

Internationalizing Higher Education

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Many nations are moving towards economic interdependency as the *modus operandi* to ensure its economic growth. The increase of transnational mergers is a testament. This fact, implies that a new kind of labour is required to function across nations and cultures. According to Tan (2003), "An emerging knowledge economy is dependent on nations that can provide the required labour force to meet the needs of an increasingly globalized economy." Changes that are taking place at universities and colleges worldwide are based on the belief that knowledge is important in enabling the training of workers towards generating economic productivity and wealth (Gregor, 2002). Consequently, institutions of higher learning will need to consider internationalizing their campuses in order to prepare future graduates to work in a globalized environment.

The meaning of internationalization has been commonly linked with international activities or initiatives and is often synonymously referred to as multicultural education, international education, international programmes, and study abroad. Researchers in the field of internationalization have defined it more broadly and comprehensively in order to define its meaning and importance to higher education. Knight (1997) defines internationalization as "the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching/training, research, and service functions of a university or college or technical institute" (p.29). This definition describes internationalization as an effort to include an international perspective in some of the most fundamental roles performed by an institution of higher learning such as teaching, research, and service.

The aim of this article is to propose a model of an internationalization process for institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. The consideration for any attempt at internationalizing a campus requires careful and strategic planning in order to ensure that most precautionary steps are well defined. More importantly, the model outlines a process of internationalizing higher education. This is important because the internationalization of a campus is not primarily about putting in place certain components, such as the existence of an international office or the recruitment of international students to the university and or college. The two components mentioned are strands of internationalization but they do not reflect the full internationalization process. This particular model outlines the necessary steps for administrators of a campus to take into consideration, prior to establishing an internationalization course of action, the necessary and important components that make up the process and the benefits that will sustain the process. Internationalizing higher education needs to be considered as a process

that entails an overall change of higher education (Harari, 1992). Scholars who conduct research in international education often describe internationalization as a process.

Malaysia as a country that is exploring the possibility of becoming a hub for education may have to consider an internationalization plan for its campuses. It is important to give the accompanying process careful thought as globalization has placed a high value on knowledge economy. Malaysia as a country will have to deal with the transfer of knowledge between countries and the mobility of individuals who seek higher education. In addition, internationalizing the campus is an important facet of the development of higher education institutions. It helps to prepare its students for the challenges of globalization that are currently creating a high degree of interdependence among nations (American Council on Education, 1995). Malaysian graduates may be working in multinational companies that are located in this country. Any form of exposure to international issues at the undergraduate level is beneficial for future Malaysian graduates. It helps them understand the nature of the changing workforce, which is becoming more international. The internationalization of the curriculum incorporating liberal education will help students to develop global awareness and understanding about diverse cultures (Harari, 1992; Marden and Engerman, 1992).

The Proposed Model: The Internationalizing Fabric

The model consists of three stages of internationalizing fabric: (a) Pre-Internationalizing, (b) Internationalizing, and (c) Sustaining Internationalizing (see Figure 1).

The first stage, Pre-Internationalizing, is the pre-departure point of an internationalization process. A university that would like to embark on an internationalization process should consider evaluating the current "international situation" on its campus. The existing international education programmes and activities should be identified in order to prevent a "reinventing the wheel" syndrome and to ensure that resources, especially the human resource of individuals who have international experiences and who are actively engaged in international activities, can be identified as significant individuals who can contribute to the internationalizing process. Similarly, international scholars and international students who are able to bring a different perspective to a subject matter is another human resource that can be tapped for the university's international programmes and activities. In addition, the existing curriculum has to be examined to determine if an international perspective needs to be included.

In addition, the *Pre-Internationalizing* stage includes the need to identify how its stakeholders such as faculty members and administrators perceive an internationalizing effort. Is internationalizing about enrolling more international students, increasing the participation of students in study abroad programmes, inviting more international scholars? Is internationalizing about encouraging faculty members and administrators to seriously consider expanding the university's involvement in international activities? Is internationalizing considered a process or is it more a content-based effort? These issues have to be taken into consideration because it would allow for its stakeholders to have a common understanding with regards to this stage of activities so that effective internationalizing can take place.

The second stage, *Internationalizing*, consists of three elements. These are the components that are needed to internationalize a campus, i.e. media, approaches of the internationalization process, and challenges that may hinder the process. If a university decides to embark on an internationalizing effort and make it its most important agenda, then challenges can be anticipated.

The media for internationalizing a campus includes creating and diversifying resources, curricular changes, and organizational changes. The effort to create and diversify

resources is crucial for institutions that either lack financial and human resources to promote internationalization or suffer from a severe budget cut. External funding may be sought to continue the internationalization process so that international activities may be continued. Curricular changes are crucial because students receive direct instruction in international issues through an internationalized curriculum. Organizational changes have to take place for internationalization to develop in an environment that realizes its importance.

Change in an organization, such as in an institution of higher learning, may not be well received by individuals who may not share the same value and enthusiasm for internationalizing a campus. Consequently, potential barriers such as a rationale for internationalizing the campus, the climate of the campus, students' background, the available resources, the level of language skills, and the influence of world events have to be anticipated.

