

INTERNATIONALIZING CURRICULUM FOR INNOVATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITIES IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Introduction

Internationalization of higher education has become an ever-increasing imperative of a modern society. Mainly led by theories of globalization and knowledge economy discourse, internationalization is reshaping the university functioning – even on the margins. This has been emphasized in a large-scale survey conducted by the International Association of Universities. In this survey, 87% of respondents identified internationalization as a central element in the strategic development of their institutions (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2010). While some scholars explain the importance of internationalization by the challenges of a globalized world (van der Wende, 1997; Altbach & Knight, 2007), it is also true that each university has its own sociocultural context that can shape its perceptions and experiences of internationalization (Yang, 2002).

In the context of entrepreneurial universities, it is widely considered that internationalization reinforces institutional competitiveness and contributes to innovation (Larionova, 2012). Entrepreneurial universities, whose mission is to engage actively in local economy's development, should pay sufficient attention to their internationalization agenda since "it is not possible for a university to be entrepreneurial without being international" (OECD, 2012, p. 14). There are different rationales that seek to explain the importance of internationalization for entrepreneurial universities. One rationale sees internationalization as an action plan for generating new streams of revenue. As universities become "income-generating units" (Deem, 2001, p. 13), increasing number of institutions adhere to principles of teaching and research excellence in order to respond to global and local market demands (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

It is unknown to what extent internationalization is viewed by universities in Kazakhstan as a source for income generation, but the idea of rethinking higher education institutions as entrepreneurial settings is gaining momentum in Kazakhstan. Today, most universities in the country have committed themselves to pursuing internationalization programs. Some do it as part of their institutional agenda while an increasing number of universities are integrating international practices into their academic functioning in post-Bologna policy context. In 2011, as part of its commitment to Bologna policy the government of Kazakhstan created a brand new law "On Science", which provided local universities with new opportunities and resources for internationalizing their research and science endeavors. However, it is important to bear in mind that innovation begins in the classrooms with students and faculty expanding the frontiers of knowledge. Without underestimating the role of academic research in knowledge production, this conceptual paper focuses on why internationalization of teaching and learning is important for people and institutions pursuing entrepreneurialism. Some common concepts of internationalization of curriculum are provided below, and some ideas are addressed on how these concepts can be applicable with teaching and learning practices experienced in Kazakhstani classrooms.

Internationalization of curriculum – defining primary concepts

I believe that conceptualization of internationalization of curriculum should begin with understanding what is meant by the term “internationalization” itself. Although many scholars use a classic definition suggested by Knight (1994; 2004), internationalization of higher education has been recently redefined in a study commissioned by the European Parliament as:

the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 281).

This definition connects quality with institutional mission en-route to internationalization, and emphasizes a broader contribution to society. Contribution to society can have different meanings in different nations, but they share the idea that adequate access to cutting-edge materials and resources shall facilitate faculty and students’ understanding of self and others. While facilitation can be done through various activities, “at the heart of the development process lies a fundamental reexamination of teaching provision to reflect the challenge of internationalization” (Taylor, 2004, p. 157).

Curricular and pedagogical transformations, or internationalization of curriculum, may be the most significant way of building an academic environment that supports and fosters the development of international and intercultural skills for living and working in a context of global interdependence. Green and Shoenberg state that internationalization of curriculum is the “most important strategy institutions can use to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they will need as citizens and workers in a rapidly changing and globalized world” (2006, p. iii).

Curriculum in this context encompasses far more than a classroom activity. It is a whole teaching-and-learning experience with all essential constituents embodied in this experience. Hence, internationalization of curriculum can be determined as a “process of incorporating international, intercultural and global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study” (Leask, 2015). An internationalized curriculum incorporates cross-cultural and global elements and seeks to assure the learning outcomes that would help students manage their personal and professional lives. Having obtained these learning outcomes, university graduates will not only navigate their ways more masterfully through different uncertainties, but they will be more willing to contribute to society in which they live. Surrounded by challenging entrepreneurial circumstances of the current era, these students need learning experiences that would educate them to become active players and opportunists of today.

Internationalization of curriculum in entrepreneurial settings – how and why?

Extending the conversation on learning outcomes, it can be proposed that international curriculum in an entrepreneurial setting is the one that integrates business context into teaching and learning practices. Burn and Smuckler (1995) called US academic institutions for curriculum reform that would consider current and future realities of the business world. The scholars suggested that institutional curricula should have “the most profound effect”

on university graduates' "attitudes and perceptions" about the world that these young people would inherit (Burn & Smuckler, 1995, p. 5).

