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Conceptualizing internationalization strategies for higher education institutions

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Abstract: The increased international competition amongst higher education institutions caused by rapid globalization now requires universities to evaluate, alter or devise new and innovative strategies which will enable them to boost their international activities. There is a need to gain a competitive advantage in attracting more local and international students, involving staff in international exchange programs, conducting joint research, establishing collaborative degree and exchange programs, etc. This ongoing study aims to propose a synthesized conceptual framework of higher education internationalization which links strategic management concepts with higher education, thus consolidating various components by taking into account influential factors such as the dynamics of the external academic environment and organizational resources. The framework outlined in this paper provides a good basis for further empirical research as well as a practical planning scheme for higher education managers.

Keywords: globalization, higher education, strategic management, internationalization.

JEL: M10, L21, I23

1. Introduction

Globalization has intensified competition in the higher education industry, as universities and colleges now have to compete not only at local levels but internationally. An advanced level of internationalization has been perceived as giving a competitive advantage to universities who seek to overcome globalization challenges. It is believed that higher education institutions involved in international activities have more chance of attracting local and international students, involving more of their academic and administrative personnel in international

exchange programs and undertaking more joint research programs which will increase academic and program sustainability, overall competitiveness and choice, quality of education and revenues.

To achieve the above-mentioned goals universities must start thinking and acting strategically. They will have to conduct proper analyses and produce action plans which will allow them to introduce and execute the appropriate strategies. This research will examine the existing literature on models and concepts on higher education internationalization, its strategic management process, and link these theories to develop a practical framework which can help researchers and universities conduct further empirical explorations to evaluate, rethink, and revise their internationalization processes by aligning them with their overall strategic goals and objectives.

2. Contemporary Views on Higher Education Internationalization

Studies of internationalization in higher educational are relatively new; however, there is a growing interest among scholars in producing concepts, frameworks and theoretical backgrounds which can form a basis for further empirical research in this field. Therefore, it is obvious that even the definition and importance of internationalization are rather fresh concepts, seen from different viewpoints by different researchers.

Ayoubi and Al-Habeibeh (2006) maintained that the international activities of universities have significantly increased since the 1990s as there have been increases in students' mobility, intensified academic and administrative staff exchange, and ongoing changes in educational programs. The globalization and internationalization of higher education are simultaneous processes. As Manning (1999) stated, globalization has influenced teaching and research processes and vice versa: teaching and research have themselves accelerated the process of globalization. The author described internationalization as one of the main aspects of globalization: it is the process of the integration of international components into higher educational institutions which implies an integration of an increased number of global intercultural components with main university functions and activities.

The same statements had previously been made by other scholars before Manning. Ellingboe (1998) described internationalization as the integration of international perspectives into college and university systems and viewed it as an active process with multidimensional and interdisciplinary elements oriented to the future. The same views were elaborated by Knight (1993), who saw the internationalization of higher education as the integration of intercultural and international elements into university teaching and research processes.

Some scholars viewed internationalization as a reaction of universities to the process of globalization (Van der Wende 1997; Qiang 2003) designed to meet the challenges posed by the globalization of economics, societies and human resources (Van der Wende 1997) by considering national identities and cultures as main elements of higher education internationalization (Qiang 2003). Qiang maintained that we cannot describe internationalization in all countries homogeneously, as the process is influenced by history, culture, resources and different concepts from place to place. However, as Stromquist (2007) mentioned, at university level globalization can be seen as a concept of internationalization which influences academic programs and the student body and creates new administrative structures. Higher education institutions are not merely local 'enterprises' anymore, they are actively involved in the process of continual change happening in the majority of countries worldwide (Elkin et al. 2005).

Defining internationalization and getting insights into it help us see its practical aspects and evaluate its importance. Nowadays, in the era of global knowledge and modern technologies, interconnected companies and markets demand that graduates have foreign language skills, intercultural relations and general international experience. This is why more universities are paying attention to their internationalization. When thinking of internationalization, first aspect that comes to mind is students' mobility worldwide, as the number of students studying abroad doubled between 2000 and 2010; however, irrespective of the fact that students' mobility is the most visible aspect of internationalization, it is only one aspect. Others include increased personnel mobility and a sharing of education policies and practices which have also been dramatically influenced by the globalization process (Henard, Diamond 2012). These are the factors generally cited when defining internationalization as a part of contemporary university life.

