INTERNATIONALIZATION AS A KEY FACTOR FOR MODERNIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the analysis of relationship between internationalization of higher education and its positive impact on the development of higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan on the example of the National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek. The contribution of the European partners within the framework of international projects, like Erasmus+, to the development of curricula or restructuring of administrative units resulted in the improvement of educational process and made emphasis on the development of actual knowledge and skills required on the global labour market.

Key words: internationalization, higher education, cooperation, quality of education, partnership.

The recent years have brought much progress in the development of educational sphere in the Republic of Uzbekistan with the support of new government policy aiming at policy of integration into global society in all spheres. Higher education is responsible for training highly qualified specialists, who will be able to find work not only in Uzbekistan, but also in the international labour market. From this perspective, universities are responsible for giving actual knowledge and develop modern skills among their students. However, the universities need to be in line with global progress and here the departments responsible for international cooperation (IROs) should be modernized. The
dominant role is played by the foreign partners, who may share their experience in the field of internationalization and give some clear recommendations to achieve the objectives in the sphere of successful cooperation with foreign partners.

Meanwhile, the internationalization in its wider meaning, represents the orientation of education to the global community and motivate higher educational institutions (HEIs) to develop their activities in cooperation with foreign specialists. More precisely, internationalization can be understood as “the process of integrating international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” [1; 11] and compared with the process of globalization. However, these two concepts somehow differ as globalization involves a large-scaled systemic processes of integration, while internationalization deals with the structures of a lower order, which are universities, for example. “Internationalization in higher education incorporates intercultural and international dimensions that directly impact both research and teaching process. It involves practices that require the use of new technology, knowledge, people, values and ideas from different international context. Because each culture is affected differently as a result of the nation’s history, traditions and culture are heterogeneous, there should be considered the need for pursuing compatibility and harmonization in higher education area, for a smooth internationalization process.” [2; 187] Therefore, the benefits of internationalization of higher education is rather objective and vivid.

In international practice the concept of internationalization is interpreted as a process in which the objectives, functions and organization of the provision of educational services acquire an international dimension. The concept of internationalization in the field of higher education in international practice traditionally includes two aspects: “internal” (internationalization at home) and
“external” internationalization or education abroad, cross-country education, cross-border education. [3]

The increasingly international nature of higher education means that colleges and universities must work together to help shape a global “knowledge society” [4; 1] and promote the exchange of science. Internationalization can be observed at several levels of higher education. For example, in a virtual sense, new knowledge can only be obtained through international exchanges, mostly using established forms of communication. University researchers and professors do not need to travel abroad for their pioneering work to be recognized around the world. Through the internationalization of curricula, students can also learn about other academic concepts without crossing international borders. Although such virtual form of internationalization via multiple Internet-platforms (like Zoom, Google Meet, Webex Meet, Microsoft Teams, etc) has become a completely natural and integral part of the learning process, especially in a new reality of pandemic restrictions, another form of international exchange requires the actual physical crossing of borders. Based on the concept of reciprocity, international student exchange programs bring foreign students to a host country or send local students to foreign colleges and universities for a specific academic experience.

Today, the process of internationalization of higher education, in addition to student and teacher mobility, includes the reform of programs and curricula, cooperation in the field of research through networks and associations, open and distance learning without borders, regional and foreign cooperation of institutions, international division of labor and other activities. Moreover, “excellence initiatives have brought about a differentiation within national systems, by separating an elite sector of world-class level universities from other, more nationally and regionally oriented, research universities. Rankings – national, regional, global, institutional, by discipline, and across an increasing number of
other dimensions – have come to play a central role in the construction of excellence schemes.” [5; 34]

Internationalization deepens the knowledge base of institutions and participants in the educational process, expands the scope of scientific research, and enriches curricula. The presence of students and scientists from different countries in the university expands the cultural horizons of both students and the teaching staff of the country. The education of foreign students also affects the development of the country of origin, and also contributes to global economic and political stability. [6; 11]

At present, the fundamental ideas of the strategy of internationalization of the educational services market are:

● strengthening international competitiveness in higher education and research;
  ● active participation in the construction of European higher education;
  ● expansion of opportunities for local educational institutions to enter the international educational market;
  ● positioning the country as a leader in international education and in the international market of educational services;
  ● expansion of opportunities: development of the education system and research infrastructure;
  ● cross-border education [7; 359]

Internationalization also positively influence the National University of Uzbekistan. The main strategic goals of internationalization for the National University of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek are the following:

- Training highly qualified graduates who are in demand in the Uzbek and foreign labour markets and who are capable of addressing the issues of
the modern globalized community, taking into account the world requirements;
- Recognition the university research and development in the international scientific community;
- Achieving the status of the reliable partner that is well-known in the world university space, and the status of the partner for implementing joint international short-term and long-term educational, cultural and scientific projects. [8]

These goals are being realized with the participation of the NUUz in the project funded by Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education “UNICAC” (UNiversity Cooperation Framework for Knowledge Transfer in Central Asia and China), which consortium is composed of six countries: Spain, Italy, Finland (Program Countries), Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China (Partner Countries).

As a result of the extensive work within the frames of this project the IRO at the NUUz was restructured and 3 more departments were separated: Department of international ranking development, Department of educational programs, and International student department. Such reallocation of responsibilities gave its positive results:
- NUUz entered the UI GREENMETRIC WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS with 374 rank in 2019 and 353 in 2020;
- the amount of international students increased almost 3 times (25% of BD students, 40% of MD students and 100% of PhD students). It should also be emphasized that many students applied to the NUUz recently are from China;
- the publication activity of teaching and administrative staff of the NUUz increased 4 times (from 85 articles published in journals indexed in data base Scopus to 390);
- twelve double degree programs in cooperation with foreign universities were opened in NUUz from 2018-2020;
- four new MOC between the NUUz and foreign universities (Renmin university of China; Belorussia National Technological University; Russian Chemical-technological university; Ankara university) on double degree programs were signed in 2020-2021;
- international staff exchange (116 professors from foreign universities are lecturing at NUUz in 2021; 12 professors from the NUUz).

Taking into consideration the obtained results, it can be declared that the participation in international projects and active cooperation with international partners help HEIs improve their teaching/learning and research processes and in general positively supports universities in their integration into global educational and scientific society.

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