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## PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

The turn of the new century witnessed a paradigm shift in economic and political philosophy that has changed the face of the world. Conventional frame work fostering isolation and economic restraint, protectionism and self-centredness has given way to economic liberalism, permissiveness and collectivism. The world started looking at the immense opportunity of 'transacting trade without barriers.' The fallout of this has been quite impressive that it has made foot prints in education also. In the context of globalization, education has become yet another means of serving political and economic goals. Whereas students across the globe took it as an opportunity for expanding their academic aspirations to gain the benefit of vast expanse of knowledge in potentially vibrant cultures, and advance their learning in tandem with the ambience of diverse peer group and scholarly academia of reputed universities, nations began to encash upon this opportunity by proactively creating conducive environment for such ambitious expeditions of foreign students, what we refer to as internationalization in Higher Education. This paper aims to revisit our approach to understanding internationalization through conceptualising models. The goals and philosophy of various dominant models of internalization and key features the models are discussed.

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## INTRODUCTION

Internationalization is a term attributed to having students from across the globe in higher educational institutions. It represents a diverse mix of students from different nationalities flocking together in pursuit of their studies. In the classic form we find this as a trend in higher education because of two main reasons. One for example is that the students' home country may not have the requisite standards in the subject of choice. Secondly, it may be born out of the brighter prospects that open up for an educational qualification acquired in a foreign country. Most noticeably western education is best appreciated in third world countries, owing to the widely shared notion of high standards of teaching and learning they maintain. Nevertheless internationalization equips the learners with key cultural fluency skills in the preparation for a globalized future. These skills pertain to understanding of diversities and differences, at the same time ability to get along despite cultural difference as hindrances thereby reducing barrier between nations and facilitating transfer of knowledge.

## OBJECTIVES, AGENDA & METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to evolve an approach to internationalization as a subject of study.

#### The objectives are as follows

- To examine prevailing models in the understanding of internationalization.
- To address commodification and commercialisation as major drivers.
- To identify internationalization as contributing to transformation and change.
- To bring out the role of culturalism as a invisible instrument creating realignments conducive to inclusive learning.
- To unfold the linkages between development and internationalization.

Institutional case studies and focus group discussions with international scholars and select academia have been adopted as methodology for the study.

## HYPOTHESES

There is a reciprocal relationship between development and internationalization. Internationalization accelerate development, and development in turn favour internationalization. Commodification and commercialisation are key drivers in the process. Culturalism and Globalism are indicators of invisible realignments that contribute to reducing the barriers in learning, and bridging gaps between the learning prerequisites. Internationalization acts as a change agent in bringing transformation and change in societies. The various models and approaches to internationalization are indicative of a shift in focus evolving with changing times and socio-cultural context as well as characteristics of the learner group and host nations.

## APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONALIZATION

Internationalization is not just about the presence of students from different nationalities flocking together to further their higher education aspirations. It is complex and multifaceted with distinct philosophy and approaches. It is a subject of study not merely a practice. A few dominant models could be considered for studying internationalization. One among them is the commodification model. For instance, among world nations largest overseas student population is in the United States. Just looking at the example of US which has highest number of international students in the world, students from China account for a contribution of 15 billion dollar annually by way of tuition fee, which forms the financial backbone for many educational institutions. This is a Commodification model of education that looks at education as a commodity, which carry a price and which could be transacted, resulting in generating revenue. Many times, internationalization tend to view education as a potential market arena which facilitate trade. Education becomes a business more than a product and assumes the role of capital. This trade facilitates each nation to be an active player through building their market potential, thereby representing a Commercialisation model. Thirdly, internationalization has an ideological connotation. The culture and values that are carried across national boundaries, influence each other. Diversities often become inspiring instruments. This is a Culturalism model. All this apart the impact of mass migrations on learning necessitate a still different construct. Knowledge is shared, information flows, institutions collaborate and academic innovations are introduced all in the best interest of the learners. The learning components are realigned through a process of 're-distancing' or 're-positioning' which leads to understanding internationalism through a Globalism perspective.

