

## Internationalization of Islamic Higher Learning Institutions in the Muslim World

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### Abstract

*The key objective of this paper is to recommend ways to internationalize Islamic higher learning institutions, as well as underline some of the impediments to internationalization. It contends that internationalization could lead Islamic institutions to itinerancy of academic staff and students; in fact, this is one of the vital grounds as it encourages and motivates exchange for staff and students. The paper also argues that the process of internationalization will invite quality of academic standards, services and research projects. This is because through internationalization, collaboration with outside world is maintained; intercultural understanding is promoted and diversity of human resources will be enhanced. The paper further attempts to develop a framework in the process of internationalization of universities in the Muslim world.*

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**Keywords:** internationalization, islamic universities, muslim world, islamic higher learning institutions, curriculum, education

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### INTRODUCTION

Internationalization requires articulation on the part of the leadership while simultaneously institutionalizing a strategic planning process. It is argued that the orientation and strength of university culture and the functioning structure can be facilitating the strategies employed to advance internationalization. There is an increasing demand for higher Islamic education in the Muslim world, whose mission is founded on religious principles, ethical values, humanism, objectivism progression, cooperation, and equilibrium. This may not be straightforward to achieve without benchmarking or comparing one's products and services to other results. Internationalization is a compound course of action for higher educational institutions in recent times. Islamic higher learning institutions such as Islamic universities shoulder extra bondage to internationalize the curriculum and clutch the acceptance and recognition of the world through their program of study, academic staff and strategies. In most cases, parochial curriculum or confined syllabus appears to be the culture of Islamic institutions. Accomplishment of broadened worldview and cultural engagement through the aforementioned curriculum is imperceptible fixture.

Steps and strategies to internationalize Islamic institutions should take the complexity and density; including external environment, shifting positions of world educational systems, into consideration. The process of integrating international perspectives could be not possible without leadership that has a handle on multi-dimensional external changes in global realities.

Predictably the nature and the functions of Islamic universities will dramatically change as the world embarks on an open method of learning and teaching. Other external factors such as globalization which brought with it the concept of knowledge-based economy will further deepen this thespian transformation. Adopting strategies of the Western universities is now proven to be futile as the internationalization of Islamic universities takes, in many ways, divergent approaches to competitiveness. The primary end of this paper is to recommend ways of internationalization for the Islamic higher learning institutions in the Muslim World. To operate as universities, in the true sense of the word, the higher learning institutions in the Muslim World must adopt an aggressive method of restructuring, streamlining their priorities and building on their potency based on the current political scenarios.

### The Nature and Teleology of Internationalizing Higher Learning Institutions

Education becomes part of globalization process and professionals work in wider and within horizon of global society. Curriculum of higher learning therefore, must feed these requirements. The demand for Internationalization is increasingly becoming influential in higher education. New dimensions and frameworks are needed, to strategize and integrate efforts to make sure internationalization embraces and functions entirely for the benefit of its adherents. There are calls that internationalization of higher learning education has now become potentially and essential part of the globalization process.

According to Levin there are at least 12 aspects of globalization that have affected higher education institutions:

1. Internationalization (students, curriculum, delivery)
2. Public sector funding constraints
3. Private sector interaction
4. Electronic technology, real-time communications
5. Productivity and efficiency
6. External competition
7. Restructuring
8. Labor alterations (e.g., additional work)
9. State intervention
10. Partnerships
11. Workforce training
12. COM modification (Levin, J.S. 1999)

In the process of internationalization it is paramount to bear in mind that there are several factors that must be seen vital, these include the background of the society, the cultural identities of the nation, the recourses and priorities. According to J. Knight, internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, services and functions of the institution. (J. Knight, 1993). The term internationalization has become a maxim in universities' vocabulary throughout the world. However, the idea refers to objectives, behaviors, concepts, practices, means, challenges and strategies that sometimes have diverse meanings to different universities. Some universities have a strictly academic conception of what internationalization is all about whilst others perceive higher education as a global market. (Noir Sur Blanc, 1999)

