for institutional income and of national economic interest.

The use of new information and communication technologies in the delivery of education and the involvement of private actors in this mean that national borders and the role of national governments in education become blurred.

These reasons demonstrate the fact that higher education has now become a real part of the globalization process: the cross-border matching of supply and demand. Consequently, higher education can no longer be viewed in a strictly national context. This calls for a broader definition of internationalization, which embraces the entire functioning of higher education and not merely a dimension or aspect of it, or the actions of some individuals which are part of it. The purpose of this article is to provide a conceptual and organizational framework of internationalization of higher education. This includes a discussion on the meaning and definition of the term, a description of the various rationales for and approaches to internationalization, and an analysis of strategies of integrating international dimensions in a higher education institution.

### **Definition, Approach and Rationale**

#### *A Comprehensive Definition of Internationalization*

Internationalization of higher education is seen as one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalization, yet at the same time respects the individuality of the nation. While the various meanings attached to the term internationalization illustrate its complexity and richness as a concept, it is clear that the key element in the term is the notion of between or among nations and cultural identities. A country's unique history, indigenous culture(s), resources, priorities, etc. shape its response to and relationships with other countries. Thus national identity and culture are key to internationalization of higher education.

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' (p. 21). There are several key concepts in this definition, e.g. the idea of internationalization being a dynamic process and not a set of isolated activities, integration or infusion that contributes to the sustainability of the international dimension. Finally, this definition refers to the primary and universal functions of an institution of higher education, namely, teaching, research and service to society.

However, some scholars argue that, in this definition, no further goal of the process of internationalization is indicated. This could suggest that internationalization is an aim itself, while in many countries and settings it is rather seen as a means to achieve a wider goal, e.g. quality improvement,

restructuring and upgrading of higher education systems and services (Van der Wende, 1997). They attempt 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 labour markets' (Van der Wende, 1997, p. 19). It can thus be said that such internationalization is not merely an aim itself, but an important resource in the development of higher education towards, first of all, a system in line with international standards; secondly, one open and responsive to its global environment.

#### *Approaches to Internationalization*

A review of the literature as well as the practice of international education over the last decade reveals that several major authors have generally used a similar typology of 'approaches' (Aigner et al, 1992; Arum & Van de Water, 1992; De Wit, 1995; Knight, 1994, 1996, 1997). By 'approaches' the authors refer to the stances adopted by persons in leadership positions towards the promotion and implementation of programs aimed at internationalization. Although the categories of approach the authors use sometimes include overlapping elements, there are basically four different approaches being used to describe the concept of internationalization.

The *activity approach*, which promotes activities such as curriculum, student/faculty exchange, technical assistance, and international students. This approach is one that has been most prevalent and is characteristic of the period when one described the international dimension in terms of specific activities or programs. In fact, the activity approach was synonymous with the term of international education in the 1970s and early 1980s. However, by looking at the international dimension as a series of activities, they are prone to be considered as distinct programs in terms of their operation. This often leads to a rather fragmented and uncoordinated approach to internationalization, whereby the relationship, impact and benefits between and among the activities are not taken into consideration.

The *competency approach*, which emphasizes the development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values in students, faculty 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 interculturally skilled. Thus, in this approach, the development of internationalized curricula and programs is not an end in itself but a means towards developing the appropriate competencies in the students, staff and faculty. While there is a growing interest in the competency approach due to the increasing orientation towards the demands and concerns of the labour market, there is an urgent need for further applied research to identify those competencies which help students to be successful national and international citizens and to contribute to local and global work environments.

The *ethos approach*, which emphasizes creating a culture or climate that values and supports international/intercultural perspectives and initiatives. This approach relates more to organizational development theories which focus on the creation of a culture or climate within an organization to support a particular set of principles and goals. This approach 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*, which 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.

#### *Rationales for Internationalization*

Just as there are a variety of ways to describe and define internationalization, there are also a number of different rationales or motivations for wanting to integrate an international dimension into higher education. Aigner et al (1992) suggest that there are three major reasons for the internationalization of higher education: 1. interest in international security; 2. maintenance of economic competitiveness; and 3. fostering of human understanding across nations. Aigner et al point out that these are not absolute or mutually exclusive reasons for internationalization and that they differ greatly in content and emphasis.

Scott (1992) identifies seven imperatives for global education. They 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 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.

