Understanding of the internationalization of higher education

Compreendendo a internacionalização da educação superior

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ABSTRACT
Institutions of higher education, which are developing internationalization processes, have been investing heavily in the qualification of their faculty and students, providing them opportunities to join international programs in partner institutions abroad. The concepts that underpin these activities, the reasons and motivations that are leading institutions of higher education to join such processes, benefits, trends, risks, and challenges are fundamental to the understanding of this issue. Based on some of the most prominent researchers of internationalization (Altbach, 2007; De Wit, 2004; Rudzki, 1998; Knight, 2005; Van Der Wende, 1996; Sebastián, 2004; Stallivieri, 2016) this article intends to highlight some of the concepts studied. It also aims to help institutional leaders when opting for the

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internationalization of their structures, emphasizing the necessity of investments and support demanded for satisfactory results.

**Keywords:** internationalization; higher education institutions; international cooperation.

**RESUMO**
Instituições de Ensino Superior, que estão focados no processo de internacionalização, têm investido fortemente na qualificação de seu corpo docente e discente, proporcionando-lhes oportunidades de participar de programas internacionais oferecidos por instituições parceiras no Exterior. Os conceitos que sustentam essas atividades, as razões que levam as IES a aderirem a esse processo, seus benefícios, tendências, riscos e desafios são fundamentais para a compreensão do fenômeno. Com base nos pesquisadores mais proeminentes que estudam a internacionalização (ALTBACH, 2007; DE WIT, 2004; RUDZKI, 1998; KNIGHT, 2005; VAN DER WENDE, 1996; SEBASTIÁN, 2004; STALLIVIERI, 2016), este artigo tem a intenção de destacar alguns desses conceitos, a fim de auxiliar os dirigentes das IES, no momento em que optarem pela internacionalização de suas estruturas, enfatizando a necessidade de investimentos e apoio necessários para a obtenção de resultados satisfatórios.

**Palavras-chave:** internacionalização; Instituições de Ensino Superior; cooperação internacional

**RESUMEN**
Las instituciones de educación superior, que se centran en el proceso de internacionalización, han estado invirtiendo fuertemente en la capacitación de sus docentes, investigadores y estudiantes, brindándoles la oportunidad de participar en los programas internacionales emprendidos en los centros asociados en el extranjero. Los conceptos que subyacen a estas actividades, las razones y motivaciones que están llevando a las instituciones de educación superior para formar parte de este proceso y, en especial, sus beneficios, tendencias, riesgos y desafíos son fundamentales para la comprensión de este problema. Sobre la base de algunos de los investigadores más destacados de la internacionalización (ALTBACH, 2007; DE WIT, 2004; RUDZKI, 1998; KNIGHT, 2005; VAN DER WENDE, 1996; SEBASTIÁN, 2004; STALLIVIERI, 2016), este artículo pretende poner de relieve algunos de los conceptos con el fin de ayudar a los líderes institucionales al optar por la internacionalización de sus estructuras, conscientes de las inversiones y el apoyo que exigirán para obtener resultados exitosos.

**Palabras clave:** internacionalización; instituciones de educación superior; cooperación internacional.

**Understanding of the Internationalization of Higher Education**

Internationalization has been taking great prominence in the late twentieth century, driven strongly by the phenomenon of globalization. The changes experienced in different areas whether in the economic, political, social or cultural scene caused shifts in humanity’s behavior.
and created the need for new responses to the conditions imposed by this globalized society.

According to Knight,

The growing number of national, regional, international, and cultural conflicts is asking the faculty to assist the students in discussing global issues and help them understand the new international and intercultural relationships. The mobility of the labor market and the increasing cultural diversity of communities require that both students and teachers have a better understanding and evident skills to work and live in different and culturally diverse environments. (KNIGHT, 2004, p. 26).

The easy access and velocity in which information moves, the fast evolution in the production of scientific and technological knowledge, the new findings that enhance living quality of various populations around the globe, while at the same time bringing new solutions to problems also demand a new behavior. Ending up by building a new profile for citizens, professionals, and human beings in general who represent the most critical component of this new society’s transformation.

According to Ianni, a global community reveals as a new moment in history. The horizon by which one can re-read the past, interpret the present, and imagine the future. (IANNI, 1999, p. 134).