Two decades later, the business world still perceives a certain gap between its realities and "attitudes and perceptions" of new university graduates. In their recent study, Cheng et al. (2016) report mismatch between skills possessed by university graduates and the skills pursued by employers from small and medium-sized enterprises. For example, a characteristic called by the European Commission (2006) as an "entrepreneurial mindset" or "the student's ability to think and respond entrepreneurially" (OECD2012 p.8) is highly valued by employers. Many employers believe that despite having a strong theoretical knowledge of business most graduates have little understanding of entrepreneurial and business context (O'Brien & Hart, 1999; Woods & Dennis, 2009). That is, there is an articulation by employers that university graduates are not fully aware about how their knowledge should and can be applied to the challenges of a real world. Then the question is what shall these young people do in order to engage more comprehensively with an ever-changing business environment and a personal life that is full of uncertainties and complexities? The most common response that comes from the scholarly literature is a reference to the Triple Helix model that considers increase in university-government-industry relations (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000).

While it is true that universities should pursue extensive collaboration with industry representatives, it is also true that institutions should seek more engagement with other international universities committed to the ethos of entrepreneurialism. These partnerships shall foster faculty collaboration, since it is they who design, teach and assess university curriculum. Without having faculty members fully engaged in this process, it is difficult to expect substantive changes to curricula and quality improvements in learning outcomes. Therefore, it is significant for faculty to have access to teaching and learning opportunities in the international competitive environment. With such experience, they will be more eager to develop the cutting-edge ideas for tailoring curriculum in entrepreneurial era – the one that fosters students to communicate, solve problems, take risks and show leadership in various challenging contexts.

Current trends and emerging needs for Kazakhstan

The past decade has been full of reforms in the higher education sector. Major transformations, which occurred in a Bologna and post-Bologna policy context, have reflected in that most universities in the country have started paying special attention to internationalization. What Kazakhstani institutions mean by internationalization of higher education varies as different institutions look to different higher education traditions and trajectories shaping policy in practice with "multiple influences of Russian, EU, and other international policies" (Silova, 2011, p. 12).

Although Kazakhstani government declares that the country's higher education policy is adherent of the principles of Bologna Accords, the process of internationalization started in Kazakhstan earlier than the Bologna discourse did. It might have started even before initial theories of globalization have begun to emerge in the country. Kazakhstan's population has long since been placed in the center of ethnic diversity. That is, it might be fair enough to state that the issues of equity, multiculturalism, and the acceptance of others have always existed in the nation, which inherited diverse ethnic populations during the era of

Soviet forced settlements. It is that with the new global economy agenda, characteristics of internationalization have started to gain new meaning. Pushed by the government, the universities have been put in a race for competitiveness, and the challenge might get even tougher in the context of a growing university autonomy discourse. Once become self-dependent, universities in Kazakhstan will have to compete harder for funding and excellence. The question is if this race will foster the learning process of those who will take the lead in creating new jobs for the emerging economy of Kazakhstan.

In a survey on perceptions of internationalization processes in universities of Kazakhstan, 67% of respondents viewed internationalization of curriculum as a priority in future reforms (Maudarbekova & Kashkinbayeva, 2013). Consequently, there is a growing need for enhancing the quality of existing curricula, as these perceptions refer to the lack of academic freedom and the excessive amount of state regulation in curriculum design. Apparently, these do not always give universities opportunity to tailor programs that will meet fast-changing needs of students and external stakeholders, like industries and employers.

Another challenge that needs to be addressed is the closed nature of the companies in Kazakhstan (International Business Publications, 2013). The lack of transparent and trustful relations with industry might cause obstacles in creating effective partnerships with different companies. Informal inquiry suggests that this remains as a major challenge for business faculty in Kazakhstan to develop teaching case studies that would help them introduce students to realities of existing entrepreneurial environment in the country, not to mention other opportunities like improvement of the students' career perspectives.

Implications for future research

Internationalization of curriculum occupies the central place in the overall university functioning. It involves many stakeholders whose contribution of time, efforts and sufficient attention is necessary for this process to be successful. Faculty members lie in the heart of these transformations, and they should possess perspectives and skills that would encourage the innovation to start in classrooms. Therefore, more thorough understanding of how curriculum internationalization is perceived by them is necessary before Kazakhstani institutions commit themselves to any further reforms in this area.

It will be useful to explore how faculty are supported in their teaching endeavors at universities. Academics are the ones who deliver institutional mission in the classrooms. They can be truly considered as the architects of curriculum that either will result in the shortage of knowledge and competences in university graduates, or will engender young people to become global academics, global citizens, and global professionals competent enough to face all sorts of uncertainties. Other implications for future research exist as well, but faculty experiences in curricular transformations require detailed research in order to make further improvements in the status quo of higher education curriculum.

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