Warner (1992) examines the various assumptions and imperatives that underlie or drive the internationalization agenda at different universities. He proposes three different models in an attempt to capture the diverse approaches to the internationalization of a university. In the competitive model, introducing international content into curricula and other elements of campus life is chiefly a means to make students, the institution, and the country more competitive in the global economic marketplace. The liberal model identifies the primary goal of internationalization as self-development in a changing world and/or global education for human relations and citizenship. The social transformation model suggests that the most important goal of internationalization is to give students a deeper awareness of international and

intercultural issues related to equity and justice, and to give them the tools to work actively and critically towards social transformation.

Davies (1992) states that internationalization is 'closely linked with financial reduction, the rise of academic entrepreneurialism and genuine philosophical commitment to cross-cultural perspectives in the advancement and dissemination of knowledge' (p. 177). This view reflects the tight fiscal situation facing universities today and places international activity in the context of revenue-producing work.

According to Johnston & Edelstein (1993), the dominant argument for internationalizing higher education is that it will ensure the nation's economic competitiveness. They have, however, acknowledged that while this argument has considerable force, it also has limitations as the very notion of international competition may be losing its meaning. The dissociation of businesses from their home countries is increasingly common as domestic enterprises evolve into international, then multinational, and then global ones.

Knight & De Wit (1995) mention the political and economic rationales (including arguments related to economic growth and investment in the future economy, the labour market, foreign policy, financial incentives and national educational demand), and educational and cultural rationales (including development of the individual, the international dimension to research and teaching, institution building, quality improvement, and statements on the cultural function). Also, Blumenthal et al (1996) discern that internationalization policy can have political, economic, educational, cultural or academic, scientific and technological dimensions. In a later study, Knight (1997) clusters the possible rationales for internationalization into four groups: political, economic, academic and cultural/social, which this author believes is particularly useful to bring a framework and some logic to the discussion of the rationales.

*Political Rationale.* The political rationale relates to issues concerning the country's position and role as a nation in the world, e.g. security, stability and peace, ideological influence, etc.

*Historically, international education was seen as a beneficial tool for foreign policy especially with respect to national security and peace among nations. While this is still a consideration today, it does not have the importance it once did. (Knight, 1997, p. 9)*

*Education, especially higher education, is often considered as a form of diplomatic investment for future political and economic relations. For example, scholarships for foreign students who are seen as promising future leaders are considered to be effective way of developing an understanding of and perhaps affinity for the sponsoring country. This affinity may prove to be beneficial in future years in terms of diplomatic or business relations. (Knight, 1997, p. 9)*

*Economic Rationale.* The economic rationale refers to objectives related to either the long-term economic effects, where internationalization of higher

education is seen as a contribution to the skilled human resources needed for international competitiveness of the nation, and where foreign graduates are seen as keys to the country's trade relations, or the direct economic benefits, e.g. institutional income and net economic effect of foreign students, etc.

*At the institutional level, the economic motive or market orientation is becoming more prevalent as well. A rigorous debate is now under way as to whether the export of education products to international markets is in fact contributing to the international dimension of teaching, research and service. Clearly, there can be a direct and beneficial relationship between an international market orientation and the internationalization of the primary functions of a university/college or institute ... If one is to ensure that improving the quality of higher education is the primary goal of internationalization, not the development of international export markets, it is essential to find the balance between income-generating motives and academic benefits. (Knight, 1997, p. 10)*

**Academic Rationale.** The academic rationale includes objectives related to the aims and functions of higher education. One of the leading reasons cited for internationalizing the higher education sector is the achievement of international academic standards for teaching and research. 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. This premise is clearly based on the assumption that internationalization is considered to be central to the mission of the institution and is not a marginalized endeavour. Linked to the notion of enhancing the quality of education is the idea that internationalization is often a positive change agent for institutional building. International activities may serve as catalysts for major institutional planning/review exercises, or help with institution building through the enhancement of the human, technical or management infrastructure systems.

**Cultural and Social Rationale.** The cultural/social rationale concentrates on the role and place of the country's own culture and language and on the importance of understanding foreign languages and culture.