Revisiting the past enables us to understand humanity’s movements at this point in time, i.e.: Why is an international experience so valued nowadays? Why are young people increasingly looking for qualification abroad? Why is it so necessary to internationalize higher education institutions?

Revisiting the concepts of higher educational establishments, the universal concept of knowledge, and the origin of the first universities is understood as having been very common in providing exchanges between students and professors from different countries, seeking knowledge and experience. Since the beginning, cosmopolitan characteristics formed the universities and students were like pilgrims developing their studies and getting their degrees from different institutions on their way back home.

Charle and Verger, when writing about the History of Universities, state that:

For a long time, students moved from Central Europe to Italian universities [Padua, Bologna, Siena] and, to a lesser extent, to French ones [Paris, Montpellier, Orleans], developing their studies visiting various universities and getting their degree during the return. What generated this mobility during the Middle Ages, in the first place, was the pursuit of new knowledge, new discoveries in different parts of the continent. However, very strongly, alongside the studies referred to, emerged the ride itself, the existential

If the past helps us understand the contemporary phenomena and interpret the present, from this perspective, it means reading what is being flagged as a demand from global society. It values international experience, recognizes the intellectual potential of individuals; giving a proper value to the production of scientific and technological knowledge, and gives high priority to the concepts of solidarity and tolerance for the solution of experienced problems, mainly created by this society.

This shows that it is more than urgent to rethink the educational system for the future.

It is evident that one of the significant challenges for higher education institutions, for educators, and for the leaders who run educational institutions is to define how faculty members, students, and researchers can develop global awareness. Also, develop intercultural communication skills, learn about other countries’ cultures, improve the abilities to work in multicultural environments, and transform themselves into international people, prepared for the challenges the future holds.

Morin teaches that:

Sciences have enabled us to understand many certainties. However, they also helped to reveal areas of uncertainty. Educational policy needs to become an instrument that leads the student to a creative dialogue with the doubts and questions of our time, a necessary condition for citizenship education. It can no longer ignore the urgency of universal citizenship, which, in turn, requires new ethics and therefore a school of education and citizenship for all. (MORIN, 2005, p. 94).

In today’s world, there is a significant expansion of internationalization resulting from new demands, perceived increase in quantity, quality, volume, scope, direction, and goals of international cooperation activities.

The academic community begins to react to the effects of globalization through its insertion in global scenarios, whether due to mobility through participation in conferences, seminars, events, or exchange programs. It can also be caused by the presentation of studies of scientific nature, or, yet, by the publication of articles in scientific and international journals.

A new behavior in the scientific society that recognizes priorities and values, even more, all intellectual manifestation, especially the ones that contain global components.

The presence of internationalization becomes possible in all environments of higher education institutions, i.e., it is necessarily an
educational environment that goes much beyond the known tripod of higher education: teaching, research, and extension.

As a result, experts who study the issue of internationalization have been writing various concepts, as described by Knight (1994) and Sebastian (2004), respectively:

The internationalization of universities is the process of introducing an international dimension in the culture and institutional strategy, in the functions of teaching, research, and extension and the projection of the capacity of the university. (KNIGHT, 1994, p. 16).

This action, according to Sebastian, is considered

A social process manifested within universities, affecting its attitudes, values, and perceptions, giving way to a broader worldview and understanding of reality. He finds internationalization as a means to strengthen institutions by incorporating international standards of content and teaching, and thematic organization of research methods, as well as outreach activities. He also understands that each organization can expand the supply capacity and the offer of products developed by faculty and research within international academic groups, improving the visibility and the recognition of the institution, as well as obtaining financial returns. (SEBASTIAN, 2004, p. 34).

Internationalization is no longer an issue apart from academic life. It shall be within the scope of policies and strategic decisions of superior institutional councils. It ceases to be an option and turns into a goal to be achieved, with obvious reasons for this.

**Motives for internationalization**

Critical moments in the global scenario stimulated the dissemination of higher education internationalization. One of the most notable was in 1998 when teaching experts from around the world met in Paris for the World Conference on Higher Education of UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization - to discuss the direction that this segment of society should take.

Among the most significant targets, expressed during the meeting, was the need for internationalization, no longer seen as an option taken by some institutions, but as a necessary step to encourage the balanced development of nations provided through education.

