

# THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONALIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (A CASE OF GEORGIAN UNIVERSITIES)

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## ABSTRACT

*Higher education administrators are challenged by a diversity of global changes and demands. Considering new requirements and demands that emerged from the globalized world, higher education institutions attempt to balance the quality of education while coping with the implementation of new concepts and notions. Despite the fact that internationalization and globalization are conflated and believed to be similar terms, they quite differ in their contexts. Unlike globalization, internationalization owns distinct strategies and tools that could be used and utilized by diverse educational institutions. The fluctuating characteristic of internationalization leads the perception of internationalization to vary from country to country and from institution to institution. Therefore, understanding the term and focusing on implementing its strategies are significant in meeting the global demands. Education institutions attempt to internationalize their institutions however, there is a risk of misunderstanding the concept and underestimating the quality of education. Education organizations need to contemplate on the essence of internationalization and decide how to internationalize by taking the priorities and requirements of their countries and regions into account. Therefore, internationalization of higher education serves as an important tool in meeting the global demands. Considering the studies carried out in Georgian higher education institutions, there should be further research on discovering the whys and wherefores of internationalization in order to understand the concept better and improve the tools and strategies that are utilized by distinct educational institutions. Being a broad term and possessing a considerable number of definitions, internationalization owns a variety of strategies that may lead institutions to enhance the quality of education in this regard.*

**Key words:** *Internationalization; Higher Education Institutions, Globalization*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Internationalization is a complex term that owns a considerable number of definitions and meanings that it needs further clarification (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988). Before starting a discussion on the definition of internationalization, it would be best to discuss the differences between globalization and internationalization. Despite the fact that the two concepts are usually understood as the same thing, they actually differ in their contexts (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Globalization is related to the trends in economic and academic contexts that emerged in 21<sup>st</sup> century while internationalization entails the approaches, policies and strategies that are utilized in order to meet the demands and requirements of global world (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Internationalization is not a new concept however, the research and studies were only accessible after 1990s. Internationalization of higher education institutions is a new concept which contains political, academic and sociocultural elements and its influence differs in accordance with the nation's or institution's context and setting (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). In 1970s, education possessed the international components such as mobility, exchanges among students, multicultural education and international studies and all the aspects were referred as international education. However, the term internationalization became dominant in 1990s and replaces all the terms related to international education (de Wit, Deca, & Hunter, 2015). Concentrating on commercialization of education due to the need for attracting more students and enhancement of student mobility have challenged the traditional views of

education. In order to balance the commercial aspect of internationalization of higher education institutions and ethical standards, education administrators are contemplating on the issue (de Wit, Deca, & Hunter, 2015).

Even though there are various studies conducted on internationalization of higher education in Georgia, there is still a need for research to be conducted on the field due to internationalization's dynamic and alterable aspect. It is important to discover how does internationalization is understood and applied in Georgian context. Because internationalization is a concept that varies from institution to institution and from country to country. Therefore, it requires contemplation regarding the strategies, priorities, the meanings that are perceived by university administrators and lecturers in a particular country and about the significance of internationalization in achieving global demands.

## 2. INTERNATIONALIZATION VS. GLOBALIZATION

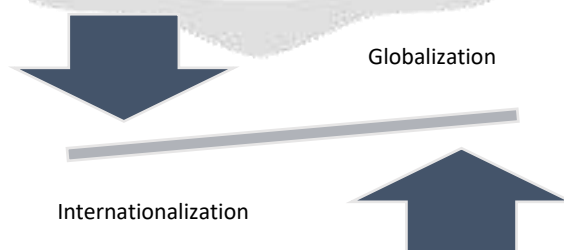
Internationalization and globalization are the two terms that are often fathomed as the same concepts; however, they actually possess different elements and components which draw a distinction in their meanings. Cambridge dictionary (Dictionary, Internationalization, n.d.) defines internationalization as “the action of becoming or making something become international.” This definition reflects the meaning of internationalization to some extent but internationalization is a broad term which does not possess a single definition that could be applied to all the contexts and need further clarification (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988). When the word internationalization is used, there is a tendency to understand the concept as “an outward movement” of the smaller or inner organizations to the bigger firms or institutions (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988, p. 36).

On the other hand, globalization is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (Dictionary, n.d.) as “a situation in which available goods and services, or social and cultural influences, gradually become similar in all parts of the world.” Globalization concept has emerged and grew to be dominant after the 1960s, where it brought new responsibilities and concerns (Enders & Fulton, 2002).