*The preservation and promotion of national culture is a strong motivation for those countries which consider internationalization as a way to respect cultural diversity and counter balance the perceived homogenizing effect of globalization. The acknowledgement of cultural and ethnic diversity within and between countries is considered as a strong rationale for the internationalization of a nation's education system. (Knight, 1997, p. 11)*

*Related to this point is the need for improved intercultural understanding and communication. The preparation of graduates who have a strong knowledge and skill base in intercultural relations and communications is considered by many academics as one of the strongest rationales for internationalizing the*

*teaching/learning experience of students in undergraduate and graduate programs. (Knight, 1997, p. 11)*

With changes over time, a shifting emphasis on the various rationales for internationalization can be observed. In the first period after World War Two, and based on political considerations, internationalization was focused especially on humanitarian aims of improving understanding between people for peaceful coexistence, and, later on, on solidarity with countries in the non-industrialized world. Increasingly, however, concerns related to international competence and competitiveness, and thus the economic rationale, becomes more important. It is felt that international labour markets require the higher education system to deliver graduates with academic, linguistic and intercultural qualifications that are internationally competitive. The academic and cultural/social rationales, reflected in measures like the mobility of students and staff, the improvement of the quality of education, a greater compatibility of study programs and degrees, and enhanced knowledge of other languages and cultures, seems all to be derived from the overarching economic rationale of strengthening human resources for international competitiveness.

#### *Stakeholders' Perspectives*

When analyzing rationales, it is necessary to take into account the diverse stakeholder groups within higher education: government, education and private sectors.

The *Government Sector* includes the different levels of government ranging from supra-national bodies to national, regional and local. Within the government sector there are many different stakeholder groups which have a vested interest in the international dimension of higher education. The most obvious are the education departments. There are other government units, such as foreign affairs, culture, economic development and trade, and science and technology, which all have an interest in the international dimension of higher education.

The *Education Sector* includes the different types of institutions (colleges, institutes, polytechnics, universities) which make up a system; the scholarly research and discipline groups; the professional and membership associations; the students, teachers and researchers, and administrators; and other advocacy or issue groups.

The *Private Sector* is a heterogeneous group, owing to the varied interests of the manufacturing, service or trade companies, the nature of their products and services as well as their geographical interests. Another influencing factor is the size of the company and whether it is local, national or transnational in ownership. It is important to recognize that the private sector is much broader than private education providers.

*Differences and Similarities among Sectors.* It is clear that different stakeholders will attribute different levels of importance to the four major rationale categories. However, what is most important to note is whether the difference in the level of importance is reason for conflict or collaboration among the stakeholder groups and whether it leads to a weakened or strengthened position for the international dimension. Therefore, it is important for an individual, institution or national body belonging to any of the sector groups to analyse the diversity and/or homogeneity of rationales and assess the potential for conflict or complementarity of purpose. This author proposes (Table I) a framework that would be useful for analyzing the level of importance that different sectors may attribute to the four categories of rationale.

Rationale	Government Sector	Educational Sector	Private Sector
<i>Political</i>			
<i>Economic</i>			
<i>Academic</i>			
<i>Cultural/Social</i>			

Table I. Stakeholders' Perspectives on Level of Importance of Rationale for Internationalization

*Difference of Rationale within a Sector.* It is important to recognize the differences in motivations for internationalization within a single sector. Table II provides the framework for analyzing how stakeholder groups in one sector might rank the importance of different motives for internationalization.

Rationale	Stakeholder Group	Stakeholder Group
<b>Political</b>		
· Promote national security & peace among nations		
· Preserve and promote national culture and identity		
<b>Economic</b>		
· Enhance economic, scientific & technological competitiveness		
· Promote marketing/income generation from educational products & services		...
<b>Academic</b>		
· Achieve international standards in teaching & research		
· Ensure that research addresses international & national issues		
· Address global interdependence through scholarship & research		
· Prepare graduates to be national and international citizens		



<b>Cultural &amp; Social</b>		
· Recognize and support cultural & ethnic diversity		
· Contribute to individual social & professional development		
· Enhance intercultural relations & understanding		

Table II. Level of Importance for Rationale of Stakeholder Groups

*Conceptual Framework for Internationalization: the national policy*

In reality, national policies for internationalization will in many cases be based on a mixture of various rationales. Therefore, the national policy in different countries and the possible changes over the past and those foreseen in the near future will be characterized along the various dimensions, presented by the following model. It should be noted that in this model the weight of a certain rationale or dimension is noted independently from all others. Put it another way, the two axes do not represent two continuums, but four separate lines each with a minimum (in middle of the model) and a maximum (at exterior of the model).

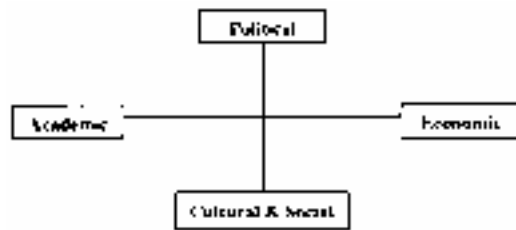


Figure 1. Rationales for the internationalization policy of a given country.

