



Internationalization Agendas in Higher Education. A Dutch – Russian Perspective

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Abstract. The endeavor to establish a faculty leadership by shaping the best practices in strategic planning of the internationalization process is the major contribution to knowledge of this study. From a conceptual perspective, different levels of internationalization are examined within this research, trying to associate these levels to the general background of institutional strategic planning concerning globalization and internationalization agendas. The present study seeks to fill the gap in research regarding the manner of implementation at the HAN University of Applied Sciences (Arnhem Business School), the Netherlands and Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Russia regarding the goals of internationalization agendas. This comparative study brings into the light best practices to be learned from and it describes how the objectives of internationalization processes are achieved. The approach to learning from best practices creates not only awareness but also develops new learning practices that could be implemented to enhance the global competitiveness.

Keywords: International agendas · Quality of higher education · University global competitiveness · Internationalization policies

1 Introduction

In order to reach the aim of this study, several main objectives are drawn. First, in order to achieve the requirements of the internationalization process set by both countries, the Dutch and the Russian higher education landscape and policies are analyzed. The next objective is to emphasize the mentioned universities that have proved the potential to reach the aims and objectives of the internationalization process, but also to lay out the traditions and particularities of these HEIs institutional cultures and approaches to internationalization. How the deficiency of policy implementation at the state level is impacting the results of internationalization at the institutional level is revealed based on the results acquired under the previous paragraphs.

Consequently, this approach looks at the trends regarding new developments in the internationalization policies at the universities that are reviewed, which implies also the

research regarding institutional history, statistics and traditions. A comparative approach was developed based on the available data regarding internationalization: data such as domestic reports, statistics, world university rankings and different data available at the university websites in order to describe the internal institutional climates of the chosen HEIs.

In the recent years, internationalization of higher education is a topic studied in many countries around the world as a consequence of globalization in higher education. Globalization at the level of higher education institutions has contributed to increasing the mobility of students, teachers and resources. The internationalization of higher education takes different facets around the world. Due to these, there are discrepancies between higher education institutions (HEIs) in different countries. Therefore, this study addresses the need to understand the differences in the internationalization process of higher education conducted for different studies and researches. The existence of an institutional strategy, agenda or policy in the universities represents a core element in the progress of internationalization of higher education and the existence of this kind of policy in universities presents significant discrepancies among universities in various parts of the world [1]. That is why this article is focusing on the comparative study regarding the existing agendas and policies of Arnhem Business School, the Netherlands and Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, Russia; to emphasize the importance of reflecting and learning from best internationalization practices at institutional level.

Due to this, comparative studies and best practices case studies are needed to explore the specifics and learning from significant differences between higher institutions as Plekhanov Russian University of Economics and HAN University of Applied Sciences (Arnhem Business School), the Netherlands. The authors believe that this approach to learning from best practices (both formal and informal) creates not only awareness but also develops new learning practices that could be implemented by both institutions to enhance the global competitiveness.

2 Literature Review

The many papers were published in the last years in the field of internationalization of higher education institutions. Moreover, an important number of relevant articles focused on international cooperation and the improvement of international education and research through internationalization have been disseminated. However, internationalization as a topic studied in scientific publications has significant differences in the Netherlands and in the Russian Federation.

The topic of internationalization of higher education in Russia is rarely researched in scientific publications. There are only a few such publications that analyze the process of internationalization from different perspectives. The institutional arrangements in the Bologna Process implementation are studied by Shenderova (2011) in relation to the development of multi-level degree system in Russia [2]. The Russian-European double degree programs have been look into literature in terms of achievement or deficiency inside a university is investigated by analyzing the factors leading to success or failure [3] as well as the regulative context of joint programs development as elements of the internationalization of higher education activities [4]. The context of leadership

and rankings as competitive environments for the university cultures is discussed [5] while in the situation of changing Soviet and Post-Soviet economy and society, the progress and understanding the position of higher education is being also relevant in the literature [6]. Still, very little is known about the subject of internationalization agendas as comparative studies. Therefore, the urgent need for comparative studies on internationalization agendas and internationalization of higher education activities is calling for this present study.