## COMMODIFICATION AND COMMERCIALISATION AS KEY DRIVERS

One of the key elements of internationalization of education is commodification. Expressed in economic terms it is visualising education as a commodity for revenue generation and economic gain. Eventually it has to be admitted that for many countries, just as in the United States overseas students are a big source of revenue. As a commodity education also bring pricing, to mean that the takers will have to pay a price. In a broad sense pricing is an economic strategy of fixing value to objects and effort is on ways and means of projecting a money model. Proponents of commodification model believe that internationalization could best be represented if the economic concerns are addressed. Some of the key features of this model are discussed below.

**Financial Flow:** The presumption here is that just as tourism, education has the potential to fetch money by way of encashing opportunities for students across the globe. In other words, education is another sector or industry which performs a business function. The income generated not only helps institutions but also nations. The trickle-down effect will be reflected all over the economy.

**Brand Building:** If education should become a preferred commodity it should be offered in a way that institutions and nations have brand value. The value comes through creating a distinguishable identity or branding. Tradition, reputation of alumni, faculty eminence, teaching quality, institutional ambience, opportunity for growth, value enrichments etc are all important ingredients in building the identity.

**Trend Setting:** As a competitor for an institution, it means a long journey through continuous innovations, both in terms of enhancing their appeal as well as creating deliverables best suited to a cost that is affordable.

**Opportunity for Advancement:** Commodification creates opportunity for the aspirants to invest and encash leading to advancement in opportunities. This is a reciprocal relationship which carry an opportunity for both the parties.

**Sustainability:** Sustainability is about efforts that reflect in a whole lot of things including branding, reputation, image and cash flow. Sustainability in terms of a commodity ensure that the price or cost is retained to a minimum and its demand among customers is maintained. In the market economy of today, education offers yet another opportunity for nations to build a capital base. Commercialisation looks at education as a market by itself and takes into account the inherent market potential. The idea is to commercialise education to its fullest potential. Therefore, effort is on attracting and retaining more students. Countries strive to enhance reputation to their educational programmes in order to attract students from overseas. The intention is to market their programmes through ways and means conducive to commercial viability. Some of the key factors of this model are mentioned below:

**State and Institutional Norms:** Admission policies, fees, regulations etc. are always considerations for any student seeking admission to a foreign university. It is on the part of the institutions to maintain an "ease of doing business" in framing the programmes. Deferring admission to the subsequent year in case unable to take up the offer for any reasons, fee concessions, visa processing procedure, flexibility to work part time, sources of scholarship available, procedural simplifications etc. come under the norms that state and institution can address to promote marketability.

**Cost of Living:** Students mainly from third world countries often find the high living cost a big hurdle to their aspirations to qualify from European Universities. It is seen that students from African nations choose relatively less expensive education in comparatively advanced countries like India. Sometimes this also accounts for many Indian students pursuing medical education in China, Uzbekistan, Philippines and even Bangladesh.

**Academic Standards:** Improving academic standards is the pivot to commercialisation of higher education. Certain Universities have established brand image for certain of their programmes due to its academic standards, say for example Harvard or Stanford. But then the overriding effect of capability over cost is the deterrent, since these institutions are not only expensive but also places where even bright students find difficult to gain entry.

**Tradition and Eminence:** Institutions like Oxford and Cambridge have long tradition which glorify them, adding to their eminence. Distinguished faculty, infrastructure and resources and a strong culture of learning and noted alumni are the strengths for eminence.

**Opportunity for Financial Support:** Setting limits to aspirations is always finance. Most of the reputed universities all over the world are private (non-governmental). They have the freedom to set their fee structure. This will enable to maintain financial sustainability and focus on quality, innovation and research but at the same time raises the question of affordability. For that matter institutions in government hands are also high in cost some times, for example India's premier management institutes namely the IIMs. Opportunity for financial support can work to cushion the financial strain.

