Challenges and Opportunities of Globalizing Higher Education: A Futuristic Approach

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Abstract

The process of globalization has affected all spheres of human activity and higher education is no exception. In this changing scenario, higher education can no longer be conceived solely in terms of national situation and criteria. The free flow of information and knowledge is desirable in the context of the liberalization of policies relating to education and national development. In this context, the higher education requires adapting itself to the needs of the time and responding to new challenges as the world is moving faster than ever before.

Many countries are overhauling their national policies for cross-border higher education for both globalization and protection. India is also one of them. In most countries, including India, there is an acceptance of the fact that cross-border higher education, if provided by the best institutions, can be the source of much sought-after quality education in professional disciplines and merging specializations. It can also deal with, to a limited extent, the problem of access to quality higher education. There is also the awareness that cross-border providers can energize local institutions through both example and competition. Their involvement can also result in various benefits like internationalization of curricula, improvement of infrastructure, development of a quality culture and a general enhancement of the academic standard.

Keywords

Internationalization, Higher education, Challenges.

The flow of technology, economy, people, values and ideas across borders has a profound impact on most aspects of society and is a significant factor impacting the nature and function of higher education. In relation to higher education, globalization can be defined, on one hand, in terms of the economic, technology, political and social forces opening access to twenty-first-century higher education, which has for much of the past century been owned by the upper and to a lesser degree, the middle classes of the developed world. On the other, it can mean increasing the exposure of traditional learners to international experiences. One definition focuses on increasing the massification of learning throughout the world, the other on increasing understanding and connection. The two are not mutually exclusive, but whatever the perspective, it is now accepted that globalization has increased the rate of internationalization in higher education.

In traditional post-secondary institutions, internationalization initiatives include creating a more international curriculum, fostering opportunities for students to study abroad, encouraging faculty and student exchanges, increasing international student recruitment efforts and exporting or importing programs. Capacity issues are also sometimes factored into the discussion; internationalization increases capacity at lower cost particularly for graduate students, and it should create greater cultural awareness. Many nation-states believe that it also fosters economic competitiveness. A contrary view, held by many in developing countries, is that capacity building through the temporary export of brains ultimately results in the removal of the best and brightest from their own futures. Evidence of increasing internationalization is generally manifest in a significant increase in the cross-border activities of higher education institutions. Cross-border higher education is fueled in part by the growing worldwide demand for higher education and is characterized by increased mobility of students, courses and programs and increased mobility of institutions across national borders. As stated by UNESCO, cross-border higher education encompasses a wide range of modalities from face-to-face instruction (such as students traveling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (through a range of technologies and including e-learning).

Student mobility has increased significantly over the past two decades. Ten million students studied abroad in 2011 a nine-fold increase over the number in 1980. African students are proportionately the most mobile, with one in 10 studying abroad, and central Asian students are next in line. The trend toward studying is likely to grow for both groups. Australia is one of the primary destinations for international students in OECD member countries. In 2010, 78 percent of all higher education students in Australia were international students. The question, of course,

is the meaning of this new gold rush of internationalization. It might be argued by some that it is a manifestation of the changing demographics of the developed world's post-secondary environment. Without an influx of students, institutions may have difficulty coping with decreasing demand and costs exceeding the average cost of inflation.

Within the open university movement, internationalization has manifested itself through direct distance delivery, partnership arrangements (e.g., two-plus-two agreements), franchising, the sale of curriculum, and the opening of branch campus operations. Other opportunities may emerge as private sector deliveries, national governments and public institutions reflect on how fiscal and social mandates can be met in the new economic and technologically enabled environments. Most post-secondary institutions believe that a cross-border or international experience is valuable to students in an increasingly globalized world. A survey on the internationalization of higher education, conducted by the International Association of Universities in 2009, drew responses from universities on most continents and from national university associations. A majority of respondents identified Internationalization as important to their institutions. Institutional respondents ranked the increase in international knowledge and intercultural skills in university students, faculty and staff members as the greatest benefit of internationalization. They ranked commercialization and commodification of higher education, in the context of eroding national boundaries, as the key risk.