A survey conducted by Noir Sur Blanc identifies that "internationalization is a major concern for universities throughout the world. Results of the direct question regarding the importance of international development are extremely revealing: 41% of Universities questioned believed that international development is an "absolute priority" whilst 52% believed it to be "important", compared with only 7% which thought that is was only "relatively important" and none which believed that it is not at all important". (Noir Sur Blanc, 1999). Lately, there are other arguments contrasting the aforementioned definition; that internationalization is not the process rather it is a purpose itself, a target to be realized and quality improvement mechanism.

As Knight and de Wit have defined, the international dimension being introduced to higher education has to do with "a perspective, activity or programme which introduces or integrates an international/intercultural/global outlook into the major functions of a university or college" (J. Knight, 1995)

More specifically, internationalization in higher education refers to "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education." (J. Knight, 2004) It is against this context that universities not only in the West but also in the Muslim World have taken an internationalization agenda very seriously. Hence, an increase in student and faculty mobility, the popularity of an international dimension in curriculum, the emphasis on international research collaborations, and the formation of various kinds of global university alliances and research networks have become increasingly prominent trends

Despite the intensified pressures for internalization of higher education, we must have critical reflections on the meanings and implications before we start internationalizing universities. (Mok, K. H., 2005). According to Elkin, Devjee, and Farnsworth "internationalization is not something that is either achieved or not achieved: rather it is an engagement with the range of dimensions" (Elkin, G, Devjee, F., & Farnsworth, J., 2005). As Jane Knight suggested, different people may have very different understandings and definitions of the internationalization of education, and "there is a great deal of confusion about what it means" (J. Knight, 2004). Similar to Knight, acknowledging the popular trends of internationalization, globalization, and regionalization that have influenced the way higher education is governed around the globe, Teichler argues that not many people or governments are very clear about what these "zations" really mean to them. (Teichler U., 2004)

Arguing along the same lines, de Wit also warns people not to oversimplify the complexity of internationalization of higher education, because some may refer to internationalization of higher education to mobility of students, some others may refer to the delivery of education to other countries through new types of arrangements, and still others may talk just about curriculum-related changes. (de Wit, H, 2006). Ka Ho Mok argues "we should not underestimate the complexity of the processes related to internationalization of higher education, particularly when the growing emphasis on trade and competition has become increasingly a driving rationale for internationalization trends". (Mok, K. H., 2005). Others define internationalization as a systematic efforts aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirement and challenges related to the globalization of societies and economics. (Van Deer Wenden)

On balance, in the writings of past decade internationalization the authors have employed diverse approaches including action orient approach, proficiency approach, standards approach and process

approach. Action approach endorses activities such as internationalization of curriculum and exchange of scholars and students, research collaboration and internal linkages. These specific activities are intended to enhance and provide specific characteristics in terms of producing, dimensional programs in the process of internationalization. The proficiency approach however, emphasizes the development of multiple skills, capacity building, attitudinal change, knowledge based initiatives, values for graduates, faculty administration and academic process. The key concept in this approach is the idea of building an international personality knowledgeable enough and skilled enough to discover the world for itself. Therefore, this approach emphasizes development of international syllabus, with the hope that international proficiency will be the outcome. The standards approach, on the other hand, emphasizes on infusing values into the programs, the curriculum and campus life in general. The approach also demands the creation of new customs, tradition and culture in the education system. It concentrates on strong belief system, worldview and universal culture.

Another approach is what you may term as a progressive or process approach. This process approach emphasizes on integration of diverse methods and schemes into the research and teaching activities of the institution. It is a permutation or mishmash of diverse performances, strategies and measures. In this process appropriateness and aptness of the activity is very vital. And the emphasis is mainly on the curriculum aspects as well as the organizational understanding of the processors that govern the curriculum.

