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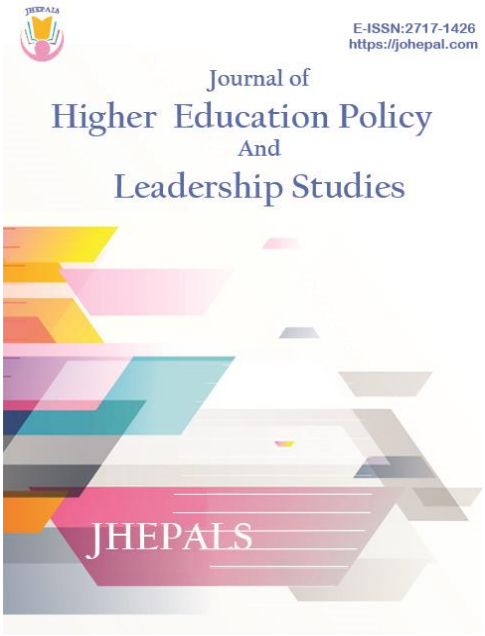

The Internationalization of Higher Education Beyond 2030

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The Internationalization of Higher Education Beyond 2030

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Highlights

- The text offers a prospective view of the internationalization of higher education beyond 2030. It explores past, present and future actions in this field, identifying challenges and opportunities. Its approach provides a solid basis for understanding the evolution and growing importance of academic internationalization. It also analyses emerging trends that will become a reality in a few years' time.
- By 2030, internationalization will offer less physical mobility, prioritising the internationalization of curricula at home. Cultural and linguistic diversity will be more equitable thanks to online mobilities. An increase in transversal actions related to values, solidarity and coexistence is anticipated, promoting a more inclusive and collaborative higher education.
- This article is important to report on the internationalization actions of higher education, offering a reflection on its future.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); Internationalization of Higher Education; Mobility; Internationalization; Globalization

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Introduction

Higher education is one of the most international sectors as it is global. The growth of institutions, teachers, researchers and students in the 20th century has been impressive. For example, in the early 1900s there were only about half a million students enrolled. Today, according to UNESCO, there are more than 220 million, with most of the growth occurring in recent decades (Schofer & Meyer, 2005).

Access to higher education has therefore become widespread. The turning point came in the 1970s and 1980s, when many countries were forced to increase student access to higher education to provide greater equality of educational and social opportunities (Trow, 1970).

On the social side, access to higher education is seen as an important mechanism for reducing inequality of opportunity and a factor in promoting social mobility, and on the economic side, the conviction has been held that the more educated people are, the more economic progress will be created. Higher education policy, in this context, has become a field of great social and political interest, debate and dispute (Rumbley et al., 2014). This fact has meant that different university systems have often sought to ensure growth, secure funding, democratise access and improve social equity (Neves & Barbosa, 2020).

In order to continue to grow, in the 1970s, universities began to incorporate an international vision into their agenda.

Although the international orientation of some educational institutions centuries ago should not be forgotten (Stier, 2003). It is even more than a century ago that universities began to establish campuses in other countries and cities, outside the home country (Knight, 2018). There are now more than 330 international campuses.

It was around the 1980s when the term 'internationalization' became widely used in the field of higher education.

At the 1998 World Conference on Higher Education in Paris, UNESCO conveyed that the increasing internationalization of higher education is first and foremost a reflection of the global character of learning and research. The increasing number of students, teachers and researchers who study, teach, undertake research, live and communicate in an international context attests to this welcome general development (UNESCO, 1998, p. 33). In short, since the mid-1990s, the international dimension has become increasingly integrated into systematically planned and implemented university strategies.

Until then, international contacts were made on an individual basis, between teachers and researchers. Many of the exchanges came from cooperation (in terms of development) between countries. Since the early 2000s, it has come to be seen as a continuous process with an institutional focus. Staff mobility being the main mechanism of internationalization.

Even Van der Wende (2001) foresaw processes of competitive cooperation that years later has been evidenced by the presence of institutional rankings and rankings.

From this point onwards, actions begin to appear with certain planning by the institutions, with strategic lines with a defined focus on contents, methods, people and international structures and often driven by political, academic, economic and socio-cultural interests.

In short, from the first international universities to the internationalization of education in general, there has been an evolution of the concept over the last decades. First

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as a marginal aspect, now the trend seeks to reach a broader dimension dedicated to satisfaction and the search for the improvement of society.

Internationalization Policies

Actions focused on mobility come from national and institutional strategies. From the institutional level, mainly the relations are bilateral and the mobility of its university members is the most usual and visual action, descending in some cases to more human and social aspects generating more personal actions. Political, social, cultural and economic instability is a reality. It could be argued that we are in a super-complex era, as Ronald Barnett put it a few years ago, where policies must seek open, bold and accessible higher education institutions (2000).