Sustaining Internationalizing is the third stage of the model, which includes the importance of internationalizing the campus and its future developments. An internationalizing process has to be evaluated after it has been implemented to ascertain its success or failure and areas that may require more time and effort because the future of this process is dependent on it.

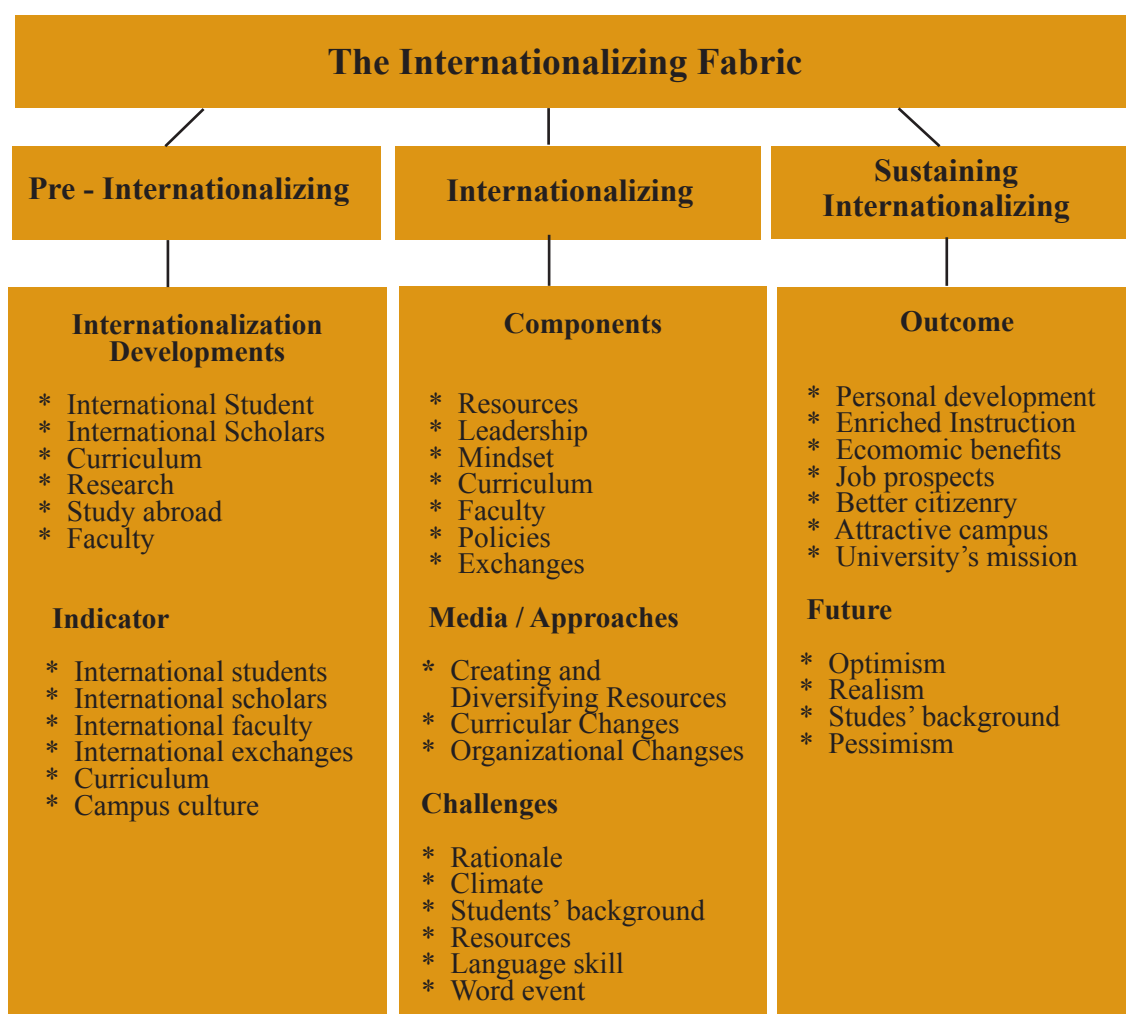


Figure 1. The Internationalizing Fabric

Conclusions

The above model describes a phase-like internationalization process for internationalizing higher education. The pre-internationalizing phase requires higher education administrators who would like to internationalize their campuses to identify existing internationalization components so that redundancy of projects will not take place. In addition, this exercise will allow the administration to bring together individuals who are already involved in international education to pool their talents to accelerate this process. The internationalizing phase identifies the components that are required to internationalize a campus, the approaches to achieve it, and the challenges that may be faced. The last phase, sustaining internationalizing, identifies the benefits or outcomes of the internationalization process and its future possibilities.

Any university or college in Malaysia that is considering internationalizing its campus may find that this model facilitates the understanding that internationalization is a process and not only an effort that has to focus only on content. It helps administrators to identify the related components and approaches that are required to initiate the process as well as the challenges that may exist. The benefits stated serve as possible rationales for any internationalization effort.

The internationalization of higher education is important to any institution of higher learning that seeks to provide its graduates with the knowledge and skills to face this increasingly globalized world. This process is taking place on numerous campuses around the world and Malaysian campuses will need to explore this process in order to determine its importance and utility.

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