#### **Serviceability of Internationalization**

Internationalization is a course of action, which intends to integrate international perspectives into the general outlook of the institution, products, curricular, staff, students and co-curricular activities. In this process the entire body focuses on worldwide exterior orientation. Although internationalization is not a new concept, to many fields, the idea became popular in the education sector in early 1980s. International education, comparative education, global education, and multicultural education are some other axioms used from 1980's to 1990's. Apart from internationalization, scholars currently use other notions including borderless education, cross-border education and transnational education.

It has been argued that the idea of borderless education refers to indistinct of disciplinary and geographic borders traditionally inherent to higher education. (S. Tamer Cavusgil, 1993). However, putting the term cross-border education side by side with the term borderless education one finds two contradictory approaches. The first approach

underlines the existence of borders; the latter however, presumes the lack of borders. The question is can there be an international definition for internationalization of educational system? We think that internationalizing the education has to take the external and local factors, societal point of view, political and religious situations into its domain. In various nations of the world, the method to attain internationalization or the development of its policies and procedures should be seen differently, depending on the location and capacity of the nation.

Institutions have the same nature and environment of the nations in which they operate. Culture and religion are another factor. In fact the Muslim world has a number of Islamic universities of which Islam is infused into the curriculum and non-Muslim students may not be openly welcomed. The anticipated outcome and the expectations of the stakeholders and the design of curriculum may also be a factor of dissimilarity. On balance, there is a level of internationalization of higher learning institutions which we all agree that is the process of integration, advocating interculturalism and universal dimensional intent into the vision, aim, and rationale within the higher learning education.

#### **Malaysian Status in Internationalizing Higher Education**

Ka Ho Mok argues that public universities in Malaysia have begun to experience the corporatization processes. His field interview conducted in Malaysia confirmed "that public universities are under greater pressures to perform in order to secure additional funding from the state". (Mok, K. H., 2007) While others contend that the restructuring of higher education in Malaysia is very much influenced by neo-liberal economic ideology. From 2004 the Malaysian government has change its policy in education, according to Abdul Razak, (Field Interview) "the recent higher education governance change is to enable universities in Malaysia to respond more innovatively to external pressures generated by the knowledge economy". Razak is of the opinion that it is inevitable for public universities to transform themselves along the lines of neo-liberalist principles and practices. (Field Interview)

On the global higher education and student mobility market, Malaysia is seen to be a contender that must be reckoned with. Related data shows that, in 2006 Malaysia has captured 2% of the world market of higher education sector. In 2008, that figures had increased, by 30% bringing the overall numbers of international students in Malaysian, international schools and higher education institutions, to 65,000. Malaysia's target is 100,000 students by 2010 from 40, 6861 in 2004; an increase of over 144%; meanwhile the world demand in 2004 was 1, 042, and 0002 forecast to be 1,507,000 in 2010. (Ministry

of Higher Education, Malaysia, 2004). With this statistics the Malaysian market share needs to grow, from 3.9% in 2004, to 6.6% in 2010. For comparison purpose the global average annual growth rate of international students 2004 to 2010 is 7.4% per annum and Malaysian target growth rate of 24.0% per annum. One of the facts of life in Global Marketing is that perceptions about attitudes toward particular countries often extend to products known to originate in those countries. (Global Marketing, 2003)

### **Internationalizing Islamic Universities**

Islamic universities are higher learning institutions with especial emphasis and directions. Based on this characterization, the process of internationalization of Islamic universities has to take following aspects into consideration. Inflate a new brand of methodology of learning that is culturally precise but adequately detailed based on the pertinent traits, circumstances and social set up.

To further attract international cultures Islamic universities need to place prominence on comparative studies. Instance of this is comparative religion, a field of study that could magnetize and catch the attention of cultures outside of its borders. Relations of religions and its role are subjects that are in demand worldwide. Islamic banking is another area of strength. As the world embraces financial values Islamic banking became relevant across the borders; as consumers are burdened by the merciless conventional interest imposed by the conformist banks, Muslims and non-Muslims alike dash to find alternatives.