Despite the efforts and attempts of Peter Scott and Jan Sadlak in distinguishing the two concepts, there is still a tendency to conflate internationalization and globalization (Altbach, 2001). Considering the importance of distinguishing the meanings of the two terms, Enders and Fulton (2002) interpreted the meaning and roles of the two conceptions as the following:

Internationalization should be acting in accordance with the state where the implications will not diminish the national policies and power and will work hand in hand. On the other hand, globalization entails a strong cultural element which is generally Western and brings its own processes which challenge the states to restructure themselves. Thus, globalization is believed to be more independent while internationalization attempts to build mutual understanding (Erguvan, 2021).

Knight (2004) states and explains the difference between the two terms as “Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization” (p. 5). Thus, even though internationalization and globalization are tightly-coupled and correlated, they are quite distinct. While globalization is considered and viewed to be entailing the social and economic aspects, internationalization serves as a response to globalization, consisting of diverse strategies and tools (Cantu, 2013).



**Fig- 1:** Internationalization & Globalization, Knight, 2004

Despite all the discussions and studies regarding the explanation of the two theories, researches have not yet come to a consensus on the roles and characteristics of internationalization and globalization. De Wit and Brendenb

(2015) introduced the general viewpoints on both theories where globalization was contemplated more influential and 'evil'. On the other hand, internationalization was regarded as a kind and 'good' process. In their article, *The End of Internationalization*, de Wit and Brandenburg (2015) argued that despite all the negative aspects of commercialization that are blamed solely on globalization, internationalization is a force which governs the demands and practices of the global world.

The importance of analyzing and discovering the meanings and definitions of the two concepts is significant in order to implement and establish internationalization strategies appropriately. Otherwise, as de Wit and Brandenburg (2015) stated, becoming more internationalized would be regarded as a goal rather than a tool on the way of serving and becoming more efficient in the global world. Thus, higher education institutions need to be constantly thinking on the ways of improving themselves and articulating their missions. Focusing solely on engaging in internationalization would lead to a misconception of the mission (Erguvan, 2021).

### 3. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF GEORGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Internationalization is not a new term and concept however, the research and studies that were conducted in the field were only accessible three decades ago (Kehm & Teichler, 2007). Therefore, internationalization of higher education started to be dominating the research areas and interests only in 1990s due to an enhanced access to the publications and journals regarding the concept. Internationalization of higher education is viewed and referred as *fuzzy* due to its complex and changing aspects. (Kehm & Teichler, 2007).

There were numerous studies and research carried out regarding the internationalization of higher education institutions in Georgia. Chanadiri (2017) discusses the importance of internationalization of higher education in improving and developing the societies. In Georgia there have been enhanced international projects in the fields of infrastructure, business sectors, tourism and entertainment, however, there is lack of development in national policies towards internationalization. Chanadiri (2017) provides another perspective in need for internationalizing the higher education institutions by referring to the possible benefits that attracting foreign students would contribute to the country's economy and reputation. Moreover, he also adds that there should be governmental support in offering scholarships for international students to ease their arrival and accommodation (Chanadiri, 2017).

Even though Nastase (2020) stated that internationalization is a one-size-fits-all term in referring to a variety of processes including the staff/student mobility, knowledge transfer, cooperation and competition (Nastase, 2020, p. 91), internationalization is actually a broad and a complex term that does not own a single or exact definition that applies to all the contexts (Knight, 2004). Internationalization in Georgian higher education has started to be applied and implemented a couple of years with the intention of providing individuals and students with the necessary skills that are required in globalized world (Nastase, 2020). Internationalization of Georgian higher education served as a reform in education system where the traditional knowledge dissemination would be transferred to a more global and international level. Nastase (2020) has discovered three main forces in propelling internationalization of higher education in Georgian context which were Western influences; faculty members and students returning from abroad; and national university accreditation processes (Nastase, 2020, p. 94).

Campbell and Gorgodze (2016) conducted a research on how lecturers, administrators and governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) perceived internationalization. The findings demonstrated that the strategies and approaches utilized in Georgian context were similar to the global practices operating in other countries but there was a little agreement towards the best practices in internationalization. The research suggests and calls for developing a definition that would apply to of internationalization of higher education in Georgian context and serve as a guide for future improvements and enhancements of internationalization (Campbell & Gorgodze, 2016).

In another study that was carried out by Korghanashvili (2018), the importance of internationalization of Georgian higher education institutions (HEIs) and its implications were analyzed. Joint trainings and double degree programs, exchange programs and staff/student mobility as well as attracting international students were among the main practices of internationalization in Georgian higher education system (Korghanashvili, 2018).

Contemplating on the information and the knowledge given with regards to internationalization processes in Georgian HEIs, internationalization establishments have started to take place after entering the Bologna Process. The major practices of internationalization of HEIs in Georgian context were exchange programs, staff/student mobilities and international cooperation. The studies and research carried out in this sphere suggested that the

establishments should be persistently applied to the higher education institutions in order to improve the quality of education (Erguvan, 2021).