The exerts’ understanding is that through the institutional internationalization, a university can compete on equal terms with the best and most renowned higher education institutions in the world, once it observes some relevant criteria of high institutional quality standards.
The guideline document of the World Conference of UNESCO, Changes, and Development in Higher Education, proclaims that, in compliance with the mandate entrusted by its Constitutive Act,

UNESCO will continue to make international cooperation as its main aim and its preferred mode of action in the field of higher education. It should foster collaboration on a global scale, seeking the most efficient way to contributing to the strengthening of higher education and research in developing countries. (STALLIVIERI, 2004, p.27).

The economic scenario, the need for financial gains, and increased profit margin are reliable indicators of good reasons for the internationalization of higher education institutions, especially to the ones who are, by definition, exclusively private schools, for-profit. In a highly competitive education market, these can be identified not only as good reasons for seeking a competitive edge but also considered suitable for the differential uptake of students.

Making money can be the principal cause of all internationalization projects in the educational sector for-profit and some non-profit, facing financial difficulties. However, this may not be the reality for many institutions which find other reasons for international insertion. Instead, they seek to expand their research capabilities and knowledge and to broaden their cultural understanding. (ALTBACH and KNIGHT, 2007, p. 292).

An institution that makes the option for internationalization needs to take under account a careful analysis of what are the real benefits and gains with this complex and challenging process. It must take into account the different levels of the process, i.e., benefits from the macro-contexts until the micro-contexts, which generate at the end personal gains.

**Advantages and gains obtained with internationalization**

Once a country can count on internationalized higher education institutions, it will certainly aim at higher levels of development, the growth of its economy, the expansion of its mental projection, higher active participation and attendance in global forums, the international improvement in the importance of researchers’ roles.

Due to this projection at the national and international level, the gains from internationalization help the regional development where the institution is. Researchers, through partnerships with foreign professionals, or through their participation in networks of universal knowledge, can identify common problems, jointly find solutions to these problems, and also establish strong ties and constant fluid communication. Consequently, the region is projected to find sustainable ways to solve the problems that consume energy in search of viable solutions.
Therefore, at the national level and the regional scale, the gains are visible and deserve support, not only from institutional authorities but also from national, regional, and local authorities.

Once the institution determines and establishes publicly that among its goals it is structuring the internationalization process, it undoubtedly becomes part of a select group of leading-edge institutions that understand they can expand quality education with strategic alliances in different areas of knowledge.

The institution clearly states its objectives with internationalization and, thus, can apply for national and international funds for the development of joint research projects.

Fundraising is strongly linked to the institution’s ability to promote their active inclusion in international order problem discussions, which always actively contemplate components of understanding global society and international communities’ problems. This national and international recognition ultimately generates new opportunities and hence the projection of the institution and the respect for the cultural identity and the way communication with others is established.

One may divide it between gains of academic units and the internationalization of the agents, i.e., the personal benefits of each of the participants in this process as individuals.

By analyzing the movement of the academic units, one can identify immediately that the presence of international researchers fully contributes to oxygenation in learned behavior, which benefits all involved parts.

The perspective of intercultural communication, to be included in daily academic life, greatly enriches the educational environment. Beyond the physical presence of individuals from other nationalities, their language, their habits, their beliefs, and values can ensure that.

The inclusion of literature of authors from other nationalities; case studies and the analysis of situations can provide the internationalization of the curriculum. It can also be through the solution of different problems with the understanding from someone from another culture, which represents a differential in the curricula gaining a lot with internationalization (STALLIVIERI, 2016).

Alongside the achievements listed above, it is crucial to mention the individual benefits of each faculty member, each researcher or each student. The professional growth that each one of these parts may obtain as a result of an international experience, either living abroad or sharing with people from other nationalities in the campus itself is unquestionable.

The ability to learn from a different perspective, from another point of view, having the opportunity to hear other opinions, to witness other cultural events and to enhance linguistic ability certainly makes a difference in the potential of the acquired knowledge.
These opportunities are unique in the academic life of a student or a professor and should be valued and legitimated as educational demonstrations of high magnitude.

The growing importance of knowledge, appreciation of individuals’ intellectual capital, the information revolution, and the responsibility in creating and maintaining understanding between people and the spirit of solidarity with the less developed countries are being heavily discussed and placed as priority targets for the educational sector.

