

# **Internationalization of Universities: Challenges, Threats and Opportunities for Third World Countries**

Syed Gohar Abbas\*, Muhammad Tariq Yousafzai\*\* &  
Amira Khattak\*\*\*

## **Abstract**

*During the last two decades, internationalization of universities has appreciably increased with reference to scope, volume and complexity and it has been also considered as a worthwhile 'business' which involves gains for students, universities and other stakeholders. Taking into account the globalization process, internationalization of universities, impact of WTO control over higher education, insurability of quality standards for high ratings, this article discusses the challenges, opportunities and threats faced by Third World countries and presents Higher Education (HE) sector of Pakistan as a role model to overcome these challenges in a pragmatic manner. This paper does not present an empirical model based on data analysis, but highlights very significant facets of internationalization of universities, with a sanguine hope that captains of higher education institutions particularly from Third World Countries will ponder upon these aspects and would incorporate long term strategies to overcome the future threats in this arena.*

**Keywords:** Internationalization, Third World, Universities.

## **Introduction**

In this era of change and uncertainty, universities are trying their best to meet public expectations and to increase income by augmenting their functions,<sup>1</sup> and in-turn they are getting more innovative, competitive and global.<sup>2</sup> This entrepreneurial attitude

---

\* Dr. Syed Gohar Abbas, Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Sarhad University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar. Email: abbas.ba@suit.edu.pk

\*\* Muhammad Tariq Yousafzai, Assistant Professor, FAST-NUCES, Peshawar,.

\*\*\* Dr. Amira Khattak, Assistant Professor, College of Business Administration, Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia

ultimately forced the universities to extend the range of their activities at global level.

During the last two decades, internationalization of universities have been appreciably increased with reference to scope, volume and complexity and it has been also considered as a worthwhile 'business' which involves gains for students, universities and other stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> Higher education internationalization is generally considered as a term for a broad array of academic activities in teaching and research which may take place by cooperation with scholars and international partners as well as crossing borders physically.<sup>4</sup>

Universities as main creators and disseminators of knowledge through formal learning processes have gained much attention by the stakeholders which further changed the vision and focus of the universities.<sup>5</sup> Taking into account the globalization process, internationalization of universities, impact of WTO control over higher education, insurability of quality standards for high ratings, this article discusses the challenges, opportunities and threats faced by Third World countries. Quoting the growth in higher education sector of Pakistan, this article presents Pakistan as a role model for universities and higher education regulatory authorities of less developed and developing countries of the world.

### **Internationalization & Globalization of Universities**

Internationalization and globalization are viewed as different but related processes and globalization has been found as a part of environment where the international aspect of Higher Education (HE) is getting more significant and is very dynamic.<sup>6</sup> Higher education sector of the world has been influenced by numerous challenges of internationalization. This may be because the academic requirements of the scholars are getting higher with the passage of time and many domestic HEIs do not have the solutions to quench such issues. But because of intense competition, they have to offer some solutions and they tend to get global. Moreover the recruitment of international students can be considered as an important factor which contributes to the income of the university. Thus higher education nowadays cannot be viewed in a national context because it is nowadays considered a real part of internationalization process and can be defined in the perspective of how a state responds to the impact of globalization by keeping in view its national identity and culture.<sup>7</sup> Thus according to Knight,<sup>8</sup> internationalization of HE is the process of incorporating

an international dimension into research, teaching, and other service functions of the university.

Internationalization of universities is sometimes considered as highly normative for example on one side, internationalization of HE is regarded as positive and significant but on the other side, it is supposed to be entrenched inside national value system and it sometimes entails that education is done better at home. This stands true for many third world countries which lack the required finances, infrastructure, and human resources to offer real international standards and thus higher education opportunities to their scholars, so they might favor the stance that “studying is better done at home”. However such traditional views have started disappearing with the passage of time and universities all around the world are trying their best to go global and meet international quality standards. Researchers in this area have presented many rationales and motivations behind ‘getting global’.

### **Rationales Driving Internationalization**

There are different rationales to add internationalization dimension to universities. These may be related to state or individual universities. Coupled with technological advances in Information Communication Technologies (ICT), internationalization is a practice which entails financial, economic, political, and cultural dynamics that are jointly strengthening this process.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly Knight<sup>10</sup> proposed political, economic, academic and cultural rationales for internationalization of universities.

The political rationale ponders upon the issues regarding any country’s position as a state in the world however according to Knight,<sup>11</sup> this stance with particular reference to internationalization of HEIs is not as significant as it had been once. It includes national security & foreign policy, mutual understanding and national identity and some other factors.