The Netherlands, on the other hand, has a relatively long tradition of having an international outlook in its higher education because the country has a relatively small population and a strong desire to attract students [7, 8]. This outlook is in a large part also attributable to the wider culture as the Netherlands depends for a large part on export and international connections [9]. As a result, when the EU called for an increasing internationalization and academic mobility, the Netherlands followed immediately [10]. A more significant move of the internationalization of higher education is that courses are increasingly offered in English both to make the universities more accessible to international students, and to prepare Dutch students better for potential international careers [11]. A further dimension of how Dutch higher education institutions internationalize is through increasing academic mobility and exchanges [9]. Indeed, between 2006 and 2014 the number of incoming international students increased by 70% while the number of outgoing students increased by 80% [12] and there is no indication that this trend is stopping soon.

According to the CBS population prognosis, between 2024 and 2030 the percentage of the Dutch student population will decrease by 5%, and almost all graduates from the Dutch higher education institutions are finding a job very quickly [13]. If policy in internationalization in Dutch higher education does not change in the following years, this trend is predicted to continue. If this trend will continue, then the numbers of international students attending the Universities of Applied Sciences will have a small growth, while a notable growth at research universities is expected. Nowadays the number of Dutch students is balanced, but on a long term is expected to fall slightly [14].

There are some critical voices in the Netherlands about this increasing internationalization of higher education however [7]. There are worries that it might decrease the quality of the education because Dutch lecturers are expected to teach in English when they are not native speakers. As a result, the worry is that neither the lecturers nor the students will be able to do their work on the same level. However, there is mixed evidence about whether this actually has negative effects [11]. This is further supplemented by increasing anti-international and anti-immigration sentiments in the Netherlands which fight against the idea of unlimited growth of international students and education [7]. A counter-reaction is so-called internationalization at home which focuses more on teaching knowledge and respect for other cultures, and teaching students to thrive in international environments [9]. Indeed, it seems that the best way to meet the demands of critics is to increase the quality of internationalization instead of focusing on attracting as many international students as possible [7].

The topic of internationalization of higher education in the Netherlands is vastly researched in scientific publications. However, comparative studies between the Netherlands and Russian higher institutions regarding internationalization progress at institutional level considering education agendas, strategies and policy is not deeply studied.

3 Results and Outcomes

The Based on the proposed research designed and the documentation analyzed, we were able to reach the results and outcomes of our research. Since this is a comparative study regarding the internationalization process of higher education institutions in the two countries, namely the Netherlands and the Russian Federation, the results and outcomes are presented for each country based on the research of previously mentioned sources of data. Universities around the world live in a competitive environment, where resources and prestige drive institutional strategies and behaviors. That is a reality that cannot be denied or avoided. This complex higher education environment requires a higher level of introspection and honesty both within institutions and among partners [15]. That is why the need for both Plekhanov and Han to share experiences, policies and agendas and learn from best practices.

HAN University of Applied Sciences (Arnhem Business School) internationalization agenda concerns both issues organized and/or facilitated at central HAN level, and issues that need to be addressed at institute and course level. The latter issues need to be approached in ways appropriate for the relevant professional field and the occupations students are being trained for, while at the same time making a contribution to the HAN-wide ambitions and objectives. The internationalization agenda in no way hinders the “local” shaping of such issues; on the contrary, this agenda provides the framework and conditions to support it. “We are aware that the setting of ambitions should go hand in hand with setting concrete objectives and accompanying indicators, and that these ambitions cannot be achieved in the absence of sufficient funding. This agenda will therefore also serve as a guide for the budget 2016–2020” [16]. Internationalization Agenda 2018–2019 of Arnhem Business School is based on concrete and specific strategic points and pillars [17]:

1. Internationalization of the curriculum
2. EPAS International accreditation
3. Personnel and internationalization
4. Research Centrum CARIB
5. Student recruitment
6. Cooperation with international professional field