To attract students, sponsorships and world-class academics Islamic universities have to get hold of the mechanism to lead other traditional universities in this aspect. Islamic universities need to revisit their curriculum. Currently these universities emphasize values only from Islamic perspectives as it is assumed that other cultures should be made acquiescent to the Islamic world view. This tendency or frame of mind should cease as the wisdom of God (*Hikmatullah*) can be found anywhere across cultures and civilizations.

Another area of improvement is on the propensity of Islamic universities on values. Although human and scientific values have some level of neutrality, Muslim universities see values mostly from Islamic perspectives, this inclination, some time is seen by other cultures as wide of the mark; a direction which is not indispensable in teaching as well as in the set of courses. Islamic Universities are to facilitate others within their cultures. This could be done, for instance by teaching Islamic subjects in diverse languages. If you have German students who are interested to learn Islam teach them in German language. Presently the

same students have to learn English or Arabic to learn Islam. Islamic universities should offer short courses on subjects in demand across the world. We all remember that after 9/11 Islam became popular but Islamic universities failed to cash on this opportunity. Islamic universities should link themselves worldwide by organizing brilliant international events. Apart from international events these universities should also enlarge the number of transnational academics. The academic expertise of all centres and faculties should have noticeable international outlook of religion and culture.

To promote internationalization exchange of academic staff and students is required. This exposes staff and students to other cultures and approaches; it should be done in a proportionate form by learning from other institutions and inviting others to learn from us. This process sanctions the experience of other scholars to penetrate and permeate in a positive platform, so as to acquire insights about the other world ideas with having direct contacts.

Another aspect requires improvement is research collaboration; this will obviously enhance joint efforts with other scholars and attracts new partnership and corporation, it will also lead to captivating interdisciplinary explorations. Islamic universities should teach local cultures.

### **Some Obstacles Faced by Islamic Higher Learning Institutions to Internationalize Services**

Most of the Islamic universities are not able to achieve notable development in scientific thoughts; they are not also adequately competent to create central attention. In fact Muslim students seek education outside the Islamic universities for the same reason. It seems that these institutions have not benefited from the internationalization activities positively.

Another hindrance is the fact that non-Muslim students are less fascinated to join these universities. More so in Africa, there is a fear that internationalization may lead to brain drain and loss of cultural identity, in fact Internationalization requires idea-driven and resourceful strategy with outward academic and administrative policies to run the process.

Another impediment is the fact that most of the Islamic institutions lack financial propensities, while others are feeble in ICT facilities, take Islamic Universities of Niger, Islamic University of Uganda, Islamic University of Pakistan and Medina University, as an instance. Lack of funds therefore is one of the obstacles to internationalization this could be in a form of budgetary or strategic priorities. Universities located in economically under-privileged

nations of the Muslim World are mainly a victim of this phenomenon.

Inertia is another obstacle; it includes the lack of enthusiasm and impetus on behalf of staff and students. It indicates sluggishness, apathy and lethargic in attitude towards internationalization or lack of interest in the process of internationalization.

Another obstacle to internationalization is related to administrative problems. These problems refer to those problems linked to the accommodation of foreign students, quota problems, credit recognition problems, criteria set by the University for access to certain courses and validation problems. The lack of pointed vision in the admission system and hospitality level is another obstacle to internationalization. In these two aspects pro-active future-oriented progress which includes primary components of internationalization into the future preparation efforts and provides positive viewpoints is necessary. Most of the Islamic universities have no full-fledged international students' office with complete facilities and capacity to offer up-to-date services.