Scholars agree on importance of the phenomenon. Knight and De Wit (1995) gave different reasons for, arguments behind, and stimulating factors of internationalization. They

categorized the arguments into two areas: Economic-Political and Cultural-Educational. The goals and objectives of internationalization in the mentioned areas are: achieving economic growth, investing in the future economy, internationalizing markets, improving foreign relationships, gaining financial profit, meeting national educational demand, promoting cultural export, supporting personal development, including international dimensions in teaching and research, achieving institutional growth and improving quality.

Adams (2001) outlined both positive and negative aspects of internationalization. Even though the author mainly described European internationalization, his key postulates can be generalized. The positive sides of internationalization are: giving wider choice of education to the population, pushing traditional institutions to launch innovative projects, assisting local education systems to become more competitive and giving local institutions the chance to generate more income and seek new sources of funding. Although the author also highlights some negative aspects of internationalization, such as problems with quality assurance at certain non-official education providers abroad, unfair competition with local strictly regulated institutions, and lack of information with which to distinguish “good from bad” universities, these factors are negligible compared to the possible positive economic or career gain the choice of one course of study generates over another.

The definition of, importance of, and motivating arguments behind higher education internationalization demonstrate that internationalization is now perceived as one of the main parts of university life, and one which brings enormous benefits, provided that the strategy is properly set and executed. Consequently, these topics require more attention and managerial approaches must be clearly defined.

3. Models of Internationalization

There are various models and concepts of internationalization in higher education. The authors of these models present different standpoint dependencies on internationalization frameworks and processes. These theories have a double purpose: first, they equip universities with the practical guiding tools for internationalizing themselves and second, they provide theoretical backgrounds for further empirical research.

Paige (2005) has conducted a complex analysis of different models, theories, works and empirical findings of various authors in the field of higher education internationalization (Ellingboe 1998; Knight, de Wit 1999; Paige, Mestenhauser 1999; Mestenhauser 2002; Green, Olson 2003; Paige 2003; Marden, Engerman 1992; Nilson 2003). Having synthesized the main concepts found in this literature the author proposed an internationalization model consisting of ten components: university leadership, strategic planning, institutionalization, infrastructure, curriculum, foreign students and scholars, studying abroad, involvement of academic personnel, university life and monitoring (Paige 2005). This model highlights that considering internationalization aspects in each of these components will affect the internationalization process of the university as a whole.

It should be mentioned that not all the internationalization components are present in each higher education institution. In some universities several of the internationalization components may be in place but different ones exist in others. However, whereas the components of internationalization present can vary, the factors influencing the implementation of internationalization models can be the same for all universities. Consequently, studying internationalization management models and the main factors influencing managerial approaches will help us conceptualize the entire process of internationalization in higher education institutions.

According to Davies (1992) universities can adopt four different approaches to achieve their internationalization goals. The author describes these attitudes as strategies: a central-systematic strategy, in which a large volume of coordinated international activities is undertaken to support the international mission of a university, a spontaneous-central strategy, in which a large volume of international activities is undertaken but with no clearly defined plans and goals, a systematic-marginal strategy, in which well-defined but limited activities are undertaken, and a spontaneous-marginal strategy, in which limited activities are undertaken which are not based on clear goals and decisions.

Neave (1992) created two paradigm models based on cases researched for UNESCO. One model was based on university leadership and the other on basic structural units. The first model addressed the internationalization of higher education as a process directed by senior university management, while the second regarded senior management as the co-coordinator of activities initiated at lower levels. These models, “top down” or “bottom up” can be seen as descriptions of

centralized and decentralized decision-making processes in the internationalization of higher education.

Night (1994) highlighted different approaches to the higher education internationalization process. These have been described as Activities, Competencies, Process, and Organizational approaches. The Activities approach requires a complex of provisions such as creating academic plans, exchanging students, scholars and faculty members, teaching in specific fields, intercultural training, etc. The Competencies approach involves providing students, academic and administrative personnel with new skill and knowledge. The Process approach integrates elements of internationalization into the university's functional practices, in areas such as academic process, organizational rules and regulations, procedures and strategies. The Organizational approach consists of creating an appropriate culture and ethos which values and supports an intercultural international perspective.