This model will not only be instrumental in the characterization of a country's policy and the possible shifts in it, but it will also be helpful in comparing the policies of various different countries. Obviously, the model will be applied on the basis of qualitative rather than quantitative data and analyses.

In the examination of establishment and implementation of national policies for internationalization and of the influence of internationalization on the national higher education system and institutions, specific attention should be paid to the interplay of various international and national forces and actors. In this way the following model for coordination of higher education in an international context will serve as a conceptual basis.

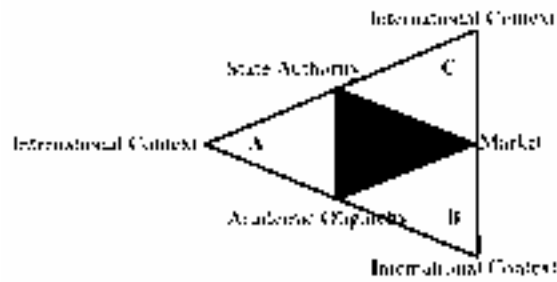


Figure 2. Coordination of higher education in an international context.

By placing the widely accepted Model of Coordination in Higher Education (Clark's triangle) in an international context, this model first of all describes international characteristics of the higher education system in a certain country. Secondly, it reveals the new areas of influence (Field A, B and C), and how the relationships and interaction between these forces are affected by international context. Correspondingly, questions can be asked about how the interaction between national forces is affected by the international context.

A: What is the interplay between international, national and institutional forces in the shaping and establishment of national policies for higher education?

B: What is the interplay between international context, market and institutions in the shaping of institutional policies?

C: What is the interplay between international, national and market forces in the shaping of national policies for higher education?

### **Strategies for Internationalization**

#### *Elements of Internationalization*

Based on a review of the literature, a number of elements have been identified which play an important role in the internationalization process (Harari, 1989; Audas, 1991; Aigner et al, 1992; Norfleet & Wilcox, 1992; Scott, 1992; Francis, 1993; Knight, 1994). In most cases, the elements are different types of academic activities, e.g. student/faculty exchanges, curriculum, recruiting/hosting international students. In other cases, organizational factors such as policy statements, annual planning and review systems are identified as the elements.

Differentiating between academic and organizational elements is essential. By only focusing on the academic or program activities one can overlook the process issues, which are important to ensure that the different activities reinforce each other, that they become central to the mission of the institution. Internationalization must be entrenched in the culture, policy,

planning and organizational process of the institution so that it can be both successful and sustainable.

Tables III and IV provide summaries of the important elements identified by many researchers. In most cases the researchers have not categorized an element as an academic/program activity or as an organizational factor. They have been labelled as such for the purpose of this article and to make the point that both are important.

<b>Governance</b>	Expressed commitment by senior leaders
	Active involvement of faculty and staff
	Articulated rationale and goals for internationalization
	Recognition of international dimension in mission statements and other policy documents
<b>Operations</b>	Integrated into institution-wide and departmental planning, budgeting and quality review systems
	Appropriate organizational structures
	Communication systems (formal & informal) for liaison and coordination
	Balance between centralized and decentralized promotion and management of internationalization
	Adequate financial support and resource allocation systems
<b>Support Services</b>	Support from institution-wide services units, i.e., student housing, registrar, counseling, fundraising, etc
...	...

Table III. Summary of Organizational Elements of Internationalization

<b>Academic Program</b>	Student exchange programs
	Foreign language study
	Internationalized curricula
	Area or thematic studies
	Work/study abroad
	International students
	Teaching/learning process
	Joint and double degree programs
	Cross-cultural training
	Faculty/staff mobility program
	Visiting lecturers and scholars
	Link between academic programs and research, training and development assistance
	<b>Research and Scholarly Collaboration</b>
Joint research projects	
International conferences and seminars	
Published articles and papers	
International research agreements	
Researcher and graduate student exchange programs	
International research partners in academic and other sectors	
Link between research, curriculum and teaching	
<b>Extra-</b>	Student clubs and associations

<b>curricular Activities</b>	International and intercultural campus events
	Liaison with community-based cultural groups
	Peer groups and programs
	Alumni development programs
	Social, cultural and academic support system
<b>External Relations and Services (Domestic &amp; Offshore)</b>	Community-based partnerships and projects with non-government groups or private sector companies
	International development assistance projects
	Customized/ contract training programs offshore
	Link between development projects and training activities with teaching and research
	Community service and intercultural project work
	Offshore teaching sites and distance education
	Participation in international networks
	Offshore alumni chapters

Table IV. Summary of Academic/Program Elements of Internationalization

### *Institutionalization of Approaches to Internationalization in Universities*

Institutionalization may be viewed along two dimensions:

Some universities will take abroad international elements in a sporadic, irregular, often knee-jerk way, with many loose ends in terms of procedure structure. Others will develop precise explicit procedures in an ordered and systematic manner. There is thus a spectrum from the ad hoc to the highly systematic.

