

Towards Functional Implementation of Internationalisation of Higher Education: Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

The successful implementation of internationalisation of higher education will require the leadership to better understand internationalisation in context. The paper presentation emerges from an interpretive and descriptive study which generated qualitative data through systematic literature review and document analysis. Thematic analysis was deployed to identify emerging and dominating themes as a focus for the interpretation. The analysis confirmed that internationalisation has multiple definitions, rationales and strategies that are continuously being updated. Still, the paper argues that although the diversity in definitions, rationales and strategies exist among authors show disagreement and create some confusion, on the other hand internationalisation has influenced higher education landscape. The internationalisation trend reflects that the choice of internationalisation activity is determined by appropriateness and, according to resources and capacity. Hence, the higher education leadership should approach internationalisation activities based on consequences and appropriateness; henceforth, apropos of implementation of internationalisation of higher education be driven by the context of internationalisation activities rather than by prescribed implementation. Therefore, the paper argues that there are many internationalisation implementation attributes but the dominant to be considered are understanding internationalisation, clear purpose for internationalisation, commitment to internationalisation and the leadership for internationalisation.

Keywords

Higher Education, Internationalisation, Internationalisation of Higher Education, International Education, Leadership

1. Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education is a globally accepted and important phenomenon because it promotes the achievement of higher-education objectives (Butrym, 2020). Nevertheless, the motivation to integrate an international dimension into higher education is underpinned by the rationale which is a driving force to explain why a country, sector or institution wants to address and invest in internationalization (Petroski, 2022; Rumbley et al., 2012). Though, Hudzik and Stohl (2009) argue that internationalisation activities should occur with reference to the overall missions and goals of institutions, Deardorff and Van Gaalen (2012) equally argue that the success of internationalisation should be measured against its contribution to the achievement of the mission and core goals of institutions (Rumbley, Altbach, & Reiberg, 2012). Therefore, the fundamental future challenge to leaders, researchers, and practitioners, is how to deal with the clarity and efficacy of activities related to internationalisation in higher education (Petroski, 2022).

While the increased popularity of internationalisation is being discussed and heralded as a key success, there is limited debate about the functional reality regarding internationalisation activities and higher education's failure to meet national mandates and attainment of globally set goals such as Sustainable Development Goals (Kufaine, 2024). Literature accounts that in the process of executing internationalisation activities, nations and institutions have experienced and expressed the following challenges: fear of protecting autonomy, the difference in the academic calendar, different education systems, competition for students and staff, forced program implementation, compromise desired standards, brain drain, cost implication, joint research exploitation, and crash of culture (Petroski, 2022; Deardorff & Van Gaalen, 2012; Knight, 2012). Therefore, the future challenge in higher education should be to unfold the reality of the success of internationalisation by measuring activities and developments against its contribution to the achievement of visions, missions and core goals of higher education institutions and global expectations.

Internationalisation of higher education is believed to cover a wide range of activities, and it is interpreted and implemented differently between and within nations and institutions (Rumbley et al., 2012). It is generally recognised that internationalisation is a complex process to define. There are some efforts made to define and describe the internationalisation of higher education by various authors (Kufaine, 2024), however, there are still challenges in developing a common, shared understanding (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023; Warwick, 2014). Zeleza (2012), noted that scholars do not agree on the definition of internationalisation, because of the diversity and complexity of its rationales, activities, stakeholders, and providers. Consequently, higher education institutions may experience different conceptualisation of goals, choices, outcomes and unintelligible notions of internationalisation, and being indecisive apropos of the concept without knowing its proper meaning (Kufaine, 2024). The internationalisation of higher education

activities has evolved over time. Implementation of internationalisation activities has been described complex by others and as ad hoc (Kotecha, 2012) by some while others participation by omission (Teferra, 2008). Therefore, the higher education leadership should strive to implement internationalisation activities based on consequences and appropriateness.

2. Research Methodology

This paper followed an interpretive paradigm that uses a qualitative approach, which comprises systematic review. The systematic review of the literature was the methodological review, as all the included papers were searched to identify, relevant themes. A general search of the Internet using the Google search engine was undertaken to identify reference. The inclusion and exclusion process were conducted in order to achieve quality and worthiness of data. The inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed journal articles and books in which internationalisation was a key focus and/or was assessed. The resources for data included journal articles, books and documents.

After following the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the search criteria for internationalisation of higher education or international education produced a sampling framework. The search comprised electronic journals and books and hard-copy books, OECD periodicals, EBSCO host academics search premier, Wiley online library, Elsevier SD Freedom collection, Journals @ ovoid, Sage premier 2012, EBSCO education research complete, JSTOR ARTS and science IV, Taylor and Francis social science and humanities with science and technology, EBSCO business source elite, and Emerald market e-journal collection. In an effort to understand internationalisation an evolutionary concept analysis was used. This is a data analysis of attributes used as one seeks the implicit meanings from the uses and characteristics of the collected data (Jackson & Sadler, 2022).

