

Updating the Definition of Internationalization

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For over 20 years now, the definition of internationalization has been the subject of much discourse. Internationalization is not a new term. The term has been used for centuries in political science and governmental relations, but its popularity in the education sector has really only soared since the early 1980s. Prior to this time, international education was the favored term and still is in some countries. In the 1990s, the discussion on using the term international education centered on differentiating it from comparative education, global education, and multicultural education. Today, in the first decade of the 21st century, another set of related terms is emerging that includes *transnational education*, *borderless education*, and *cross-border education*.

The term *borderless* first appeared in Australian and U.K. reports in 2000. Basically, the term refers to the blurring of conceptual, disciplinary, and geographic borders traditionally inherent to higher education. It is interesting to juxtapose the term borderless education with *cross-border* education. The former term acknowledges the disappearance of borders while the latter term actually emphasizes their existence. Both approaches reflect the reality of today. In this period of unprecedented growth in distance and e-learning education, geographic borders seem to be of little consequence. Yet, there is growing importance attached to borders when the focus turns to regulatory responsibility, especially related to quality assurance, funding, and accreditation.

New Working Definition

It is interesting to look at the way in which definitions can shape policy and how practice can influence definitions and policy. Given the changes in the rationales, providers, and the delivery methods of cross-border higher education, it is important to revisit the question of definition and ensure that the meaning reflects current changes and challenges. It is increasingly clear that internationalization needs to be understood at the national and sector level as well as at the institutional level. Therefore, a new definition is needed that encompasses both levels and the dynamic relationship between them, as well as reflecting the realities of today.

A challenging part of developing a definition is taking into account its application to many different countries, cultures, and education systems. This is no easy task. At issue is not developing a universal definition but rather ensuring that the meaning is appropriate for a broad range of contexts and countries of the world. Thus it is important that a definition does not specify the rationales, benefits, outcomes, actors, activities, or stakeholders of internationalization as these elements vary across nations and from institution to institution. The critical point is that the international dimension relates to all aspects of education and the role that it plays in society. With this in mind the following working definition is proposed:

Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.

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Key Concepts

The above specific terms and concepts were carefully chosen for the proposed working definition of internationalization. The term *process* is deliberately used to convey that internationalization is an ongoing and continuing effort. The term *process* denotes an evolutionary or developmental quality to the concept. Process is often thought of in terms of a tripartite model of education—input, process, and output. However, the concepts of input and output were intentionally not used in the above definition—even though in today's environment accountability and therefore outcomes are stressed. If internationalization is defined in terms of inputs, outputs, or benefits, it becomes less generic as it must reflect the particular priorities of a country, an institution, or a specific group of stakeholders.

International, intercultural, and global dimension are three terms that are intentionally used as a triad. International is used in the sense of relationships between and among nations, cultures or countries. But we know that internationalization is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exist within countries, communities, and institutions, and so

intercultural is used to address this dimension. Finally, global, a controversial and value-laden term these days, is included to provide the sense of worldwide scope. These three terms complement each other and together depict the richness in the breadth and depth of internationalization.

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The concept of integration is specifically used to denote the process of infusing or embedding the international and intercultural dimension into policies and programs to ensure that the international dimension remains central, not marginal, and is sustainable. The concepts of *purpose*, *function*, and *delivery* have been carefully chosen and are meant to be used together. Purpose refers to the overall role and objectives that higher education has for a country or the mission of an institution. Function refers to the primary elements or tasks that characterize a national postsecondary system or individual institution. Usually these include teaching, research, and service to society. Delivery is a narrower concept. It refers to the offering of education courses and programs either domestically or in other countries. This includes delivery by traditional higher education institutions but also by new providers such as multinational companies that are often more interested in the global delivery of their programs and services than the international or intercultural dimension of a campus or research and service functions.

One of the previous definitions that has been widely used to describe internationalization is “the process of integrating an international or intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of the institution.” This definition does not conflict with the updated definition: in fact the opposite is true, the definitions are very complementary. Because the new definition includes the national and sector level and also the growing number and diversity of new education providers and delivery methods, the more generic terms of purpose, function, and delivery are used instead of the specific functional terms of teaching, research, and service. By using the more general terms, the proposed definition can be relevant for the sector level, the institutional level, and the variety of providers in the broad field of postsecondary education.

Internationalization and Globalization

The dynamic relationship between internationalization of education and globalization is an important area of study. In order to acknowledge, but not oversimplify the complex and rather contentious topic of globalization, parameters need to be established to frame the discussion. For the purposes of this discussion a nonideological definition of globalization is adopted: the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, and ideas . . . across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way due to a nation’s individual history, traditions, culture and priorities. Globalization is positioned as a multifaceted phenomenon and an important environmental factor that has multiple effects on education.

Globalization clearly presents new opportunities, challenges, and risks. It is important to note, however, that the discussion does not center on the globalization of education. Rather, globalization is presented as a process impacting internationalization. In short, internationalization is changing the world of education and globalization is changing the world of internationalization. In fact, substantial efforts have been made during this past decade to maintain the focus on the internationalization of education and to avoid using the term globalization of education. This has had mixed results but some success has been achieved in ensuring that the relationship between these two terms is recognized, but that they are not seen to be synonymous and are not used interchangeably.

Defending Academic Freedom as a Human Right: An Internationalist Perspective

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Defenders of academic freedom in the United States have argued for it as a professional or constitutional right of the individual or, less frequently, as an institutional right of the academy. Its practice has been quite vigorous in this country, especially when compared with its fate in closed political systems such as China’s. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, perceptions of threats to academic freedom have changed. Now, it seems, the war on terror has extended to academia.