The economic rationale can be viewed in terms of long term economic benefits in terms of exchange of skilled human resources (economic growth, labor market, trade etc.) or short term financial benefits in the form of revenue generation from international students. It is one of the most important motives for all types of universities to get global.

Academic rationale most importantly covers the core academic activities of teaching and research to achieve the international standards and competitive rankings in parallel.

Moreover it covers institution building, enhancement of quality etc.

Cultural rationale highlights more on cultural and language dimensions of internationalization so students are offered scholarships to visit other countries for education and exchange of cultural norms in parallel. It also focuses on cross-cultural understanding, social development, citizenship and community development.

### **WTO and Internationalization of Universities**

Higher education is no more considered as a public good but seen as a product which can be bought and sold like other products in the market. Just as other products/services, several countries are interested in the export of HE and others are interested in its import and the users should pay for this service as they use to pay for others. In this scenario, as usual World Trade Organization (WTO) jumped in with many proposals on 'trade of higher education'. Actually it started back in 1995 when General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) was finalized and worldwide pressures related to liberalization of higher education had been witnessed. GATS reinforced business/economic driven rationales in the internationalization of Higher education and incorporated trade rules to regulate this sector which has been widely criticized by teacher unions, universities and NGOs because if universities adhere to the rules of business defined by WTO/GAT, they must think like 'corporations' rather than Universities. This might have several negative trickledown effects e.g. privatization of public sector universities, increase in students fees and thus considering higher education as a luxury product accessible only to the elite class.

As per WTO agreements (once member countries agree), academic internationalization can take place by any of the below mentioned modes, however WTO provides a regulatory framework to streamline international trade in this sector.<sup>12</sup>

- Commercial Presence: The exporting countries can establish universities in importing countries and can have arrangements as joint ventures or branch campuses.
- Consumption abroad: Under this arrangement, the student can move to the country where s/he wants to complete his/her studies. Students have to physically dislocate themselves from their parent country to the country of service provider.

- Resource Persons Mobility: Under this arrangement, the researchers or teachers can travel to other countries on temporary basis to share their knowledge and expertise.
- Cross-border Supply: This arrangement focuses on virtual/e-learning i.e. distance education and franchising some courses without physical movement of the students or teachers.

### **The Challenges: Measuring University's Progress towards Internationalization**

The QS Stars rating system uses 7 criteria which are very important for the universities to incorporate if they have their benchmarks to achieve international rankings. These include:

- International Faculty: Hiring the international faculty means that universities employed the best talent irrespective of nationality, thus providing a diverse and creative academic environment to its students to learn with different approaches. According to the QS Stars rating, international faculty constitute one of the most vital part of modern-day HE system<sup>13</sup> and maximum points are awarded to universities with at least 25% international faculty.
- International Research Collaborations: The most important attribute of higher education is research and research collaborations with international partners by sharing facilities, researchers and funds is of pivotal importance for a university to claim itself as 'international university'. According to QS Stars rating system if an institution of HE has worked with 25 universities in the topmost 500 of QS World University Rankings, it will be granted highest marks for this standard.
- International Scholars: Universities are expected to provide a cosmopolitan educational environment rather than a limited local setup. Education abroad during the last two decades has become increasingly desirable choice. International scholars contribute much to the universities' rankings the same way as international faculty. According to QS standards, if 25 percent of a university's scholars are international, that university will receive full score.
- International scholar support – religious services/facilities: Students from different countries and religions must be accommodated by universities with particular reference to

their religious practices. QS Star rating demands that universities should make available at least a single place of worship for three main religions or should have multi denominational place religious facility so as to be awarded with maximum points.

- Inbound exchange students: Exchange programs help the students to experience education abroad, meet people with different nationalities and learn new ways of thinking out of box. QS Star rating system award maximum points to universities whose total of incoming scholars is equivalent to 2 percent of their entire strength.
- Outbound exchange students: Just as in case of inbound students, contemporary universities should also focus towards its own scholars to partake in exchange programs (e.g. with other countries/universities). If the university's outbound students are 2 percent of the total strength, highest points are granted.
- Transnational diversity: To be a truly international HEI, a university must also hire talented scholars from different countries. Such talented students with diverse experiences are beneficial for the local university and its students. It reduces the stereotype biases (on both sides) and prepares the scholars for the globalized world. To get maximum grades by QS Star rating system, in a university's total student strength, at least 20 different nationalities should be registered in a university.