Through internationalization and its different possibilities of international cooperation actions, institutions can and should: crave international levels of visibility and international recognition; attract students from various parts of the world, promoting the internationalization of the campus; pursue academic excellence through the presence of professors and researchers of international renown.

Considering academic strategies, they can also participate in committees, selection processes, grants of international awards; research groups formed by scientists from prestigious institutions reaping results with the products generated by the research. By doing so, they may produce and publish scientific results in peer-reviewed world-renowned journals; compete in international bids for obtaining financial resources and investment funds arising from research agencies; send students to other institutions aiming to offer them the best schooling possibilities and form a qualified critical mass to compete globally.

Internationalization opens the possibility to receive top students on campus to boost and raise the level of performance of their own students; enables the placement of graduates in the international job market by means of the results observed in their academic and scientific profile. As a result, they become attractive for foreign investments; enhance local, regional and national development; extend the capability of communicating through the proficiency of foreign languages; expand cross-cultural skills due to intercultural behaviors and understanding of different cultures.

Evidence points to the knowledge of the reasons and the results that make an institution of higher education pursue the internationalization of its structures.

However, the observation of some key points is necessary a priori.

Institutions that seek their effective internationalization without a clear understanding of their conditions, features, profile, weaknesses, and strengths can hardly achieve such goals. Therefore, it becomes necessary to conduct activities that can diagnose the internationalization status in the target institution.
Importance of a proper diagnosis for the internationalization process

It becomes essential that each institution can develop an analysis of the level of internationalization to join the global scenario. They must consider relevant information such as the vision, the mission, and the institutional development plan. Geographical location, communication language and instruction language; the potential for scientific publications in journals of international circulation and hence in foreign languages are also important. The capability to participate in research networks and international research groups; the ability to establish partnerships with similar institutions; availability to manage and integrate international academic mobility programs to faculty members, researchers, and students. Finally, the capability to receive representatives of international scientific communities; the availability of favorable infrastructure for the development of research projects of international negotiations, among other factors, must be considered.

By choosing to implement an internationalization plan, it is essential that each institution carries a clear understanding of its place as a principal protagonist for the promotion of higher education to align its structuring actions with the desired goals to be achieved with such plan.

It needs to define appropriate conditions, providing proper resources; checking the available infrastructure; adapting to new demands, and even creating new administrative bodies, which can address the issue and participate using adequate communication skills as the domain of different foreign languages needed when dealing with international partners.

A previously developed institutional diagnosis is not only recommended but essential because, in doing so, the institution can more precisely identify its potential for international insertion and the capabilities it has to absorb resulting demands.

A diagnosis must detect the already established level of internationalization before starting a new process, and it should be done preferably by both internal and external experts.

Given their expertise, these professionals can assess and identify the exact conditions and give a direction to the development plan, as well as jointly define what actions the institution can and should prioritize when establishing the steps for internationalization.

When working in together with the committee of international experts, it is essential to identify among the members of the faculty, or administrative body, a group of managers who can assume responsibilities for managing internationalization. The profile of each manager must be clear, especially verifying their conditions to establish a productive dialogue with the various international communities.
Like any other process of strategic planning, this also demands that the analysis must be made both of internal and external environments. It is important to measure the capacity of the institution, considering its setting with the same importance as the conditions of its surroundings.

Within the institution, it is required to find the ones who are willing towards the internationalization proposals; the ones who already have some empowerment of the issue and understand that institutional quality can be guaranteed and enlarged; who speak foreign languages, and who knows how to interact and negotiate in multicultural environments.

It is very common to find projects of high internationalization levels already existing in some departments of the institution. They have been solidified in particular areas of excellence in which the researchers already have broad autonomy and therefore have their own contacts with international peers, but are entirely unknown to the institution itself.

The organization or committee of external experts, together with those responsible for the process within the institution must work to capitalize on the already achieved results, turning them into possible elements of visibility and international recognition.

Verification of existing partnerships can also be evaluated with a high degree of attention since the incidence of a vast number of memorandums of understanding, agreement terms, memos, and letters of intent signed between institutions is quite frequent. However, none of these deals have ever managed to materialize results gained through the desired co-operation, mainly the mobility, finding in the lack of the language proficiency one of its greatest obstacles.