The Concerning Issues and Challenges

While internationalization initiatives are occurring in most countries, the large English-speaking developed countries are the biggest providers of international education services, a fact that is causing some alarm. Consumer countries, including middle-income Asian and Latin American countries and, to a lesser extent, poorer developing nations that lack the capacity to meet the growing demands for higher education, are increasingly concerned about. their ability to control the internationalization agenda. The continuing pressures of globalization exacerbate this concern. While these countries might enjoy benefits such as increased choice, improved quality, and lowered cost, developing countries (in particular) face risks associated with opening the sector to international competition. The possibility of foreign competitors overpowering a poorly funded domestic higher education system is real. All too often the international operations of foreign providers are regulated neither by the authorities in their home countries, nor those in the host country. Ultimately, students may be the victims of whatever problems arise and universities are of course, about more than teaching; they are about research and service to their

communities. Nation-states must develop systems that allow them to contribute to world knowledge and to control their own knowledge futures.

Some believe that globalization has eroded the traditional role. of governments in the education sphere, that not only ownership but also issues such as quality, credibility and responsibility are being blurred. While in some countries the national frameworks forquality assurance, v, in many countries they are not prepared to address the challenges of cross-border provisions. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive frameworks for coordinating various initiatives at the international level, together with the diversity and unevenness of the quality assurance and accreditation systems at the national level, create gaps in the quality assurance of cross-border higher education, leaving some cross-border higher education provision outside any framework of quality assurance and accreditation. This makes students and other stakeholders more vulnerable to low-quality provisions and disreputable provides of cross-border higher education.

Increasingly, however, national governments are beginning to regulate the activities of foreign institutions, particularly those of distance education providers. This can be achieved through accreditation processes, the creation of national lists, student loan restrictions, residency requirements, and copyright regulations. Such restrictions are expected to increase in the years to come. The private sector has already reacted by collaborating with or acquiring. indigenous institutions, or by franchising courses. Internationalism is likely to remain a central long-term force in higher education, although the ways in which it manifests itself are likely to change.

In addition to cross-border international initiatives by higher educational institutions, attempts to internationalize the curriculum have gained momentum. Some assert that the curriculum is the most important element in the provision of an international education, and argue persuasively that internationalized curricula are integral to any process of internationalization. According to many educators, the intent of internationalization should be the raising of global consciousness". Internationalization of the curricula is multifaceted and purports to recognize values and nurture respect for differences among the cultures and communities of the world. Given the diversity of people, it becomes clear there is no single way to go about internationalizing courses.

The movement in goods and services, including educational services, across international borders is viewed as a key economic outcome of globalization. Key decision-makers consider higher education to be a tradable commodity as well as a social service. Economic considerations related to international competitiveness have become a significant driving force behind the internationalization of learning. Along

Dr. Sangita Singh

with the movement of goods and general services, the movement of educational services and products has increased significantly in the last decade. Education is increasingly seen not only as an export commodity but also as a key national opportunity for branding a nation's knowledge process. Knowledge institutions, whether private or public, are regarded as key stakeholders in a country's competitiveness. This view has gained particular prominence since the establishment of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO), t first-ever set of multilateral, legally enforceable rules governing international trade in services, including education services.

Opportunities for Globalization of Higher Education

As learning becomes increasingly borderless, higher education policy is likely to rank increasingly high on national agendas. Developing countries view increasing higher education participation as key to their transition to developed country status. The argument that higher education is a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy is now widely accepted, although there are those who question whether it should receive the same priority as other development strategies. Many accept that higher-level employment skills are critical to sustaining a globally competitive research base and to improving knowledge dissemination to the benefit of all societies. However, some have argued that branded education (MIT, Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford, etc.) given people's varying abilities to access it, represents a marketing initiative by already-dominant institutions and nations, directed to ensuring a market share of the world's best brains. Does the real question become how to ensure mass access to higher education? Providing open, distance and technology-enabled learning through national for-profit and not-for-profit providers is increasingly seen as the key to allowing mass access to higher educational opportunities. The challenges inherent in this prospectare real.