### **Challenge or Threat?**

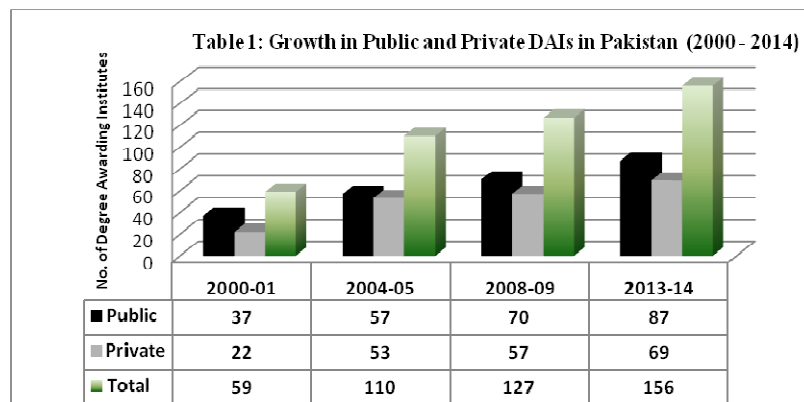
The participation of HEIs in global framework posed novel challenges as these have been ranked worldwide and their supremacy in the domestic HE system diminished.<sup>14</sup> Adhering to the 7 criteria mentioned above is no doubt a big challenge for universities particularly in the less developed and even the developing countries. For the developed countries and particularly the well-established universities, it is no doubt an opportunity but the other way round it is a threat for the existence and survival of weaker universities in under developed countries. It is worthwhile to ponder upon whether WTO/GATS have any solutions to overcome such threats faced by Third World universities in the less developed areas of the world? In this scenario, the traditional idea regarding university education as a 'public good' is weakened. Because of competition and strictness to adhere to WTO/GATS policies and QS Star rating (standards), university education is

subject to commercial pressures and sooner or later, it will be a unique commodity to be purchased by the upper only.

In the scenario mentioned above, it is very difficult for the universities in the developing nations to maintain their academic independence. The big giants may force them out of business if they do not align their strategies in accordance with the quality standards. Third World universities have specific academic needs and based on these need they aim to have international relationships. Enforced strictness by WTO/GATS pose a big threat to such universities and these issues must be addressed by international higher education regulatory authorities in a manner to favor third world universities and newer universities in the market place.

### **Opportunities: The blessings in disguised – Pakistan as a Role Model**

For the Third World countries and the developing countries like Pakistan, the above mentioned internationalization challenges and/or threats may be actually ‘the blessings in disguised’. Considering the case of the higher education sector of Pakistan, these challenges have created a new context for universities which are trying their best for high rankings, accreditations and quality certifications. Pakistan has witnessed more rapid political, economic, social, and technological changes during last 14 years and the number of universities in Pakistan have almost doubled (See table 1).



Source: *Education Statistics of Pakistan & Higher Education Commission of Pakistan*

The future of higher education in Pakistan depends on how the stakeholders respond to these challenges.<sup>15</sup> Hats-off to the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and captains of higher education institutes of Pakistan, who responded to these challenges in a very pragmatic manner and created many opportunities for sustainable growth in higher education sector. Thousands of students have been sent abroad for higher studies through faculty development programs and overseas scholarships, and majority of them joined back their parent organizations. Despite of the financial crunch and negative image of Pakistan with particular reference to terrorism and corruption during last decade, the HE sector of Pakistan witnessed growth and prosperity which have seldom been observed in any other sector. Quoting the latest updates published in major newspapers (on June 24, 2013), Pakistan observed a remarkable 50 % growth in the number of research publications during 2011-2013, which jumped up from 3939 to 6200 & this has been the 2nd highest increase worldwide. Scimago, which is the world's prominent research database forecasted that in case Pakistan continues with this research trend, by 2018 Pakistan will move onward 26 notches in global ranking, (i.e. from 43 to 27). In this way, Pakistan will cross Singapore, Hong Kong, and Thailand. According to that report, Pakistan's per capita research publications were more than India. In addition, the number of Ph.D. faculty at public sector universities was also increased by almost by 50%, (i.e. from 4,203 to 6,067) during the years mentioned above. The credit goes to the sincere efforts of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, where PhD scholars that have started returning and joining universities in Pakistan. These scholars were selected for higher studies at prominent universities of the developed countries through a transparent, clear and merit-based system.

The statistics mentioned above clearly reveals the results of internationalization efforts by Pakistani universities and HEC of Pakistan. In addition many universities of Pakistan have initiated dual degree and split PhD programs, through which faculty members (and non-academic staff as well) have been provided opportunities to join high repute international universities on temporary basis and complete their MS or PhD programs. The scholars already returned from reputed universities throughout the world should be motivated by their parent universities and HEC, so they can play their role in research and development initiatives and can create many other opportunities for the new students as well.