Rudzki (1995) differentiated two modes of internationalization of higher education, each of which contains five phases. The Reactive mode involves academic personnel making preliminary contact with foreign colleagues, the formalization of some of these contacts with formal agreements, increasing central control as these activities grow, conflict between top management seeking to take control of this process and employees involved in it from the beginning, reaching a maturity level and then switching to the other mode or allowing this work to decline. The "Proactive Mode" involves setting concurrent and long-term strategic plans, creating strategic policies, implementing plans, evaluating the results, and then modifying or reinforcing further activities. These two modes are based on two different approaches: The first is based more on spontaneous activities while the other is more organized and shares the principles of general strategic management.

The theories and models described by various authors clearly indicate that internationalization of higher education is a long term process that needs analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation of achievements. Hence, it is necessary to view a university's internationalization as a strategic process, and link concepts of strategic management with the higher education internationalization process.

4. Internationalization as a Strategic Process

There is no doubt about the importance of strategic planning for companies. Therefore there has been much research undertaken in the field of corporate, business, and functional strategies. Strategic management is a part of the teaching curriculum in many business schools and faculties around the world.

Strategic management plays an enormous role in enhancing a company's performance and only well-defined and executed strategies can lead a company towards long-term successes per Chokheli (2013). This statement is seen as an axiom, and agreed on by many scholars and strategists. Different authors might have different views on and approaches to defining strategies, but they all defined strategic management process quite similarly (Carpenter, Sanders 2007; Lynch 2011; Wheelen, Hunger 2012; David 2011; Coulter 2013; Robbins, Coulter 2007). The process described by these authors can be also applied to higher education internationalization.

Generally, strategic management consists of several steps such as defining a strategic vision, clarifying the goals and mission of the company, analyzing the company's internal and external environment, outlining strategic alternatives, choosing the best option from amongst these, implementing that option and evaluating the results. Of course this process is not linear. It can be seen more as a loop, as at each stage of the process a company might need to correct the other stages according to the dynamics of the environment.

It is obvious that the dynamics of the strategy implementation process differ depending on whether the environment it is being conducted in is stable or turbulent. However, the components of the process are the same.

Reviewing the existing literature has shown that the strategic process of higher education internationalization is very close to that in other fields, as internationalization as a goal can be achieved by both short and long term strategic planning (Schoorman 1999). Many universities have included internationalization in their strategic plans. Taylor (2004) pointed out that setting an internationalization strategy is a long term course in itself and is not isolated from other university activities. Rudzki (1995) examined each step of the general strategic process from the angle of internationalization. The author provides detailed guidelines on how to carry out each step of the strategic process in university internationalization, which involves environmental analysis, internal resource evaluation, setting achievable goals and objectives, formulating and

