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Internationalization of Higher Education and its Impact on Enhancing Corporate Competitiveness and Comparative Skill Formation

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Abstract

The idea that career competencies are required to achieve corporate competitiveness is an integral part of the reference on globalization. As things present, it is no easy task to keep up with the rapidly growing vocabulary which captures the whole mass of skills that prepare a student to be part of the global workforce. In the discourse on globalization, the notion that competitiveness is critical to organizational sustainability has proved much the case. In consequence, it falls to higher education institutions to be responsive to those skills which constitute work-preparedness—and the way forward is through internationalization of higher education. The staggering pace at which trans-national corporations are moving up the global value chain implies that higher education institutions need to move inwards from peripheral to core internationalization. In other words, only such internationalization will serve as results in shift towards substantive skill formation. The study argues that internationalization of higher education contributes imperatively to the attainment of global career-readiness competencies; further, it discusses the myriad ways in which this comes about. The paper delves into the research concern largely through critical synthesis of published literature.

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1. Introduction

Globalization refers to the increasing integration and interdependence of groups as a result of cross exchange

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between them (Houghton & Sheehan, 2000). In a knowledge economy-centric definition, Altbach & Knightl (2007) define the concept thusly:

. . . [t]he economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international involvement. Global capital has, for the first time, heavily invested in knowledge industries worldwide, including higher education and advanced training. This investment reflects the emergence of the “knowledge society,” the rise of the service sector, and the dependence of many societies on knowledge products and highly educated personnel for economic growth (p. 290).

Globalization is directly correlated to the facility with which trans-local entities interact with each other (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 291).ⁱ The term globalization, as it has come to be understood, took roots in the Anglophone world following the Second World War. The new world order is increasingly being marked by incorporation of systems to form a “flat world” (Friedman, 2005). An outcome of this phenomenon follows that insularity and parochialism, more than ever before, foretold the danger of becoming irrelevant and perishing.

It is relatable that globalization devaluates the notion of nation-states without invalidating it, and herein is introduced the concept of internationalization. The two are frequently misperceived to be substitutable: while internationalization arises out of globalization, it is not identical to it. Internationalization refers to an engagement of multi-national, multi cultural and multi lingual dimension into an entity or phenomenon (cf. Altbach, Reisburg & Rumbley, 2009, pp 23-24).ⁱⁱ Along the same lines, Van der Wende (2001) refers to internationalization as the “process of increasing cooperation between states or to activities across state borders” (as cited in Powar, 2013). This description is important in that it emphasizes the dissimilarity between globalization and internationalizationⁱⁱⁱ from the standpoint of the manner in which each views the role of nation-states.

In an oft-cited definition of internationalization of higher education, Knight (1993, p. 21) states: “[I]nternationalisation is the process of integrating an international or intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of an institution of higher learning”.^{iv} In a similar process-oriented definition, Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley (2009, p. 23) note: “[internationalization refers to] specific policies and programs undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments”. It is noteworthy that both authors pivot the definition on infusion of an approach to reach out and interrelate with other nations. *Au contraire*, the proliferation of globalization is described as “tentacular spread”.^v Thus, internationalization is not a goal unto itself, but means to an end: its value lies in enhancing pedagogy, research and innovation, and institutional engagement (cf. Van der Wende, 1997, as cited in Qiang, 2003).

Middlehurst & Woodfield (2007) have observed that internationalization has impacted higher education primarily in two ways: first, it has made the higher education sector more competitive, and secondly, it has driven institutions to devise policy prescriptions at the organizational level. The former implies that higher education the world over is viewed as a global marketplace for international students, academics and research funds. Thus, institutions and education providers do not interact with each other in a random fashion; rather they engage in active competition. The latter impact refers to the increasing range and complexity of activities undertaken by higher education institutions. These strategies might be limited in their goal to increasing international student enrolment, or these might be more comprehensive and aim to transform the entire ethos of the organization so it is internationalised across manifold dimensions. The understanding that internationalization of higher education adds competitive advantage drives institutions to incorporate the international element. This view perceives institutions to be partakers in the global marketplace of higher education as well as the multinational job market. Since globalization necessitates familiarity with cross cultural context it falls to higher education institutions to prepare the future workforce to meet the demands of global career. This view is borne out of the interpretation that internationalization is part of an inevitable “academic entrepreneurialism” (Davies, 1992, as cited in Knight, 1994). The impact of globalization on educational practices and processes has emerged as subject of research interest in its own right—complete with its own lexicon; cf. Appadurai (2006) and Castells (2000), as cited in Spring (2008, p. 333).

2. Competitiveness and skills

The notion of employability and its relation to higher education is continually transmuting to incorporate newer modalities. Employability competencies are under-girded by the twin concepts of “massification” of higher education and knowledge economy (cf. Gibbons et al. 1994; OECD, 1988; Scott, 1998; Scott, 1999, as cited in Teichler, 1999). The idea of knowledge economy refers to an economy which pivots on knowledge to thrust forward

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