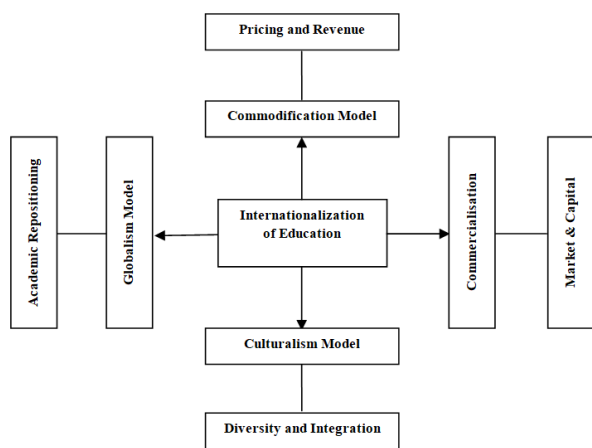


Figure 1. Emerging Models of Internationalization

**GLOBALISM AND ACADEMIC SPACING:** In the context of internationalization, globalism as a philosophy aims at academic re-positioning, a phrase that denotes spacing academics across realm of the learner’s attitude, aspirations, mindset and expectations. The complexity of learning necessitates such fine tuning aimed at evolving student-friendly methodologies, adopting student-centric approaches, adaptive pedagogy and customised content for comfortable learning. The expertise and skill set of the academia, their diversity and eminence matter in negotiating spacing since they are navigating the transaction process of learning which design the alignment. Similarly, the knowledge resources of the institution and the information-communication technology are also subject of spacing. Re-positioning in other words is re-working on the alignment between learner and learning. In other words, it involves a realignment of the various components of the learning universe. By ‘Learning Universe’ we mean the vast expanse of space where the learning components such as teacher, student, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment are situated and are dynamic but at the same time in constant interaction with each other. Re-positioning involves the entire gamut of interface between learner and teacher, curriculum and learner, and learner and learner. Some of the key characteristics are mentioned below:

**Focused to Growth:** Education to be truly meaningful should focus on growth. Enhancement of competency of the learner should be visible on any of the growth parameters. For instance, employability is the resultant of a properly focused alignment. Such alignment is indicative of a well-adjusted spacing between the learning components.

**Learner-centric:** To be learner-friendly, the design, development and delivery of the curriculum ought to be learner-centric. This is yet another dimension of spacing. The pace of learning, interest and ability all matter in making it learner-centric, leading to a re-positioning of the various components in the learning universe, such as curriculum, pedagogy etc. vis-a-vis the learners. This facilitates comfortable learning.

**Customise to Requirement:** Education in order to address one of the major concerns in internationalization should enable customising. The learners belong to different nationalities and diverse background. Their intellectual profile is seldom underestimated. That apart the potential flexibility education offers to customise to requirement makes globalism a remarkable trait of internationalization.

**Academic Orientation:** Eminence of the academia, reflected in the distinct set of domain specific knowledge and skills, nurture an academic orientation which becomes the mirror of the institution. Many world-class institutions are known for their academic orientation that promote them to popularise.

**Peer Group Effect:** Internationalization facilitates adaptive global communion through peer interaction and makes possible meaningful learning.

**Individual and Personal Gain :** Realignment serves to liberate the learner from the rigid ‘mainframe’ of education leading to greater involvement and satisfaction.

Table 1. Models of Internationalization

Sl.No.	Models	Philosophy	Goal	Motto
1.	Commodification Model	Instrument of Trade	Pricing and Revenue	Education as commodity
2.	Commercialisation Model	Potential Market	Reputation and Brand building	Education as Capital
3.	Culturalism Model	Ideology of Inclusion	Diversity Orientation	Education as Change agent
4.	Globalism Model	Adaptiveness and Dynamism	Academic Re-positioning	Curriculum as means to end

**CULTURALISM AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING**

Culturalism is based on the ideology of inclusion where internationalization is a road leading to experience diversity to learn inclusion. World as a multicultural entity has received focus for educationalists to use education as a platform to build integration in values and develop diversity orientation. Diversity orientation refers to an attitude of being conscious about cultural differences among people while at the same time to be sensitive to it and admire the differences. It leads to a lot of give and take and in the context of education it affords insightful learning. Diversity may bring to the fore mix of ideas and differences it creates, and resolving it through positive collaboration. Present day work place is turning to be largely multicultural, even within nations, that this ability need to be built up as competency for workplace effectiveness. In other words culturalism denotes education resulting from informed awareness built through learning. Some of the key features are mentioned below:

**Exposure:** Internationalization opens up a unique possibility for wide exposure through migrating to a different country in pursuit of education. The experience has been amazing. The liberal values of the west through their education have shaped world leaders in later life to champion struggles and oppressions and countries free of bondage.