Knight explains that

There is no doubt that the number of bilateral or multilateral agreements has increased exponentially in recent decades. During the early stages of internationalization, institutions often react to the multitude of opportunities through the establishment of institutional partnerships. These signed partnerships can have different purposes - academic mobility, joint programs, development programs, seminars and conferences, joint research. Too often occurs that institutions cannot manage such a large number of agreements and thus many are inactive and mostly are contracts that remain only on paper. (KNIGHT, 2004, p 27).

It is necessary that higher education institutions’ authorities establish clear criteria when making a diagnosis that identifies the level of internationalization of their actions, their programs or their projects, avoiding the multiplication of documents without successful results.

Concerning the aspects within the institution, it is necessary to analyze some specific items such as the profile of the institution; its history, foundation, and characteristics; size and the geographic area;
awareness and the acceptance on the internationalization by the staff. Agreements and other signed documents; programs and projects in progress; the offer of faculty and student mobility programs; the existence of an administrative office of international cooperation can also help to promote internationalization. Following there is the institutional visibility; the flow of information and opportunities; the presence of clear policies; definition of a plan with clear goals; an observatory for monitoring and evaluating the movement of cooperation; the ability to communicate in foreign languages and the knowledge of other cultures.

The list of items for the preparation of diagnosis can be quite extensive. However, more important than that, before establishing new goals and redesigning the strategies to achieve international levels, the superior councils of the institution must define adequately the status and the degree of internationalization the organization can afford and its impact on the community.

Once the institution establishes the diagnosis, it becomes crucial to define the guidelines for internationalization. Through them, it will be possible to define new goals, new partners, and check how they will achieve the new goals. Accordingly, it reinforces the need to design a coherent plan of international integration with the university’s other functions.

Frustrations may occur in the relationship between researchers, who inevitably get too excited as they start their participation in research groups and momentarily fail when they do not meet the objectives due to a lack of different skills. It can occur due to the impossibility to match previous expectations, possibly as consequence of personal issues such as a lack of adaptability, difficulty in communicating and understanding of another culture, or even due to institutional issues of infrastructure, lack of funds, management and redefinitions of institutional policies. Internationalization can be a priority, but it may be reassessed any given moment, according to the interests of the institution.

In situations like this, there is always cooperation between the giver and receiver. It is crucial to clearly state to all parties which is the way for insertion and type of leadership researchers and participating institutions have in each of the projects, particularly when it involves mobility. Needless to remind that mobility generates movement of peers. This action implies mutual recognition, acceptance of the conditions in which each of the researchers can collaborate with the unfolding of projects and, above all, respect for academic, linguistic, cultural differences, among other. In the course of the project, actions and dialogue among participants will allow for detecting those aspects.

The traditional relationship securely contemplates staff and student mobility among people from different nationalities and, therefore, it is relevant to consider primarily linguistic criteria.
Preparing development plans for institutional internationalization

Considering that the internationalization has been acquiring prominence increasingly in higher education space, it was possible to learn a lot about the importance of implementing policies and developing strategies to put into effect such internationalization.

De Wit says:

The different activities identified as key components for internationalization are into two broad categories: programmatic strategies and organizational strategies. Programmatic strategies refer to those academic activities and services that an institution of higher education offers when integrating international dimension along their most important functions. Corporate strategies include initiatives that help ensure that the development of appropriate administrative structures institutionalizes the international dimension. (DE WITT, 1995, p. 167).


The interpretation of these standards must be applied according to the profile of each institution once the proposals are very ambitious and not always taking under consideration the conditions, opportunities, and political, economic and social scenarios that are involved.

Most often, they do not count with financial, organizational, administrative nor the human conditions necessary for implementing such plans, and therefore try to apply them, facing barriers that prevent or hinder the elements that advance the proposed actions.

Each institution should pursue its international development according to its characteristics and its ability to achieve the goals set for itself.

A good strategic plan for internationalization should be fully aligned with the objectives of the institutional development. Therefore, the purpose of internationalization should be one of the structuring actions, considered as a priority in the decisions of higher councils.

Though having been set as a priority action, not all actors have the correct understanding of the need for internationalization, regarding their earnings and benefits to the organization, nor of its operational format.