Reflecting its roots in distance education, the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) was, until 1982, known as the International Council for Correspondence Education. However, distance education has undergone a significant transformation from its origins in independent or correspondence study. Until recently that transformation has been best characterized by the creation and growth of more and more open universities since 1970. Open universities may be viewed, from many respects, as forerunners in tackling the challenges that now confront higher education systems worldwide. In addition to the growth of open distance learning universities, however, the growth of corporate involvement in education including distance education is also taking place. Pearson Galgotias etc. International media companies and world leaders in educational and consumer

publishing are some of the examples. In the last few decades, the open and distance concepts of education have also spawned or resonated with other movements which have created their own terminology, some drawn from popular culture (e.g., the knowledge society, the new knowledge economy, open courseware, open-source, wikieconomics, and technology-enabled learning). Embedded in all of these concepts and, it could be argued, emerging from them is the belief that access to knowledge and learning is a universal right, one of the key rights of the global community. In fact, knowledge is increasingly regarded as the solution to individual and collective social and economic problems: it has become a new global religion. However, this new solution may soon be embroiled in the inevitable discussions of the new knowledge imperialism and the new marginalization.

Those who are successful in the new global knowledge economy may harvest great wealth and exert an inordinate influence on the world's future. Ensuring equity, ensuring respect for all cultures, ensuring that everyone has access to learning, ensuring that economic opportunity is open to all, and ensuring that the planet survives the economic and technological struggles among regions. nations and the corporate sector represent the great challenges of the coming decades. Several regards the distance, open, and technology-enabled learning movement as one of the few movements that show a convergence of interests and knowledge that might be capable of meeting these challenges. While the transformation o distance, open and technology-based learning continues in these new contexts, it is important to understand that challenges exist and how learning institutions that have adopted the principle of equity of access will meet them. These new learning models can meet the challenges posed by the new environment, but learning institutions may have to use them resolutely, vigorously and collaboratively. Such an approach will likely require new partnerships among post-secondary institutions, regional national groupings, the corporate sector and non-governmental organizations. No one can address global or technological issues alone.

The right to a primary and secondary education has long been accepted, but the belief that higher education is also a human right has become widely accepted around the globe. This expectation springs from the cross-cultural and increasingly universal belief that education offers hope for employment, a better life for one's seland one's children and fulfillment of one's personal aspirations. Thus, while population growth and demand for access are exceeding the capacity of institutions to deliver, at the same time raising expectations of people that access to education is their right. This disparity brings an added urgency to the efforts of governments and institutions to resolve in order to avoid further social unrest.

Path of Expansion

Higher education has expanded remarkably in recent decades. Growth is, by all measures, faster than anticipated. Projections gave 140 million students worldwide by 2020, but the number has already been achieved, in 2010, 142 million students were enrolled worldwide, up from 68 million in 1991. The average annual growth from 1991 to 2004 was 5.1 percent. Most of this growth has been in Africa. Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab countries, and in Eastern and Central Europe. China and India have doubled their enrolments in the past 10 years alone. In many countries, youth and young adults have driven this increase but in others, such as Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, a significant number of older adults have also been entering the system. In 2006 in Canada, for example, the majority of part-time students (approximately 190,000 of 275,000) were 25 years old or older. Although worldwide participation rates in higher education are increasing participation rates in some regions of the world remain extremely low. The status of higher education in Africa is a cause for particular concern. Africa has an overall participation rate of less than 45 percent, and participation drops to less than two percent in sub-Saharan Africa. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa (UNISA), the oldest open university in the world, believes that open and distance learning may be the only viable and affordable means of providing post-secondary education in Africa, given the constraints there.

Much of the recent worldwide growth in higher education has been at private universities while public institutions have been struggling with smaller budgets and inadequate staffing. This dominance of the private sector results partly from the fact that governments do not have the resources to provide post-secondary learning opportunities at the level needed to respond to the demand. The tensions among national agendas, offshore international providers and international trade structures and between the private sector and national institutions are likely to become intense in the decades to come. These tensions will increase as developing countries attempt to increase post-secondary participation rates, while quality and national control. In contrast, while the capacity building will become a critical initiative in the coming decades for developing countries, increasing enrolment in the underfunded public and private institutions of the developed world will be equally critical.

