



GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONALIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Introduction

Internationalization of HE Systems and Institutions is becoming an important issue all over the world. The globalization of the job market as cause and consequence of students and graduate's mobility is calling for new strategies and tools for the assessment of the quality of Education, at national and institutional level.

The 48 countries that signed the Bologna Declaration and joined the EHEA agreed to reform their HE systems adopting the big switch from teacher-centered to student-centered approach in designing and delivering the degree programmes.

The Bologna Process and the developed methodologies and goals represent a key reference point for all countries.

The EHEA introduced several tools, now widely used, for a correct comparison and a continuous improvement of both HE systems and HEI's activities.

The principles contained in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* and the criteria for the identification of the core characteristics of the accreditation and evaluation Agencies (including Ministry branches) are shared by several countries, beyond the 48 signatories of BD.

Consequently the Institutions are required to establish methods and tools for a continuous internal assessment of their activities: research, teaching, third mission, and the Ministries of Higher Education must establish criteria and indicators for the continuous evaluation and monitoring of the HE system.

The three missions of a HEI are strictly connected and international by nature. Thus, the Quality Assessment of a system or an Institution becomes the Quality assessment of their "internationalization".

1. Introducing the Internationalization **in the quality assessment of higher education**

Public Universities are funded by the governments, and funds are granted according to specific parameters, connected with

- the attractiveness of the accredited study programmes, that is the number of students enrolled, their provenance, geographical and scholastic, and their quality, as measured through the admission tests.
- the results relating to the students' career: dropouts, number of credits earned by students passing from one course year to the next one, time to graduation and final vote.
- the effectiveness of course units and other educational activities and of the learning process as a whole perceived by students and graduates respectively.
- the placement of graduates in the labor market, in particular the consistency between granted qualification and working activity, effectiveness of the degree in the working activity, opinion of the employed graduates on the adequacy of the education received.

The above implies that each Institution must be able to provide concrete evidence of its performance. Thus, they must establish clear objectives for the 3 missions, that for education means:

- measurable study programme objectives: educational objectives and associated competences, expected learning outcomes.
- clear educational process, which includes standards relating to the design and planning of the educational process and to the assessment of student learning.
- suitable resources, including standards relating to teaching staff, facilities and student services.
- available results' monitoring system, including standards relating to the monitoring of the results of the educational process.
- reliable "management system", which includes standards related to the organizational structure of the study programme and to the process of quality promotion and continuous improvement.

Since 2000, a wide range of educational systems and institutions have been directed to implement internationalization. To understand how universities, engage in internationalization and the effects of the process, it is necessary to address the following questions:

- 1) Which indicators should integrate the ones concerning the quality assessment in order to evaluate the implementation of internationalization at specific higher education institutions?
- 2) To which extent do students and faculty perceive the importance and feasibility of implementing internationalization at their higher education institutions?
- 3) How important were/are the opinions of students and faculty for the implementation of the internationalization policies and how to transform them in order to reinforce the process?

Internationalization refers to *“the specific policies and initiatives of countries and individual academic institutions or systems to deal with global trends. Examples of internationalization include policies relating to recruitment of foreign students, collaboration with academic institutions or systems in other countries, and the establishment of branch campuses abroad”* (Altbach, 2015).

Knight (2003) proposed a broadly accepted definition of internationalization that encompasses a national dimension: *“Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.”*

Knight (2008) also stated that two components are evolving in higher education:

- (a) internationalization at home, meaning activities that assist students in developing international understanding and intercultural skills (curriculum-oriented) and that prepare students to be active in a much more globalized world; and
- (b) internationalization abroad, meaning all forms of education across borders, including the circulation of students, faculty, scholars, and programs.

Due to the increased mobility and the extensive participation to cooperation Programmes, the above cannot be assessed with a restricted national or local view, but an international comparison and visibility is needed. Consequently, further indicators for measuring the capacity, for a HE system, to be attractive and to provide its students with the capacity to be competitive in a global context, must be identified.

For the Universities this means that they must increase their capacity:

- a) internationalization at home: to attract students and teachers from abroad able to create an international environment within their structures.
- b) internationalization abroad: to provide their students with the opportunity to follow part of the programme abroad through the establishment of suitable network of universities and the promotion of structured mobility.