Awareness seminars and training on the topic are always welcome and relevant, since they can, by the presence of experts who study the issue, make the information accessible to all academic participants. With
different levels of communication and approach, it is necessary that the entire university community gets involved in this process through training workshops, discussion meetings or outreaching activities. The idea is to get them acquainted with the proper understanding and join the development of proposed action goals towards internationalization.

Among all the gains and results of international cooperation, and as a central focus of the search for institutional quality are the actors of the whole process: professors, researchers, and students, regardless of the locus, the level or area of their activities. They are the ones who will lead and keep the process going.

The strategy of internationalization implementation plan should involve the entire university community. Otherwise, the institution will not achieve the expected results, especially if any of the parties is not sufficiently committed to the idea.

Institutional councils must consider some items as relevant for the development of an action plan for internationalization, such as: making the option and being aware of the internal and the external realities of the institution with regards to internationalization. It is crucial to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the institution; justify the reasons to pursue internationalization; define the objectives; and find ways to fetch them. It is important to check the available and needed resources for each goal; develop a strategic plan to achieve each objective; identify means of implementing the aims of the scheme; monitor the implementation of the project; identify the obtained results; evaluate the results and determine if they meet the institution’s capability. Review and adjust the plan according to the new requirements; it is also necessary to monitor and assess the program.

The project will be defined jointly. However, it is crucial that there is a precise positioning by institutional authorities regarding the choice of internationalization, explaining what to expect from each of the institutional spheres, under graduation, post-graduation, extension, research and management, and who will be the agents responsible for its implementation.

**Trends and prospects for internationalization**

Internationalization is already a strong phenomenon in the forefront of excellence, and highly academic universities. However, vast part of higher education institutions, especially the ones located in less developed countries or even institutions located in countries with emerging economies such as Brazil, have yet to set their internationalization strategies. They need to establish their goals and plan how they will operate, besides placing the necessary resources for the implementation, particularly the qualification of actors.
Internationalization exists. Cooperative actions are occurring in response to international movements, in particular, people’s mobility. However, most happen in an unsystematic, pulverized and recurring basis, within the same department or unit, or involving the same actors who are aware of the importance of international cooperation and already have adequate linguistic or intercultural skills, interacting comfortably in the presence of foreigners.

Using the dynamics of intercultural communication; developing global awareness; learning the culture of other people; working in multicultural environments and transforming the staff into international people, prepared for the challenges of the future, is one of the significant challenges for higher education institutions. This is the reality not only for them but also for educators and the ones who are managing schools, aiming to form global citizens.

The new trends of internationalization, responding to the challenges of the future of education, provide that the presence of foreign visiting professors or permanent faculty will be significantly enlarged. It is a strong trend in which higher education institutions are betting on raising the level of privileged dialogue with the world’s major centers of excellence in specific knowledge areas. The presence of top scholars ensures constant communication between national and foreign departments, aiming to broaden the scope of joint investigations and seek favorable investigative results.

The development of post-graduate programs, mandatory international modules in two ways: either with qualified foreign professors on the faculty team or with the completion of academic assignments abroad is quite necessary. The objective is to develop bi-national activities, which include lectures, seminars, and roundtables between professionals from both nationalities; visits focused and aligned with the pedagogical goals of the programs. This kind of experience is intended to nurture the international experience, but the real value is in the development of technical expertise in the area of studies and intercultural communication skills, understanding how to express oneself and how to interact with people from other nationalities.

The insertion in different research networks with researchers from different nationalities, which already occurs in large centers of intellectual production and the offer of wider destination options for academic mobility programs are also important trends. The identification of the studies’ segment and exchange is receiving considerable attention from national and international authorities as a major world economic movement sector. Some examples of successful academic mobility programs such as the Erasmus Program - European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students - and Science without Borders which take advantage of the completion of undergraduate studies developed.
successfully abroad. The inclusion of mandatory periods abroad provided in the undergraduate curricula and syllabuses, showing students that they shall have an experience away from their home country and, therefore, must be linguistically prepared for this experience, mastering destination country’s language.

Double degree programs are a natural tendency due to the expansion and strengthening of undergraduate programs (study abroad or student exchange). With the positive results from undergraduate student’s academic mobility, a new niche of differential performance for institutions of higher education was identified, i.e., availability of programs which guarantee curriculum analysis and harmonization of disciplines and contents. Students can graduate in two institutions: their home institution and a foreign institution where they developed their international experience;

In the same path, enabling educational programs with triple diplomas, through which student’s study in three institutions, receiving the degrees in three countries can be a very good alternative. The increasing necessity of citizens with strong development of global awareness and high performance of abilities and skills in cross-cultural behavior, a culturally intelligent citizen, globally competent and proficient in foreign languages justifies these trends.