#### 4. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Internationalization is not a new concept however, it started to be dominant and popular after the 1990s due to the economic aspects and deliberations (Kreber, 2009). There is a widespread belief that internationalization is a reaction to globalization which builds mutual understanding with other nations while entailing respect towards the nation state (Qiang, 2003). Even though internationalization is a rich concept which possesses a vast number of perceptions and that it varies from country to country, it could be said that the culture and national components play a crucial role in forming internationalization of higher education (Kreber, 2009).

Despite the fact that internationalization of higher education institutions has emerged earlier, the studies conducted in the field could not be accessed or gathered until the mid-1990s (Kehm & Teichler, 2007). Mobility, cooperation, knowledge and political nuances are among the components that are included in internationalization of higher education (HE). The majority of educational institutions are attempting to highly internationalize and involve the international elements in their strategic goals and mission statements due to their positive outlook towards internationalization. While the other educational organizations contemplate the concept of internationalization and its impacts as the drivers for enhanced competition and happen to believe that education acquired in home country is better (Kehm & Teichler, 2007).



**Fig- 2:** Some of the components of Internationalization, Kehm & Teichler, 2007.

Educational institutions are confronting new challenges and responsibilities due to the high competition across the globe. There is a considerable number of studies conducted on internationalization of higher education institutions which demonstrate the significance of enhancing the concept (Dewey & Duff, 2009). The enhancing competition among higher educational institutions has led the organizations to take the issues of funding, ranking and reputation into consideration and to maintain their position amidst the globe (Jia, Yu, & Lo, 2015).

The concept of internationalization has evolved over the 25 years and brought a significant shift in university administrators' concerns from contemplating the ways for providing scholarships or financial support for international students to discover the ways to enhance international projects, mobility and intercultural environment (Knight & de Wit, 2018). The concept possesses a variety of strategies, approaches and trends but it still lacks a definition that applies to all the contexts due to each country's and region's altering priorities and demands. In this way, internationalization becomes a broad and a complex term which possesses a considerable number of definitions, strategies and approaches and lacks a consensus on its meaning and policies (Knight & de Wit, 2018).

Knight (2012) defines internationalization as 'a process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the goals, functions, and delivery of higher education' (p. 2). This definition provides a further explanation for internationalization which states that internationalization is not only a concept of engaging with outer organizations (Kehm & Teichler, 2007) but it is more of engagement of culture and global dimensions with the institutions. Knight (2012) also states that there is no definitive solution or explanation for internationalization due to its dynamic aspect.

The benefits of internationalization of higher education contains staff/student mobility, intercultural component, international collaboration and increased access to scientific publications around the globe (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). Internationalization in higher education does not only facilitate the staff/students' their skills in meeting the global

requirements but it also fosters the ethical values such as mutual understanding, enhanced intercultural communication and integration among nations (Jibeen & Khan, 2015).

One of the most challenging aspects of internationalization is that the concept does not possess a single explanation or a strategy since each culture, institution and country may perceive internationalization in diverse ways. There is a distinction between the English-speaking countries and non-English-speaking countries about the perception of internationalization (Gao, Baik, & Arkoudis, 2015). Since it is difficult to have a consensus on a 'one-size-fits-all' definition of the concept, internationalization challenges institutions to take the specific needs and requirements of a particular region, country or culture into consideration (Gao, Baik, & Arkoudis, 2015).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that internationalization is not a new term, there are some quandaries regarding the definition and conceptualization of the term that is applicable to all the contexts. Internationalization entails a considerable number of definitions and the perception of the concept may alter from country to country, from region to region, and from institution to institution. These aspects lead the education institutions to contemplate on the meaning of internationalization and take the tools, strategies and practices of it into consideration.

With the enhanced competition across the globe, the majority of higher education institutions are attempting to internationalize their organizations. However, there is a risk of misunderstanding internationalization and coping with the requirements and challenges from narrow perspective. Attempting to enroll more international students, increase staff/student mobility, organize more international conferences while ignoring the internationalization of curriculum may lead the institutions to miss the opportunities.

Therefore, considering the dynamic aspect of internationalization and its growing importance across the world are calling the educators and education administrators for analyzing the concept and examining the meaning of it not to mislead their organizations and undervalue the quality of education. Even though internationalization has not emerged recently, it still requires further research and understanding. In this way, internationalizing the higher education institutions would take place appropriately which would facilitate the quality improvement of higher education institutions. Besides, internationalization is sometimes viewed as a goal rather than a tool which may lead to some hazardous ramifications. Thereby, internationalizing the higher education institutions by contemplating on the definition, tools and strategies of the concept is highly significant. Otherwise, HEIs would miss the internationalization train and lag behind and lose their positions globally.

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