For some universities, internationalism is essentially a relatively marginal activity – an interesting and stimulating addendum to a predominantly regional or national focus. For others, internationalism is highly central to their work and permeates every aspect of institutional life. There is thus another spectrum from marginality to centrality.

These two dimensions, as is seen in Figure 3, result in the development of a matrix of four quadrants.

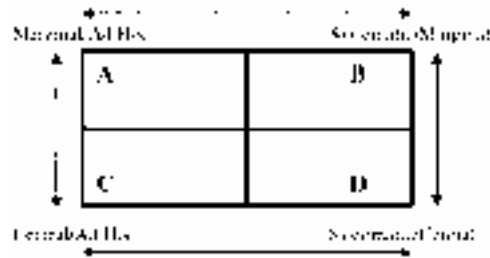


Figure 3. Institutionalization of approaches to internationalization in universities.

Universities should be able to locate themselves in one or other of the four quadrants, according to the typical operating characteristics in each quadrant. It is worth using this conceptual framework to reflect on the dynamics of internationalization in a university. Most institutions will find themselves in Quadrant A initially.

If external pressures towards international entrepreneurialism are strong and finances are precarious, the institution will move from Quadrant A to C quickly, and remain in Quadrant C until firm leadership moves the institution into Quadrant D. With weak external circumstances, an institution may move from Quadrant A to B, and then into Quadrant D with careful planning.

A question facing many institutions is how to translate what seems to be a strong commitment to internationalization into a comprehensive and practical strategy. While the development of such a strategy is a rather daunting challenge when looked at from a holistic perspective, Knight (1994) conceptualizes the process as a cycle, as seen in Figure 4.

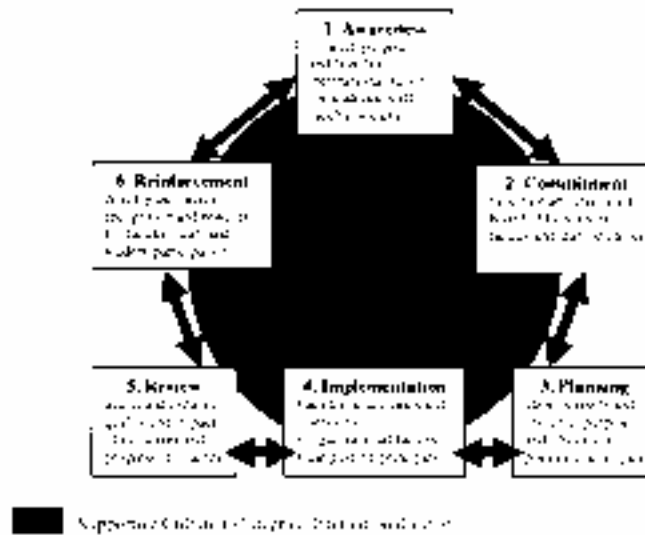


Figure 4. Internationalization cycle.

The process of internationalization is cyclical not linear. Reinforcement and reward lead to renewed awareness and commitment. A renewed and broader base of commitment leads to further planning processes. This usually stimulates changes to existing programs or policies and the development and implementation of new activities and services. A continuous support, monitoring and review system attempts to improve quality and involves incentives, recognition and rewards.

## Correspondence

Qiang Zha, Higher Education, Theory & Policy Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 1V6, Canada (qzha@oise.utoronto.ca).

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### **Selected Bibliography on Internationalization of Higher Education**

This bibliography focuses on many of the organizational, management and policy issues related to integrating an international dimension into university and college communities. The references have been organized by themes addressing different issues important to ensuring that internationalism becomes a central, planned and sustained part of the mission of universities and colleges. The purpose of this list is to provide a selection of references which focus on the process of internationalization as opposed to managing individual international education activities. While recognizing the importance of many publications from the 1970s and 1980s, only the most recent articles and books have been included in this listing.

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