The presence of international students, strengthening the concept of internationalization will be increasingly constant. Multicultural environments, with the presence of students from different nationalities in the same academic space is now very common in the Northern Hemisphere, where student mobility has been happening for many years. It requires institutions to think of offering their programs in ways that are attractive to the educational market. It means that institutions begin to think about the development of programs that are offered in other languages of instruction, besides Portuguese, especially in English or Spanish.

This measure requires qualified professors and administrative staff who need training in foreign languages to be able to effectively communicate. The provision of language courses for all members becomes a valuable and necessary action. If there is a stimulus for the academy to pursue its experience abroad, to be consistent with the requirements of internationalization of the institution, then the institution will have to provide means and facilitators for the qualification of its students, faculty, and staff;

Another important aspect is inclusion of intercultural communication subject, the organization of study groups about other cultures and creation of inter-ethnic groups, the spread cultural intelligence concept becoming widely disseminated. Both students and professors feel the need to understand the concepts of intercultural communication better in order to improve their understanding and their way of interacting
and communicating with people from other cultures, increasingly present on campus. This subject is already widespread in undergraduate international relations programs, but there is still a huge gap for discussions of interculturalism.

Curricula harmonization, enhancing academic mobility and exploring studies abroad is also noteworthy. Curricula flexibility is allowing a growing group of young people to have an international experience. This flexibility takes different forms, from the placement of electives to its recognition within complementary activities permitted under national law and respecting the academic and university autonomy guaranteed by each institution.

On the other hand, curricula internationalization is still little explored in Brazil. The Center for Educational Research and Innovation (Ceri) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) offers some courses as part of internationalized curricula: anthropology, psychology, sociology, communication, education, and management. The general understanding is that curricula internationalization can improve students’ performance for those who are unable to develop an experience abroad.

Finally, institutional evaluations, with global indicators higher education quality, bring some models as evaluation parameters in the international ranking of universities’ agendas. Webometrics (INTERNET 2008) rank formally adheres to the Berlin Principles of Higher Education Institutions and perhaps is considered the most comprehensive. Shanghai Jiao Tong University (INTERNET, 2008) developed the second one, in which the criteria that guide the scores are:

Alumni - quality of graduating students (academic awards, including Nobel laureates);
Award - quality of faculty (academic awards, including the Nobel Prize); HiCi - quality of faculty (citations); N & S - publishing articles about nature and science; Pub - publishing articles in scientific journals and social science.

This trend gives direction to institutions of higher education with regards to a sense upon their visibility and international recognition, aiming to be among the selected group of establishments that reach the top-ranking indicators for evaluating universities and being among the top 500 best institutions in the world. There is a clear signal of quality assurance and relevance of higher education to be obtained through internationalization.

**Evaluation of the internationalization process**

For any analysis, it is impossible to make comparisons between institutions with different vocations; located in strikingly different
scenarios, developing their activities in different environments and, therefore, compose an entirely different framework.

Even if the experts in movement analysis of internationalization guidelines are being followed, each plan must, also, observe the characteristics of the local scene and refine the assessment of the perceived results with the internationalization.

Some institutions started their process of internationalization, without the slightest preparation of their organizational and administrative, academic, linguistic or pedagogical structures. The results generated more failures than institutional gains.

The ongoing assessments are needed and can ensure the redirection of actions that are not corresponding or are not aligning with the plan for international insertion.

As stated by Gacel - Avila:

The assessment provides a solid basis for reflection and decision-making basis. The results serve to inform decisions, justify requests for support or to share with colleagues in the process of finding solutions to conflicts or problems. The internationalization process should begin with an institutional assessment. (GACEL - AVILA, 2004, p. 267).

There is a wide availability of different assessment instruments that can be used to monitor the degree of internationalization of an institution.

De Witt (1993), Gacel - Avila (2003), Sebastian (2004), among others, have addressed the issue and related some essential elements for proper monitoring of levels of integration and international projection obtained by universities.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), through its Institute for the Management of Higher Education, developed a study by De Witt registered and Knight (2001) establishing a conceptual framework for assessing organizational changes in the institution, which is known as Internationalization Quality Review Process (IQRP).