Institutions have a big role to play as they are the ones who sign bilateral agreements to send or receive students.

To further improve current activities, certain limitations must be overcome: many countries do not have clear policies and guidelines; others lack academic, scientific or linguistic capabilities; and many accept and encourage brain drain.

In relation to national policies, most of the actions come from developed countries (mostly from the Global North), due to the ease of developing reciprocal relationships and certain cultural affinity. A research conducted by Crăciun in 2018 confirms that little more than 10% of the countries on the planet have national strategies on the internationalization of higher education. This determines that the system is uneven and, in most cases, driven by economic reasons. The term “academic capitalism” is even used (Jones et al., 2021).

The following is a classification of periods related to current and future actions in the internationalization of higher education.

Today

- Physical mobility is still booming because many companies still value it.
- Probably the most dominant factor or action today is physical mobility. But in recent years there has been a noticeable growth in programmatic and policy mobility, with a slight increase in "virtual mobility".
- There are some perceived trends of unnecessary travel, especially when internationalization is of short duration, and is also being favoured by the increased use of online communication platforms and the digitisation of documents. The Covid health pandemic probably changed travel patterns with the technological platforms.
- The internationalization of higher education is still mainly seen in terms of a Westernised, English-speaking paradigm.
- Many countries have eased or simplified their visa policies, signed bilateral or regional alliances or agreements and bilateral or multilateral free trade treaties, etc.
- Higher education internationalization strategies are increasingly looking for educational space.

In the Future

To improve the internationalization of the sector in the future, for example in 2030, it is necessary to consolidate current trends but also to take some initiatives such as:

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- Virtual mobility should have the same weight as face-to-face mobility and therefore, thanks to ICT.
- Students should develop a global perspective while at university that helps and encourages them to think about the need to live on a planet where they place themselves, work, have fun and live with other people.
- Egalitarian values are characterised by transmitting a new way of relating in society where all people have the same dignity, value and rights, regardless of their gender. An international university will help to make egalitarian values a reality.
- Transversal actions will be a reality. There will be collaborations beyond the academic sphere with the common goal of creating a better, more egalitarian and fairer world, with greater respect for life, freedom, solidarity, coexistence, honesty, national identity and perseverance.
- Transparency is a concept linked to ethics. Universities and research centres should promote policies that develop transparency actions.
- Cooperation agreements between countries need to be improved. Even if they are fixed and signed by most countries on the planet (in Chapter IX of the UN Charter), they must be a reality.
- The development of ICT infrastructure has become more crucial than ever, and certain technological spaces in some countries of the global south are aware of this. In this line, cooperation is again crucial, as the constant growth of virtual interactions can penalise developing countries, and therefore the more developed countries must help those in need. After years of fighting the digital divide, now is the time to reduce it as much as possible.
- Institutional agreements and relations will not disappear, nor will those between countries or regions, but personal and individual internationalization will be very strong, as it is faster than institutional internationalization and allows for more dynamic rhythms.
- It will be necessary to establish university or educational “points” abroad and innovation centres, created by groups of countries rather than by individual institutions. For example, the Asian, Latin American, Nordic, etc. space or point.
- Overcoming the westernised paradigm of the internationalisation of higher education and giving space and prominence to countries in the global south.
- Need for an office or team dedicated to internationalisation tasks within each institution or the country itself in order to develop, implement and monitor internationalisation policies and strategies.

Conclusion

The results of internationalization offer clear benefits in the teaching and learning processes in universities (training, research and innovation) and is a world of opportunities to improve the current planet (services to society).

Currently developed countries dominate internationalization actions, but it is expected that in the future there will be a grouping of countries together with the global south. This requires overcoming certain limitations stemming from the country's own geographical location and is further restricted by political instability, economic barriers and

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socio-cultural legacies. Likewise, internationalization is crucial to overcome obstacles affecting various countries or regions, such as challenges like poverty, climate change and educational inequalities, among others.

To overcome barriers, it is necessary to embrace the positive aspects of the university sector, as it has a certain autonomy in most countries (regulatory autonomy, economic autonomy, autonomy of actions, autonomy of contacts, etc.) and it is essential to strengthen connections between regions and countries rather than ambitious institutional strategies.

In the same line, there should be a universal commitment to internationalization discourses in official documents and a consensual agreement on its importance. All this will allow for joint efforts in the contexts of global challenges, technological advances and changing paradigms of teaching and learning.

In short, with the best expectations and forecasts, a global knowledge society, where all people have access to the same information and knowledge, could be achieved by the year 2030.

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Human Participants

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Originality Note

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