Challenges for Higher Education Providers

Clearly, the projected growth of the worldwide population of people qualified to process from high school to higher education will yield a significant increase in demand that cannot be met by existing capacity or infrastructure. Given their combined population for Asia, South America, and Africa to reach a level of post-secondary

penetration equal to that of developed countries, they would have to build tens of thousands of traditional universities, each accommodating 40,000 students. While the inevitable growth of universities in the developing world will transform the map of higher education worldwide, new approaches are clearly needed. It is generally acknowledged that open and distance education is a good way of reaching out to large numbers of students. India accounts for a quarter of the developing world's population and has the third-largest higher education system in the world. Approximately 24 percent of all higher education students in India are enrolled in distance education institutions specifically in the 13 national and state open universities and the 106 institutions, mostly public, which offer both on-campus and correspondence programs. A 2007 study, under the auspices of the Commonwealth of Learning, of the development of the Indian state open universities concluded that ODL (open and distance learning) has vast potential in a country like India with millions of young aspirants eager to receive higher education and with conventional universities and colleges simply not being in a position to accommodate them. The infrastructure for the expansion of open universities is fairly good in the country, especially the Indira Gandhi National Open University(IGNOU) willing to help the SOUS (State Open University).

Open universities are acknowledged as having had a significant impact upon innovation in higher education and as having paved the way for the next generation of education, which Peters characterizes as the "raise of digitized distance education which began in the 1908. Peters credits open universities with enabling the emergence of virtual universities and corporate universities. Indeed, today a number of corporations operate their own universities for their employees, although some, like Volkswagen's AutoUni, are designed for a more general non-corporate elite.

The recent expansion of higher education has been companied by the satisfaction of distance education providers. The widespread development of e-learning, which usually means distance learning with some online components, is occurring in both the public and private sectors. The provision of blended learning opportunities has also increased, through learning models that combine traditional classroom practice with e-learning solutions. For example, students in a traditional class are assigned both print and online materials, have online mentoring sessions with their teacher through chat, and are subscribed to a class e-mail list. Additionally, web-based courses can be supplemented by periodic face-to-face instruction. There is little doubt that, in the last several years, convergence has occurred between the distance education format and the on-campus format. While the traditional universities adopt technologies within their way of working, they also need to adopt the

methodologies of the distance education learning institutions. New types of institutions have emerged as well, and the number and type of educational offerings within existing institutions have increased and become more diverse.

It is very likely that private-for-profit institutions will play a greater role in higher education. Since 1997, higher education in Australia has shifted from a primarily publicly funded system to one in which individuals and other private entities contribute to educational costs. Data published by the OECD show that, between 1995 and 2004, the public share of expenditures for Australia's tertiary educational institutions declined from 64.8 percent to 47.2 percent. This decline in public expenditure for higher education mirrors a trend that is widespread in the developed world.

The Way Ahead

Developing nations, by necessity, are likely to seek a much greater role for private, for-profit institutions than is the case in the developed world. Capitalizing on supply and demand, for-profit institutions in the developed world will likely continue to expand their cross-border provision of educational services, especially through distance and e-learning. Indeed, private provision is already higher education's fastest-growing segment worldwide20. It is predicted that private institutions will account for most of the higher education provision in some developing countries in a decade or two. "In East Asia, 80 percent of students are enrolled in private tertiary education institutions in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines where governments regulate the private higher education sector tightly. Should we be convened about the growth of privately funded, corporate higher education? What are the threats or risks inherent in this growth? Conversely, are there opportunities or benefits associated with the growth of these new providers? The public sector has been gaining strength, even though public institutions are under increasing pressure to operate in a costrecovery rather than cost responsive ways. The Indira Gandhi National Open University now has 2.5 million students, as do not number of Chinese radio and television universities. Numbers are burgeoning at UNISA as well. Conventional, face-to-face universities are increasingly moving into the delivery of online learning programs.

While free flow of information and knowledge is desirable in the context of liberalization of policies relating to education and economic development, it is equally essential that the operation of foreign education providers be regulated in order to protect the national interest. Finally, it has to be ensured that the procedures, where worked out in detail, are not too cumbersome and should give positive signals to the genuine high-quality providers. While encouraging reputed universities that are capable of providing education of international standard, it is also necessary to regulate

the activities of the run-of-the-mill providers who are operating largely for the purpose of making a quick profit. Franchise operations conducted in collaboration with a non-academic partner need to be legally banned. Nations need to devise a regulatory mode that encourages the cross-border provision of quality education ye prevents exploitation.

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