Some conclusions are evident. Before starting the evaluation process, one must have clear that it cannot be punitive or serve for little comparison purposes. It should be taken to support the future decision-making and facilitate next steps for the internationalization. The assessment must take into account external and internal scenarios of the institution. Evaluate where the institution is located (economic bloc, country, state, political, social, economic moment). The organization profile, research centers, departments, units, faculty, administrators, students, programs, and projects as well as the degree to which each one interferes with the progress of the activities.
Blended committees composed by representatives of the institution itself and by invited external representatives, deprived of any pre-trial can help evaluation and follow-up of the activities. It must take into account the different objects to be evaluated, i.e., the process of internationalization as a whole, or the assessment of specific international cooperation actions. In the first case, referring to the possibility of identifying whether the internationalization policy, defined by the institution, is achieving the results it had established or not.

If a major challenge for higher education is to form global citizens prepared to interact in multicultural environments and such capacity is directly related to its degree of internationalization, the need for its institutionalization is even more evident. Making diagnoses, setting strategic plans, tracking trends and continually evaluating the processes, to assure quality of intercultural education necessary to join the international scenario.

Without observing the suggested ideas, the institution runs the risk of facing problematic situations that distort the goals of internationalization.

**Risks and challenges with internationalization**

The evidence of the new scenario of higher education clearly indicates the need of pursuing internationalization. However, it is also evident that the process is only valid if it serves for the intellectual and organizational health of the institutions.

The definition of internationalization policy establishes some goals for international cooperation and through them helps to define the roles of different actors, invites the community to commit, to engage in the projects and the cooperation actions. It creates allies, engages managers who, imbued with the understanding of the importance of working towards intercultural education, put their efforts towards achieving success for the internationalization of the institution and its consequent projection on the best scenarios of higher education.

It should work in a positive way, avoiding the overvaluation of some results not as impactful as one would wish them to be. These results can be accomplished as risks or as challenges to be corrected, such as the promotion of the institutional internationalization without a proper global leadership can lead to a non-execution of activities, failure to comply with agreements with international partners and not achieve the established goals.

The definition of inconsistent or not aligned goals with the institutional development plan, generating misfit decision-making, including budget cuts and low administrative forecasts, inadequate infrastructure can create stressful situations when attending specific demands of
projects. Agreements, partnerships, lack of supportive structures for the reception of students or visiting scholars or researchers are also on the list.

Conducting international activities without the correct information, especially with the aim of monitoring the results, designing new partnerships and optimizing the numbers arising from the existing projects may fail. The signature of international cooperation agreements without the correct definition of coordinators, budgets, deadlines, schedules, forms of realization, resulting in the multiplication of unsuccessful transactions, which are so harmful to the indexes of international cooperation.

Non-capitalization of income, loss of international prestige and loss of national and local competitiveness, since there is not an appropriate use of the benefits already identified with the internationalization of the institution may be very harmful to the university. Forming private groups in the institution due to the presence of foreign visiting professors without the proper meshing with other members of the academic community may damage the whole concept of collaborative working. It may happen as a consequence of a non-cultural adaptation of habits, values, and beliefs of the local community.

The expectation of international cooperation activities, as an alternative to qualification and subsequent frustration for its impracticability, e.g. conducting post-graduate programs without being adequate with the law of the country may demand additional efforts.

There are so many other examples of risks that the institution may face. However, rather than risk, these items should be understood as challenges and goals as addressed in planning for training and development of the institutions and their communities, as a proper international integration depending crucially on the right preparation of its actors and structures.

Final remarks

Given the relevance of the topic, this article has presented some considerations about the process and the concepts of internationalization, to lead to a better understanding of the challenges of higher education and the immediate need of favorable institutional placements to this process.

It tried to bring some essential elements that indicate that the level of internationalization can be achieved, provided they fulfill some criteria such as making diagnoses, establishing goals, and defining action plans. Crucially, it tries to promote the understanding that the adequacy of the organizational structures of the institution represents the primary differential element for the elimination of barriers and the projection of more ambitious goals, particularly regarding the visibility of the institution.
Adequate community preparation is a crucial step to the success of the processes of internationalization.

References


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