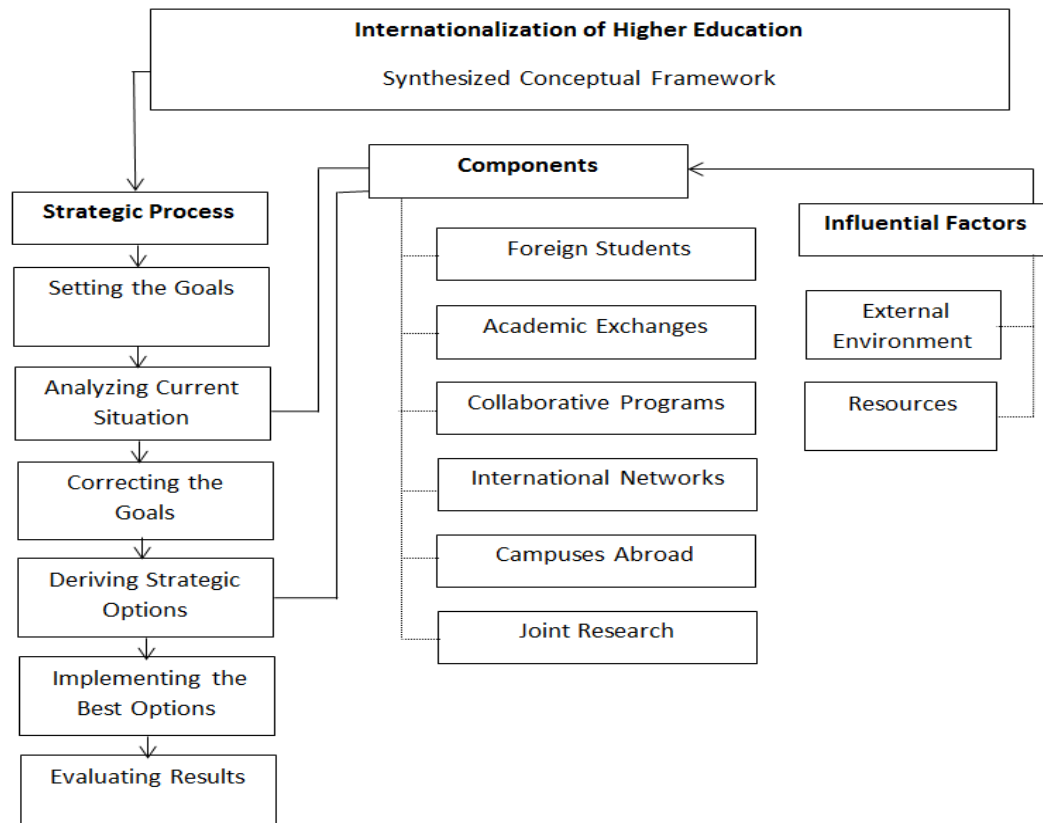
evaluating strategic options, planning for implementation and executing the derived strategies. This strategic option can be used in the areas of international educational programs, research activities, exchange programs, and partnerships (Kouijzer 1994). It is obvious that the internationalization of higher education is a reflection of the growing globalization process. Introducing and considering international aspects in a university's life is a permanently ongoing process. The process itself however is a classical strategic planning process which involves different stakeholders at different stages of its design and implementation.

5. Synthesized Conceptual Framework of Higher Education Internationalization

The aim of this research is to develop a conceptual framework which will provide a good basis for conducting further empirical research. The scheme (refer to Figure 1) provides a theoretical model within which to evaluate the content and implementation of strategic plans for the internationalization of universities. It will help higher education institutions systemize their international activities and develop a clear understanding of their own strategies.

Analyzing the theories, models, schemes and conclusions provided in the literature has helped to synthesize the various concepts of strategic management and higher education internationalization. Drawing strategic management processes and their influential factors reviewed above and considering components of internationalization of higher education enabled to come up with the following model (refer to Figure 1), which is seen as unique and can be used to evaluate the current level of internationalization and then either modify existing strategies or devise, implement and monitor new strategies.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework



Source: Author's Compilation

The proposed conceptual framework links three interdisciplinary areas. It emphasizes the strategic nature of the higher education internationalization process. The strategic process outlined in the first column in Figure 1 reflects the ideas of authors cited in section 4 of this paper, specifically, Lynch (2011), who proposed analyzing the environment and resources first and then identifying vision, mission and objectives, and Robbins and Coulter (2007), who suggested identifying the existing mission, goals and strategies first and then conducting external and internal analyses accordingly.

The scheme (Figure 1) synthesizes both these views and is consistent with the strategic decision making process described by Wheelen and Hunger (2012). Rudzki's (1995) description of strategic planning for higher education internationalization can be used as a guideline of how to go through each step in the strategic process outlined in Figure 1, as this author describes the

issues that should be addressed at each step of the higher education internationalization planning process.

The models described in section 3 of this paper do not present a comprehensive picture of internationalization as the proposed framework does; however, they can all contribute positively to the systemization and implementation of the various steps described. For instance, Knight's (1994) four approaches to internationalization can help universities evaluate whether they act based on activities, competences, processes or organizationally, and provide new insights for developing future improvement plans. The positive and negative aspects of centralization and decentralization can also be reviewed, and future actions planned, according to the Neave (1992) model.