**Cohort Ramifications:** The relevance that institutions create in education is the splendid opportunity provided through peers and cohorts. The role of peer group in learning is a significant one quarter of ones learning during the course of education.

**Expanding beyond Boundaries:** The uniqueness of education is that it has not limits – spatial or temporal. The universality of education cutting across boundaries persuades every learner to experience a diversity platform while choosing higher learning in a foreign nation.

**Inclusion:** Inclusion is a goal and an outcome of internationalisation. As a goal it enthruse learners to become part of an extended diaspora. At the same time, it fosters inclusion through recognising diversity of self and others.

**New Learnings:** Diversity open up new learning opportunities among learners. Institutions become pastures and culture become the fodder. Both culturalism and globalism aim to realize the gap between the learner and his surroundings, to promote better learning in the context of internationalization.

**INTERNATIONALIZATION AS A CHANGE AGENT:**

Internationalization is not just about composition or diversity of students. It is best explained as the “process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the goals, teaching/learning, research and service functions of a University or a

higher education system” (Knight.K,2014). As such it is an agent for transformation and change. Institutions in general strive to attain high levels of internationalization because it helps them to get acclaim. Top universities in the world are all characterised by the presence of large mix of students from different countries. One of the global ranking parameters of higher education institutions itself is the level of internationalization. As in the US, India also has a large and diverse higher education system. It is the third largest after US and China with 10 million students continuing their study in about 16,000 institutions across the country (Mitra, S.K,2010). Internationalization acts as a change agent bringing about transformation and change in all spheres of learning – change in the outlook of students, change in the attitude of institutions, change in the mindset of nations and change in the approach towards learning. Nevertheless, the process of internationalization is constrained by a lot of factors such as availability of finance, cost of living, language proficiency, immigration rules and regulations, restrictions in admission to the institution etc. Yet, there is a positive gain for all the stakeholders – countries benefit, institutions benefit, students benefit and quality of education also benefit.

#### THE PRAXES OF DEVELOPMENT:

Development is often reckoned as synonymous with progress though there are differences between the two. For a nation, in economic parlance development is about increased GDP and per capita. Commonly held assumptions of development denotes certain visible traits that characterise it such as large and sky rise buildings, better road connectivity, more automobiles, communication and infrastructure. It may also mean more schools, hospitals, more industries and trade, more scientific institutions and technology. It could be more irrigated land under cultivation, more crops harvested, more cleaner rivers and conservation of environment and energy. Beyond all this, the ability of a nation’s population to access all these becomes important consideration to judge development. Therefore, equity and fairness become key concerns. Equitable distribution of resources and its efficient use marks real development of a nation. This means more people are educated, employed, having shelter, enjoying better health and freedom from hunger. Even more it is about freedom from fear to express, associate, preach and practice. Hence development is a composite concept as distinguishable from progress. Internationalization contributes to development by breaking the barriers among nations through creating vistas for knowledge sharing, fostering diversity, and promoting geographical and spatial mobility. The income accrued through it helps nations to build institutions and the financial benefit trickle down to the economy. Thus internationalization trigger development initiating a chain reaction such that the output goes into the process as inputs to further accelerate the process.

## CONCLUSION

Fundamentally education is a ‘learning instrument’ to convey ‘disciplinary knowledge’. It is a process of communicating with the learner so as to create desirable changes in the mindset of the learners. The ever-expanding knowledge base of disciplines have enlarged the scope of learning instrumentality of education.

Today’s learner is expecting too much in too little time, demanding that the bulk be reduced to a pill. Again, the changing profile of students has brought in flexibility in curriculum. Today, education is aiming at a larger audience with diverse mix of attitude and potential, and each one is important to address. Both these have befallen as a major task for higher educational institutions to grapple. Internationalization has been able to tackle the growing demands of learner aspirations and vulnerabilities of change in the context of higher education such that it has become a desirable and irreversible trend. The approaches suggested here are relevant to understanding the phenomena from all its angles. The models are indicative of varying shift in focus evolving with changing times and socio-cultural contexts as well as characteristics of the learner group and hostnation.

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