Unfortunately, the negative image of Pakistan with reference to security conditions has hampered the inbound exchange of students and researchers. Thus the economic/financial rationale has not been addressed in a pragmatic manner and government should make sure the security of international students/researchers so Pakistani universities could get benefit of inbound exchange as well. Despite of the problems mentioned above, many Pakistani universities and HEC is a role model for Third World countries and many developing countries as well.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Latest trends such as ICT, the globalization of knowledge and WTO control over higher education on one hand has several benefits but on the other hand these trends have the potential to create severe problems for academic institutions in smaller or poorer nations. Though WTO aims to guarantee that degree awarding institutions could set up branches across the globe and/or export degrees by investing in offshore universities and importing/exporting teachers and students for the said purpose. However many stakeholders criticize regarding accreditations and quality control dimensions pertaining to internationalization of higher education. Can WTO/GATS ensure quality standards, which must be maintained in both the countries particularly the one which is in need of state of the art higher education services? The higher education regulatory authorities of both the countries should be on the same page to ensure quality standards with particular reference to student/teacher recruitments, teaching methodologies, curricula development and facilities at the campus. Moreover, Third World countries should join hands together to create opportunities for exchange of students, teachers and other resources. They should not merely depend on the funding/aid from developing countries but should generate their own resources. They must adapt proactive measures to get internationalized as Pakistan did. HEC Pakistan and Pakistan's top ranked universities serve as a role model for the other universities in less developed countries and developing countries as well. We recommend that captains from higher education institutions particularly from Third World Countries should seriously ponder upon these aspects and must incorporate long term strategies to overcome the future threats in the same way as the corporate sector has incorporated, else the universities (particularly the weaker ones) will be more vulnerable to acquisitions and downsizing as many other organizations have experienced during the last decade.

**Study Limitations and Scope**

This research endeavor is subject to many limitations. For example this paper does not present an empirical model based on data analysis, but only highlights few significant facets of internationalization of universities with particular reference to threats and opportunities the Third World Countries face in higher education sector. In other words, this paper is not based on quantitative or qualitative research techniques (e.g. interviews or questionnaires) but just on review of literature and some statistics from the secondary data retrieved from reliable sources. Through this effort we aimed to open the doors for the new scholars to enter this arena, apply thorough qualitative and quantitative techniques and come out with the outcomes in the form of some models which can be of utmost importance for the higher education institutes of the Third World Countries. Future research in this area can focus on comparative studies of weaker vs. stronger universities, developed vs. less developed countries etc. Thus, we also aim to incorporate the above mentioned suggestions in our future studies so as to come out with results based on pragmatic research methods which might be quantitative, qualitative or both.

## Notes & References

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Mary Henkel, "Academic identity and autonomy in a changing policy environment", *Higher education* 49, no. 1-2 (2005): 155-176.
- <sup>2</sup> Sorin E. Zaharia and Ernest Gibert, "The entrepreneurial university in the knowledge society", *Higher Education in Europe* 30, no. 1 (2005): 31-40.
- <sup>3</sup> Philip G. Altbach and Jane Knight, "The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities", *Journal of studies in international education* 11, no. 3-4 (2007): 290-305.
- <sup>4</sup> Barbara M. Kehm and Ulrich Teichler, "Research on internationalisation in higher education", *Journal of Studies in International Education* 11, no. 3-4 (2007): 260-273.
- <sup>5</sup> Hugo Horta, "The role of the state in the internationalization of universities in catching-up countries: An analysis of the Portuguese higher education system", *Higher Education Policy* 23, no. 1 (2010): 63-81.
- <sup>6</sup> Jane Knight, "Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales", *Journal of studies in international education* 8, no. 1 (2004): 5-31.
- <sup>7</sup> Zha Qiang, "Internationalization of higher education: towards a conceptual framework", *Policy Futures in Education* 1, no. 2 (2003): 248-270.
- <sup>8</sup> Jane Knight, "Internationalization: management strategies and issues", *International Education Magazine* 9, no. 1 (1993): 6..
- <sup>9</sup> Dijk Van Jan, "The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media" (Sage: 2006).
- <sup>10</sup> Jane Knight, "Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales", *Journal of studies in international education* 8, no. 1 (2004): 5-31.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Jane Knight, "Internationalization: Concepts, complexities and challenges", In *International handbook of higher education* (Netherlands: Springer, 2007), 207-227.
- <sup>13</sup> Abebaw Yirga Adamu, "Internationalisation of higher education in Africa: introducing credit accumulation and transfer system", *International Journal of Public Policy* 8, no. 4-6 (2012): 199-213.
- <sup>14</sup> Simon Marginson, "Dynamics of national and global competition in higher education", *Higher Education* 52, no. 1 (2006): 1-39.

<sup>15</sup> V. K. Rao, *Higher Education* (New Delhi: A. P. H. Public Corporation, 2003).