3. Results and Discussions

The search for functional internationalisation of higher education covered a wide range of scholarly sources. The diversity of the sources reflects the scope of use of the concept of internationalisation. Besides, the breadth of usage applied to internationalisation by both scholarly and non-scholarly people underscores the importance of the concept to both researchers and those practicing it. Although internationalisation has a disputed history (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; de Wit, Deca, & Hunter, 2015), it has been discussed for over thirty years. Various internationalisation approaches and strategies have been suggested (Petroski, 2022; Deardorff & Van Gaalen, 2012). However, it is important to recognise that internationalising higher education necessitates other prerequisites (Warwick, 2014).

Therefore, the systematic review of internationalisation of higher education purpose, rationale and activities literature revealed requirements for the successful implementation. Hence, Ellingboe (1998) noted that internationalisation implementation requires 1) college leadership, 2) available international programmes,

3) international culture, and 4) an international faculty. This is consistent with Schoorman (2000), who states that core requirements for internationalisation are: 1) commitment to internationalisation, 2) organisational leadership, 3) availability of resources, and 4) evaluation of organisational processes. Petroski, (2022) and Knight (2008) all noted that strategies and strategic approaches are fundamental to successful implementation of internationalisation of higher education.

The analysis of the dominant internationalisation of higher education requirements as the papers' contribution are as follows:

3.1. Knowledge of Internationalisation

The study revealed that, the attributes of internationalisation are associated with common definitions and uses. Therefore, the attributes for internationalisation include 1) international, 2) process, 3) strategy, 4) purpose, 5) goal, 6) integration, 7) dimension, and 8) policy. The analysis also recognised antecedents to clarify a concept; hence, the antecedents were searched by using the question: "What happens before internationalisation takes place?" Antecedents such as "desire" appeared prominent, however, various reasons influence the desire because of diverse rationales for internationalisation (Petroski, 2022; Jiang, 2008). The capacity to conduct internationalisation activities also appears as an antecedent. Every higher education institution will internationalise based on capacity (Rumbley et al., 2012). Since internationalisation is implemented and defined differently, its context is also an antecedent. In this case, higher education must be present before the internationalisation of higher education can occur. Knowledge and understanding forms a set of antecedents because they influence decisions, attitudes, and beliefs. However, belief is also an important antecedent in this respect because it influences the degree of compliance with implementing behaviour (Ajzen, 2005), an important variable in establishing the achievement of intended behaviour. Some antecedents are related, such as ability and capacity, which all appear to be key factors. Furthermore, the analysis results have revealed that planning is a critical antecedent because internationalisation requires resources.

The surrogate terms for internationalisation suggest that internationalizations' popular or assumed meaning is international education. On the other hand, discussions of international education indicate that globalisation and internationalisation are interchangeable terms. However, although frequently used interchangeably, globalisation and internationalisation are two distinct phenomena discussed in detail to distinguish one from the other (Marginson, 2022). Further, Tight (2021) argued that while many interpret the growing globalization and internationalization of higher education as another effect of neo-liberal agendas. It also suggests that higher education researchers themselves need to move out of their national comfort zones and think and research more globally (Tight, 2021). Furthermore, the researcher referred to internationalisation regarding specific policies and programmes undertaken by governments, academic systems,

institutions, and even individual departments dealing with globalisation (Tight, 2021). Therefore, the clear difference between globalisation and internationalisation is based on the purpose of the phenomenon. For example, internationalisation may be seen as a strategy for societies and institutions to respond to the many demands placed upon higher education. (Marginson, 2022; Tight, 2021).

Most words fall within activities taking place across borders. Hence, the term international is used mostly when the description is attached to an activity. Knight (2008) argued that attaching activity and rationales to the definitions will weaken the definitions. However, the study revealed words used in literature to mean or describe or be interchangeably used to represent internationalisation. These words include international education, globalisation, international students, internationalisation at home, internationalisation abroad, networking, and partnership. (Xu, 2023; Tight, 2022)

The list includes international students, joint PhD programmes, modularized programmes, postgraduate programmes, student exchange, international staff, research collaboration, e-learning programmes, generating of revenue, staff capacity building, equipment acquisition, partnership, increased visibility, and raised institutional profile. eventually enabling all the internationalisation activities to work towards the same purpose (Petroski, 2022; Xu, 2023; Tight, 2022).

3.2. Commitment to Internationalisation

Commitment to internationalisation is among the core characteristics considered a prerequisite for implementing internationalisation (Schoorman, 2000). According to de Wit (2013), internationalisation requires commitment and involvement at all levels; in other words, the entire organisation must be committed. Although commitment is associated with individual psychological influence (Cook & Wall, 1980), Avolio, Zhu, Koh, and Bhatia (2004) defined organisational commitment as the relative strength of an individual or organisation identification with involvement in a particular task.