Davies' (1992) model can also be used as a powerful tool for evaluating existing strategies when analyzing the current situation according to the proposed conceptual framework. It would be beneficial for further strategic planning if institutions have clear ideas on which types of central or marginal strategies they follow, in order to identify the directions such strategies take and have already taken, and if necessary take proper action to alter and modify them. The same applies to Rudzki's (1995) two modes of internationalization: reactive and proactive (refer to section 3 for details). These can be used by researchers or university managers to analyze the different internationalization approaches they experience.

The second column of the framework outlines the main components of internationalization. These were identified through studying different scholars' works and suggestions. One of the most complete lists of university internationalization components is that provided by Qiang (2003), who summarized works of various authors in this field.

The proposed conceptual framework sets out not only the main areas of university internationalization but several sub-areas and directions. For instance, the concept of collaborative programs might include dual degree, joint degree, and other types of agreements, and international networks could be bilateral, regional or worldwide associations. These components should be taken into account whilst undergoing two steps of the strategic process: analyzing the current situation and deriving strategic options, whilst also paying continual attention to external and internal influencing factors.

The third area highlighted in the proposed conceptual framework is the main influencing factors in internationalization. Generally, in a stable environment such factors are taken into

account whilst conducting a situational analysis during the strategy development process; however, as today's environment is dynamic and frequently changing, the factors influencing internationalization, such as resource change and external turbulence, are considered throughout the process, and this should be reflected in each stage of strategy development and implementation.

6. Conclusion

This paper synthesizes the concepts of internationalization of higher education and strategic management processes. The proposed conceptual framework clearly shows the links between the areas of university internationalization and strategy development.

Previously published schemes by various authors have addressed internationalization issues from different angles and perspectives. The outline provided in this paper is a big picture of the strategy development process in higher education internationalization. It enables researchers to conduct further empirical research and undertake deeper analysis at each phase of the process. Unlike previously published models, which outline particular patterns of internationalization, the proposed framework opens up a wide range of research areas within the fields of strategic management and higher education administration.

This framework has a unique character, as it can be used for both evaluating universities' current internationalization processes and generating new strategies. For new universities, or higher education institutions seeking to engage in international activities for the first time, it provides clear guideline on how to start the process, what the possible components of their international activities will be, what factors they must consider while developing strategic options and what their best options might be, considering internal and external factors.

The theoretical model provided in this paper will also serve well established universities. It will enable university management to monitor and analyze their internationalization activities and conclude whether they are consistent with their strategic goals and objectives. Furthermore, it will help them identify weak points in their international activities in today's turbulent external environment considering fast-changing internal resource banks. The model will also act as a guideline when evaluating, adapting or creating new internationalization strategies.

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Konceptualizacja strategii internacjonalizacji dla instytucji szkolnictwa wyższego

Streszczenie:

Zwiększona międzynarodowa konkurencja pomiędzy instytucjami szkolnictwa wyższego, spowodowana gwałtowną globalizacją, wymogła na uniwersytetach dokonania oceny, przemiany bądź opracowania nowych i innowacyjnych strategii umożliwiających poprawę i stymulację aktywności międzynarodowej. Istnieje potrzeba pozyskania przewagi konkurencyjnej w przyciąganiu lokalnych i zagranicznych studentów, angażowania pracowników w międzynarodowe programy wymiany, przeprowadzanie wspólnych międzynarodowych badań, ustanawianie wspólnych stopni i programów wymiany czy studiów itp. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie syntetycznych ram koncepcyjnych internacjonalizacji szkolnictwa wyższego, łączących koncepcję zarządzania strategicznego ze szkolnictwem wyższym, a zatem konsolidujących różne elementy poprzez uwzględnianie takich czynników wpływu, jak dynamika zewnętrznego otoczenia akademickiego czy zasoby organizacyjne. Koncepcja zarysowana w

opracowaniu stanowi odpowiednią podstawę dla dalszych badań empirycznych, a także dla praktycznej procedury planowania dla kierowników z zakresu szkolnictwa wyższego.

Słowa kluczowe: globalizacja, szkolnictwo wyższe, zarządzanie strategiczne, internacjonalizacja
JEL: M10, L21, I23