This implies the reinforcement of the services and the improvement of the methods and tools for the recognition of credits. Thus, further indicators should be introduced at Country level (and consequently at institutional level) for assessing:

- the quality the services in support of mobility (IROs, academic committees, internationalization policy and tools, strategic plans, etc.).
- the presentation in the web site of the programmes in other languages, and by using the LO approach.
- the contribution of the internationalization policy to the performance of the institution in the implementation of the other 2 missions, research and social impact, and achievement of the planned objectives.

But these are only part of the complex, and still not widely accepted, set of indicators for the quality assessment of HE Institutions or systems.

Since internationalization refers to the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to compete in the globalized academic environment (Altbach and Knight, 2007), it has become a major concern in higher education and is explicitly considered an institutional priority in several countries all over the world.

As internationalization has matured at the institutional level, the interest in measuring the “international-ness/internationality” of a university by using a set of indicators (Brandenburg et al., 2009) has increased.

As Knight (2015) pointed out, internationalization can lead to both positive and negative consequences, unless consideration is applied to developing and using appropriate indicators. For instance, quantitative data can provide useful information to an institution. However, when only outcome indicators are used, the transformative process of internationalization can be ignored. In the context of the fourth industrial revolution, new perspectives are in the horizons of higher education, where the concept of internationalization is a key stone, that need to be updated, refreshed, and fine-tuned.

There are also myths (Knight 2011) and misconceptions (de Wit, 2011,2014) to be considered:

- foreign students are internationalization agents,
- international reputation is the only way to quality assurance,
- global branding is the purpose of an institution’s internationalization efforts,
- the more partnerships, the more international an institution is,
- Internationalization is teaching in the English language,
- Internationalization is studying abroad,
- Internationalization equals an international subject,
- Internationalization is a goal in itself.

Looking at the literature related to methodology and tools for evaluating internationalization, so as to answer the questions 1) 2) and 3), it is evident that measuring and assessing internationalization outcomes and their impact is becoming increasingly crucial, since these continue to become more central to defining quality in higher education teaching, research, and engagement. The challenge for institutions is to create a manageable and meaningful approach to understanding the true impact and ultimately the success of internationalization policies and strategies. But whatever the array of goals an institution may choose for measuring the success of its efforts, the question of whether those efforts enhance student learning must be the prominent objective.

A measurement and analysis approach must integrate multiple dimensions, measures, and assessment tools to accurately reflect the various “faces” of internationalization, where students’ opinions might play a crucial role.

The literature review identified numerous aspects of internationalization. Starting from Knight’s (1997) three key elements: the motives, the strategies, and the approaches, through the Ellingboe’s (1998) six dimensions of internationalization: faculty involvement in international activities, internationalized curricula, study abroad, international students and scholars, and college leadership, till the OECD’s tool called the “Internationalization Quality Review Process

(IQRP)", Gao (2015) proposed a qualitative approach for developing indicators for internationalization. The approach highlights the method for developing indicators and specifies the people who should be engaged in the process and the steps that should be followed in indicators' development.

PAWER project, based on literature and analysis of the experiences of the partner Institutions and information from the Ministries of Education of the involved countries, tried to develop suitable indicators for promoting a sustainable and fruitful approach to internationalization and promote mobility not only between EU and Partner Countries but also between the Partner Countries, in the framework of shared principles of quality, transparency and accountability.

The result reveals that the universities in each PC place strong efforts on producing globally competent graduates and on internationalizing the curriculum, research, and services. However, there is still a need to include more internationalization effort in the university assessments process.

2. Policy-driven institutional internationalization

The purpose of the project was to create a comprehensive model for interpreting the phenomenon of “internationalization” at the institutional and national level.

The questionnaires submitted to the Ministries aimed to understand the state of art and the policy trends in the Partner Countries involved, focusing on

- why the policy favors internationalization in higher education institutions, and
- how the policy is implemented.

According to the results, internationalization in higher education in the 7 countries has the following main objectives:

- a) Exposing students to cross-cultural experiences: To aid students in broadening their horizons and familiarizing themselves with other cultures, promoting joint/dual degree partnerships with international counterparts.
- b) Enhancing the language (English) proficiency of students: Accreditation of students’ English competence is becoming a requisite for graduation, and a growing number of courses/programmes are English taught, which benefit both international and local students.
- c) Increasing the number of international scholars and students pursuing academic degrees.
- d) Increasing the number of international exchange students.
- e) Providing talented open-minded graduates for promoting innovation.

