

# Internationalization of higher education: results and benefits

[Economics](#), [Globalization](#)



Globalization and neoliberal ideologies have jointly propelled the internationalization of higher education in recent decades. By means of liberalism, universities are becoming business enterprises, and by virtue of globalization they are seeking to expand their business beyond national borders. The definition of internationalization of higher education refers to the process of integrating an international or intercultural aspect into the teaching, research and service functions of internationalization. The international relations among universities have expanded significantly during the past two decades. According to published reports, the majority of educational institutions worldwide prioritize and place a high importance to internationalization. European universities seem to top the list in this regard, followed by North America, the Middle East, the Latin America and the Caribbean. The large English-speaking nations provide most services related to international higher education initiatives and control most programs. They sell their services to Asian, Latin American middle-income, and poor nations of the developing world, “ which are the “ buying” countries as they are unable to meet growing demand”.

The scope of internationalization of higher education has taken on various degrees of interests and areas of focus that range from traditional study abroad programs, taking courses at colleges or universities in other countries through internet or face to face arrangements such as branch campuses or franchises. “ Other activities include international partnerships, academic programs and research activities that emphasize advancement of international students’ perspectives and skills, promotion of foreign language programs and access to cross-cultural understanding”.

The process of internationalization of higher education brings with it several benefits (particularly for the students who experience an education abroad), and significant attention has been paid to international universities.

However, “severe risks, challenges, and controversies are part of this multifaceted and growing phenomenon”. The ongoing discussions in many countries about the internationalization process, its positive and negative consequences, seem to focus on the Western hegemony in the process. The dynamics of globalization and the concentration of the best universities in a handful of Western countries cause flows of students to be unidirectional towards those countries that are perceived to offer the best educational opportunities. In this context, little is being done “to promote long-term advances for students and institutions in developing nations”.

Commercialization, brain drain and low quality education are usually identified as the major risks associated with internationalization of higher education. Moreover, “each of these risks relates more to the cross-border aspects of internationalization than the campus-based activities”. One of the salient motives behind internationalization efforts is profit motive as many universities see international efforts “as a way to attract “revenue to balance their budgets. The international universities are eager to recruit international students so that they can charge higher fees”. Western universities are establishing branch campuses, and these branches are making money and profit that go back to the main campus. The developed institution charges high fees to students in developing countries, who pay to the benefit of usually wealthy universities in the USA and Europe. It remains unclear that internationalization based mainly or solely on commercial

priorities could bring the kind of educational benefits that are needed in many parts of the world. In fact, when commercialism drives the internationalization of higher education institutions, the neoliberal agenda becomes strengthened and expanded. Further, the “ loss of cultural or national identity, homogenization of international curriculum and “ brain drain” are threats that are inherent in the internationalization of higher education”.

International campuses may be functioning as outposts of foreign cultures and ways of life that have the effect of eroding, albeit partially, the cultural values of the host country. For some observers, “ the loss of cultural identity is definitely the most significant risk factor attached to the process of internationalization”. Moreover, the internationalization of higher education “ is widening the gap between socioeconomic classes and thus creating discrimination among developing societies’ students”. Some consider the process to be “ a threat to the intellectual, cultural and economic fortune of underdeveloped countries as developed countries are preparing these students for further higher or professional studies or job acquisition in their homeland. Internationalization of education by western advanced universities has also been equated with academic colonization that seeks to increase their academic influence into developing nations”. A major question for reflection is the degree to which the drivers of internationalization in higher education and higher education institutions ought to advocate for policy change at the level of regional and national governments, given the fact that creating well-balanced and constructive internationalization

strategies must be a priority for all parties involved. In this regard, initiatives that do not safeguard the long-term academic interests of higher education institutions should be sidelined. A continuous examination and evaluation of the effects of internationalization ought to be placed high in the agenda. This would include examining the impacts of a more internationally open program, classroom, and institution on students. In addition, a framework would be developed to put in practice plans to have large numbers of students from under-privileged countries exposed to scholars, researchers and professors from developed nations without imposing a financial burden on those under-privileged students. As noted by Hans de Wit and Laura E. Rumbley (2018): “ While the process of internationalization has progressed for the past few decades, there is an increasing disconnect between the relevance of internationalization and recent trends in society toward greater inward focus, manifested by anti-global and anti-international tendencies. Such developments are clearly evident in the United States under the current Trump administration; in the United Kingdom through the Brexit vote; in the election of nationalist-populist governments in such countries as the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, Brazil; and in light of the newly prominent role of hard right political parties in governments and/or parliaments in countries like Austria, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Norway, and the Netherlands. Elsewhere (such as in China, India, the Philippines, Russia, and Turkey), regimes combine nationalist positions with an internationalist agenda, unfortunately leaving little room for autonomy and academic freedom to operate in a truly open and internationally engaged or enriching way”.

In the long run, and in some cases in the shorter term, the tension between nationalistic tendencies and the push for global engagement could have a serious impact on the evolution of internationalization in higher education. Altbach and de Wit (2017) expect that “ the commercial side of internationalization will continue to thrive for some time, while internationalization at home will encounter more opposition and will depend even more on institutions than on governments for development and support”. Nationalist tendencies and other internal dynamics may significantly dampen the appeal of international engagement. As a result, it is possible that some longstanding “ industry leaders” — like the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as a number of other European countries — will face difficulties to advance their internationalization efforts within higher education.

Against this backdrop, other countries — such as Australia and Canada, but also a number of emerging economies — will likely become more active players and benefit from the waning engagement of the more longstanding national powerhouses. To be sure, the evolution of higher education internationalization will broadly follow the ebbs and flows of world markets and the reshaping of the political world order as we continue the deep and uncertain transition of capitalism that we are witnessing today.