This agenda also aims to create the frameworks and conditions that enable HAN to work in the long term towards obtaining the certificate of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) for internationalization at institution level. The preparations to achieve such an international quality label can benefit the internal dynamics of the institution. Because internationalization improves the quality of education and

research, the institution must systematically and professionally examine its vision, policy and implementation of internationalization: the vision that underpins internationalization, the policies developed and the ways in which they are implemented throughout the institution. The process the institution must undergo in order to obtain the internationalization certificate is helpful in this regard. The internationalization ambitions set out in the Institutional Plan 2016–2020 largely need to be addressed and implemented into a decentralized manner. Central services, such as the International Office, play a coordinating role as needed to improve efficiency or to guarantee clarity and consistency towards students and staff [16–18].

At Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (PRUE) until 2013 internationalization was not considered as a significant factor of competitiveness. It was a duty of the International Office to proceed applications of foreign students and to organize student and staff exchange programs. International Office worked in cooperation with faculties and sometimes with academic departments but still was functionally isolated. International cooperation in the field of science and research was not well established and no real need for that existed. The share of foreign student was about 3%; the share of foreign lecturers (visiting only) was less than 1%. Only two faculties had programs delivered in English (2–3 at the BSc level and 3 at the MSc level). One of those faculties attempted in 2011 to obtain EPAS International Accreditation but failed some of the criteria at the institutional level [19].

In 2012 Russian Government announced new Russian Academic Excellence Project 5-100. Although Plekhanov University was not included into this project, administration took decision to increase international competitiveness of the university and to use Project 5-100 framework. In 2013 first internationalization concept of the Plekhanov University was developed [19]. Internationalization strategy in 2016 was included as an integral part of the PRUE Strategic Development Program for 2016–2020 [20]. At Plekhanov University the Internationalization strategy 2018–2019 is based on the following goals:

1. Improving the quality, attractiveness and competitiveness of educational services of the PRUE at the global and national levels;
2. Enhancing the reputation and value of research activities of the PRUE at the global and national level;
3. Ensuring effective participation of the PRUE in the global processes of development of science and education;
4. Increasing the share of income from export of educational and research services.

Increasing international partnerships and the international elements of research and education is based on several important arguments. Higher education institutions should enhance international cooperation in order to improve the quality of research by the chance to collaborate with researchers from different countries. By doing this, the field of research may be enriched. On the other hand, the quality of education can be also enhanced through exchange of knowledge and experience during international partnerships. Requirements like creating international comparisons and analyze these comparisons help students to observe the content of education into a larger context. Moreover, students are ready for working life due to the internationalization in higher education. Nowadays, the impact of internationalization and globalization is increased in society

and in the labor market. Based on this situation, international and intercultural aspects help all students to be prepared for society and the labor market, both for the present and for the future. There are various arguments for which the activities of higher education institutions should develop into international partnerships in order to bring benefits for the entire society.

4 Conclusions and Further Research

Cooperation and knowledge transfer in education and research receive more significant attention in countries that are developing as knowledge intensive societies. In bilateral partnerships with different countries and cooperation within the EU, education and research represent core domains. Bilateral relationships are improved by many countries using as an instrument the science diplomacy. Moreover, an essential role in the improvement of the assistance policy can be played by research and higher education. Some of the international challenges the world is facing nowadays can be surmounted by in-depth research collaboration. Both national and international sustainable developments are decisively influenced by the internationalization of higher education. Additionally, increasing internationalization has also several economic arguments. Innovation system is essential to the society growth and economic development. Since higher education and research are contributing significantly to the innovative system, these institutions are vital components for the society as whole. Any country that attracts foreign students, researchers and experts who choose to remain in that country after graduating can gain numerous benefits.

Consequently, internationalization brings vital benefits of cultural and social importance. An increasing number of forms of cooperation and networking are characteristic for the wide field of internationalization of research and higher education. World-wide partnerships and internationalization benefit from many new opportunities such as the increasing in global mobility of people, values, knowledge, ideas, innovations and money. At the same time, between nations and higher education institutions is a tight competition for skills and resources.

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