### **Internationalizing Postgraduate Studies in a Higher Learning Institution: Faculty of Engineering, IIUM as a Case Study**

#### **Studying Postgraduate at the Faculty of Engineering, IIUM**

The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) aims to produce qualified intellectuals and professionals for the betterment of the world, as it competes in the educational industry, with its unique mission. For this reason it aspires to be at the frontier in postgraduate programmes. The university plans to have at least 30 percent postgraduate students of the overall student's population by the year 2010, this constitutes local and international. This paper suggests ideas to increase the enrolment of international postgraduates studies for the faculty of engineering; one of the most viable faculties of IIUM.

The ideas in this paper are based on informal surveys conducted by the author on the current postgraduate international students in the faculty of engineering. The paper is of the opinion that promotion of knowledge should be the main parameter of how the educational business is conducted in the post graduate level.

#### **Prospects and Advantages for the Faculty of Engineering in the International level**

Internationally, the faculty has numerous prospects in promoting the postgraduate programmes. These factors could be summarized into the following:

1. Political and social stability of Malaysia in comparison with the rest of the Muslim world.
2. Eminence of Malaysia in the minds of Muslim nations and individuals
3. Malaysia's footing in the West or Western perception on Malaysia (tolerant society, Islam hadhari etc)
4. Malaysian's Islamic environment as a moderate Muslim nation
5. The IIUM as an established name and the reputation the university has garnered so far
6. The status and the philosophy of the university (international and Islamic in nature)
7. Strong alumni mechanism. In fact the graduates of the faculty are willing to recommend the postgraduate programmes to the prospective candidates and to the public.
8. Integration of knowledge.

#### **Why Study Post Graduate Engineering Degree at the Faculty of Engineering**

According to the international students of the faculty of engineering there are a number of reasons for pursuing postgraduate degree at the faculty of engineering. These reasons revolve around:

1. Fulfilling job requirement: Most of the companies are not satisfied with the first basic degree and prefer to see some sort of extra qualifications. This could be in the form of experience or another degree or recognition through awards, etc.
2. Pay hike: Masters Degree leads to higher post and extra salary or other forms of increment; with the increase of living expenses people do higher degrees to maximize their chances of earning more.
3. Status: Qualification seem to give high self esteem
4. Self-satisfaction: personal achievements
5. Currently not employed: why waste time; study.
6. Fulfilling family's expectations: make parents proud.

These factors are all important aspects in the development of the individual's financial and intellectual status. In fact in due time postgraduate studies will be seen as an inescapable level, as the first degree, is becoming too common for all industries in the world. That means postgraduate student's population will rapidly increase year after year and postgraduate centers will have to be ready to cope with the phenomenon.

How international students do come to know the programme? About one-third of the international students who are currently in the postgraduate programme were former engineering students. Almost 50% of them came to know about the programme through the internet that is through the IIUM website. This indicates that for the International students the internet remains the main

source of information. Nonetheless substantial number of international students came to know about the postgraduate programmes through friends in IIUM.

#### **How the Existing Students Perceive Postgraduate Engineering Programmes**

Existing students see that:

1. The faculty postgraduate programmes are of high-quality in the theoretical components.
2. Strong inculcation of Islamic values
3. Reasonable duration of study period
4. Up-to date curriculum
5. Contemporary teaching methods
6. Reasonable marking scheme
7. The academic staff in Kulliyah of engineering are highly regarded in their:
  - a. Competent delivery skills.
  - b. Positive attitude
  - c. International outlook
8. Impressive facilities are:
  - a. Resourceful library.
  - b. Easy on-line registration.
  - c. Access to computers
9. On services provided they see
  - a. Friendly and cooperative services

#### **Limitations of the Faculty of Engineering on Internationalization and Some Suggestions**

There are some serious limitations in the postgraduate level, which, if not confronted, will lead to weaknesses or failures in the process of internationalization.