The following internationalization indicators identified by PAWER project provide useful concepts and practices for the present Guidelines, assisting the Ministries to develop a comprehensive assessment framework to determine the effectiveness of internationalization in higher education institutions and system.

Table 1 - Selected indicators for internationalization at the institutional level.

Dimension	Indicators	Description
Context	C1	Increase in the number of international students
	C2	Distribution of international students’ countries and increase in
	C3	their number
	C4	Increase in the number of overseas students
Input	I1	Distribution of overseas students and their increase among various countries
	I2	Setting up international affairs offices
	I3	Investing in staff in the international affairs offices
		Strategic plan for internationalization

	I4 I5	Monitoring the process of internationalization through standardized operation procedures Funding for promoting internationalization
Process	P1 P2 P3 P4 P5 P6	Establishing distance-learning programs Promoting international research cooperation Endorsing internationalization-related courses Promoting international learning activities Promoting international student recruitment Promoting international internship accreditation
Output	O1 O2 O3 O4 O5 O6	Ratio of outbound students Ratio of international students on campus Ratio of foreign staff on campus Number of international-cooperation programs Number of articles published in international journals Number of papers in international conference proceedings

These indicators are able to measure the diversity in implementing internationalization at the higher education institutions, thus are a good tool for the Ministries to enhance the internationalization level of the HE system and, at the same time, provide a guide for the Institutions for improving their policies and strategies.

3. Internationalisation and global university rankings

The global university rankings are a relatively recent phenomenon that is influencing also the national rankings.

The growth of them coincides with the advance of globalization and the importance of HE for social and economic recovery and development, the “marketization” of higher education, the increase in professional and academic mobility of both students and staff, the rapid development of information technology and digital media, as well as public calls for greater accountability.

Traditional ways of assessing academic reputation over time, often through closed-circle peer reviews, are being challenged by an increasing transparency brought by bibliometrics and other data available online. Such data, processed and amplified by media-driven rankings play an increasing role in shaping the image of the Institutions and national systems. Even though still under debate, the influence of such rankings is growing also at national level.

THE WUR (Times Higher Education World Universities ranking), QS WUR, Shanghai ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities), are focused mainly on the research, and reputation in the worldwide academic communities.

Quality Assessment reports are generally hard to understand, while global ranking results appear to be easily readable. Of course it is not so simple since several methodological shortcomings limit the usefulness of such rankings in measuring the “quality” of higher education. To address these shortcomings different initiatives have been set up, as for instance the creation of the U-Multirank to highlight the diversity of higher education and also THE WUR and ARWU are introducing other fields and indicators, enlarging the analysis to the other missions, besides research.

The current literature suggests that higher education’s internationalization is perceived as an important contribution to the quality of higher education. Nonetheless few approaches have been developed to assess the quality of internationalization. But recently it is becoming one of the topics of the extended interest of the main global rankings, well considered by U-Multirank. For these reasons the development and use of indicators for the Internationalisation at institutional and national level is increasing its relevance.

4. Conclusions

PAWER project has provided a comprehensive indicator framework to determine the internationalization in higher education institutions. In this indicator system, we considered context, input, process, and output dimensions (CIPO model, developed by Jaap Scheerens, 1990) to classify the indicators, but integrating it with other perspectives, as

- Effectiveness*, that is the extent to which an education system is able to achieve predetermined goals,
- Efficiency*, that is seeking to achieve the highest possible effectiveness with the lowest possible of costs,
- Adaptivity*, that is the extent to which education adequately responds to specific questions from the broader social-, cultural- and economic context.

These indicators can be evaluated by different participants for specific purposes in various higher education settings, and the results suggest the following strategies for implementing internationalization in the participating institutions:

- First, universities must have a strategic plan for internationalization and should create self-regulated steps for its development and implementation.
- Second, universities must establish/update an international affairs office and invest in qualified, professional teams for accomplishing this task.
- Third, financial support is a basic need for promoting internationalization at institution level. In particular, higher education institutions need to prepare long-term financial support for internationalization, in conjunction with other priorities.
- Finally, Institutions must construct specific key performance indicators for monitoring internationalization.

The suggested indicators represent a quite efficient approach to the complex phenomenon of implementing university internationalization, but in the future, further projects/studies could determine more specific variables for further reorganization and revision of them in order to fit higher education institutions' evolution.

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