When the degree of commitment to internationalisation and available support by the university is not explicit it will affect the implementation. The decision to internationalise is not only a question of process and structure but also behaviour and demonstration of commitment. Therefore, the nature of the commitment to the internationalisation of higher education needs to be unambiguous. However, although many indicators and activities appear unsupported, the university and the entire higher-education sector are committed to internationalisation. This is evidenced by the presence of initiatives, although perhaps not specific, that provide and support the integration of international dimensions into university activities.

Although internationalisation appears taking center stage according to literature, progress in institutional structure and policies remains low. The analysis shows that internationalisation has been somewhat integrated, although the institutions are not committed. Hence, commitment to internationalisation and

available support by the university is unclear: internationalisation is not only a process and a structure but also a behaviour and a demonstration of commitment.

The nature of commitment to internationalising higher education reveals that, although many indicators and activities appear unsupported, the universities and the entire higher education sector are committed to internationalisation. This is demonstrated by initiatives that provide and support the integration of international dimensions into university activities, albeit not explicitly. In a situation where budgetary support is limited, internationalisation should be aligned with the routine higher-education activities of the institution so that international activities can benefit from budgetary support from other activities.

3.3. Purpose for Internationalisation

Analysis of higher education indicates that activities are international; however, there is little progress on internationalisation, and many factors affect activities. This is a widespread situation, as found in the literature (Tight, 2022; Rumbley et al., 2012) that different stakeholders define and implement internationalisation differently.

The analysis of the results shows that where a broad spectrum of rationales is implemented simultaneously there is usually a challenge. There is constant overlap between and among the rationales for internationalisation, with some rationales more accepted by the leaders than others; however, no rationale is completely ignored. Therefore, leaders should implement internationalisation driven by specific rationales. However, the possible interpretation of the dominance by economic and academic faculties is that universities are not in the same league as competing universities: some universities core functions are still aligned with capacity building for national development.

3.4. Leadership for Internationalisation

Understanding the leadership situation in the context of the internationalisation of higher education is important. It is evident that description of higher education and leadership are complex having multiple attributes. The study has illustrated that some existing discrepancies and misconceptions about leadership and higher education, may create resistance or mask the development and internationalisation of higher education. Equally important to consider is the leadership beliefs and values regarding the general knowledge for higher education leadership. However, higher education leadership mode of learning appears to be elusive. The primary source of leadership knowledge is experience, which in some cases is considered inefficient and complete of misconceptions (Owen, 2015). Therefore, the nature of experience should be prescribed with measurable goals and be developmental and ongoing (Avolio et al., 2009).

It is evident that since the inception of internationalisation, the roles and responsibilities of higher education leadership have expanded because, besides attending to the routine higher-education roles and responsibilities, leadership is

also attending to internationalisation demands (Tight, 2022). Therefore, leaders are involved in respective internationalisation activities, including international students, curriculum development, financial resource mobilization, academic staff development, recruitment, and negotiating partnerships. Analysis of the challenges existing in higher education since the inception of internationalisation three decades ago shows that higher-education leaders need a combination of leadership and management competencies.

The leadership is expected to develop a positive culture and commitment to the institution's vision. Cultural diversity is also expected to be understood from national and international perspectives.

The analysis of higher education, higher education leadership and internationalisation activities has revealed that internationalisation has positioned institutions and leaders in a continuum in which national priorities and international benefits are pulling in opposite directions. Discussions in leadership evolution reveals that contingent and transformational leadership approaches are popular within the context of internationalisation, however connective leadership approach appears appropriate among the other leadership theories which internationalisation leadership may require. Connective leadership is apposite in connecting leaders with academic members, academic member to academic member, academic to institution, leaders to institution, and institution to institution.

4. Conclusion

Understanding the context of internationalisation of higher education provides a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge on internationalisation. Internationalisation is broad and studies have not exhausted the clarification of the concept to increase understanding of it. Studies and literature have confirmed that internationalisation has multiple definitions and strategies that are continuously being updated. Diversity, increased complexity, and disagreement between various authors brings challenges during implementation.

Although internationalisation is motivated by various factors, with some factors overlapping, to most universities the dominating rationale direct or indirectly is economically driven because it serves the purpose of rescuing the universities from economic distress. This means internationalisation activities are being implemented using a market approach in which international students are attracted through aggressive marketing, customer-demand-driven programmes, and scarce programmes. However, the internationalisation trend reflects that the choice of internationalisation activity is determined by appropriateness and, according to resources and capacity.

Therefore, the appropriate implementation of internationalisation of higher education be driven by the context of internationalisation activities rather than by prescribed implementation. Although activities are based on context, not guided by a prescribed framework, the clear implementation will help explain the complexity of internationalisation, counteracting hasty and presumptive work by

understanding the context. Therefore, implementation of internationalisation should be informed by the knowledge about internationalisation, the commitment to internationalisation, the purpose for internationalisation, and the leadership for internationalisation.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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