- a. Financial Support for international students: To attract first-class postgraduate students, internationally availability of resources seems to be prerequisite. The situation is serious as most of international students are from the Muslim world.
- b. Fees Structure: Compared to other universities in Malaysia, IIUM fees are condescending. In fact a number of international students have moved to other higher learning institutions for this reason. To add to the aforementioned predicament, securing research grants for students remain low.
- c. Quality and Research Input: We should not sacrifice quality by accepting fee payers without research input. Although the faculty is aware of this fact there is still a trend that internationalization is to accept any student who is able to pay the tuition fees.
- d. Administrative and Academic Guidelines: The administrative and academic guidelines are not "adequately" made available to students. There is seemingly feeling among postgraduate international students that there exists insufficient information on non-academic-matters, lack of information on thesis writing, less systematic research supervision, lack of contemporary knowledge on industry's needs and lack of academic advice. The paper proposes that these information should be made available in the

departmental level. The postgraduate unit cannot and should not be left alone to handle these information.

e. Between Research and Teaching: The academic community of the faculty is of the feeling that they are straggling to manage research and teaching at the same time; of the same weight. The faculty should identify some mechanisms to address this issue, as this double dose affects the research activities, delivery skills and teaching methods.

f. The Industry: The faculty should have up-to-date knowledge of the current practices in related engineering industries.

g. IT Research Facilities: IT research facilities in the faculty should be further enhanced; the general infrastructure such as accessibility to computer labs and resource rooms remain undersized taking the academic aspirations into consideration.

h. Influence of Other Departments of the University: The performance of other departments in the university affects the performance of the faculty of engineering in internationalization.

i. Detailed Promotion Map: The paper suggests that it is overdue to draw up detailed promotion map with the purpose of setting out the precise strategy which could be practically implemented.

j. Former Students: The faculty of engineering should use the information provided by former students. They should be rewarded for recommendations; as this will encourage them to promote the postgraduate programmes internationally.

k. Academic Staff Attending International Conferences: The faculty should officially empower the academic staff who are attending international seminars and conferences to act as an agent or promoter

l. Up-To-Date Website: There should be a sturdy up-to-date website for the post graduate programmes.

m. Advertisement as Useful Mechanism: the faculty should promote current research fields internationally

n. Collaborations with Engineering Research Institutes: Collaborations with international research institutes and industries will enhance the internationalization process of the postgraduate programmes.

o. Monitoring the Academic Progress: Faculty of engineering should formulate smooth academic procedures; this could be done by setting clear and strict guidelines for external examiners. This will reduce the unnecessary extra time spent by waiting for the final result

p. Language Requirements: International Engineering students should be given special levels in the EPT. The use of English as a medium of instruction in the faculty should be a plus point not an obstacle to the international students

q. Set Target of Enrolment for International Students in each Semester: This will create a conscious mentality for internationalization

r. International Postgraduate Students should Teach: The faculty of engineering should uses the

postgraduate international students in teaching formal classes; this will attract more qualified international students

s. IIUM's Strength: IIUM's strength in integrating knowledge, in its curriculum, has not been used in science-based faculties including engineering. In the process of internationalization this will have positive impact; particularly on the international Muslim students.

t. Appointing Agents: Appoint agents overseas for recruitment and during the short semesters, lecturers who went for vacations should be empowered to recruit international students.

### CONCLUSION

Internationalization strategy of Islamic universities entails improvement of the current curriculum into one that is wide-ranging, one that takes social tribulations, political realities, potentialities, and future possibilities into consideration.

Internationalization is about offering international courses and providing universal programs on diverse perspectives, cultural studies, comparative religion and interdisciplinary studies. To accomplish the process of internationalization, Islamic universities must see it as core precedence or a priority. The stakeholders of the institutions should play their part in the process.

As of now each university operates in a solitary situation of financial and political environment, but in fact, these institutions should share information on priorities of internationalization. By doing so they could voice out their concern on the trends of international dimensions of the world's educational system. Perhaps they could also screen opportunities for future consumption. For the faculty of engineering to underscore natural level of internationalization in the postgraduate level Financial Support for international students, Fees restructuring, and solving the problems of the related departments of the University are some key problems affecting the increase of the population of the international students in the faculty.

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