

# Internationalization of Higher Education: The Activity-Process at Malaysian Technical University



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**Abstract:** *Internationalizing higher education has long been on the agenda of most countries. The purpose of internationalization is to improve the quality and relevance of international standards. Given today's interrelated and interdependent world, internationalization has proven to be a useful tool for higher educational institutions to benchmarking and improve innovative solutions for continuous challenges. Thus, higher education institutions need to strengthen their quality through its primary functions to reach a certain level of internationalization. This paper highlighted the most common practices of internationalization of higher education at the national and sector, institutional and faculty, and individual levels. With a view in identifying approaches and best practices in Malaysia, it is critically reviewed the relevant approaches to internationalization that are covered in the scholarly literature review from the past few decades. The review has revealed the chronology of international education – internationalization from the past until this century and its meaning that carries the concept of internationalization of higher education. The review also identified the approaches to internationalization which are the activity and process approach where has been applied in the internationalization of higher education stratification level. Therefore, this paper will catalyse the change in the understanding of the world that strongly focuses on internationalizing the higher institutions.*

**Keywords:** *Internationalization, higher education institutions, activity approach, process approach, MTUN*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Internationalizing the institutions has become essential in the education sector globally. The process took a long time to be established until this century. The stories on international education – internationalization has become trendy and presents a good indication that it is accepted widely around the world. Internationalization is a combination of the word *international* and *ization*. The *international* is a concept that

refers to things among or between the nations, while *ization* is seen as a process instead of an ideology (Knight, 2012) [23]. It is referred to as the evolutionary process in education of a country or institution. However, the term itself was interpreted differently by different people who can lead to confusion and limit the understanding in its practice (Knight, 2007) [24].

### A. International Education Evolution

The term internationalization has become trendy and used widely as it presents a good indication in the global arena. It refers to a global phenomenon or news or process that crossing the borders and emulating from one part of the world to another part of the world (Knight, 2012; Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg, 2012) [23] [38]. The key element of internationalization consists of national identities, cultural and relationship between countries. Yet, the term frequently interpreted differently which may lead to confusion and limited understanding in its practices (Knight, 2007) [24]. The process of internationalization has arisen since the nineteenth century through political science and government relations. This move has caused the formation of diplomatic relations and law-making between countries as well as scholars involvement. Furthermore, due to the policy differences between countries has also caused changes in foreign policy.

The international education has been introduced by the Institute of International Education (IIE), New York in the year 1919. It was developed right after end of World War and began to concentrate on the technical cooperation, international studies, and international educational exchange specifically at the institutional level. However, the development progress is not encouraging and unpromising until the arisen of World War II (WW2). During the Second World War, many schools, colleges and universities are mobilized into defence training centre which significantly affected the number in student enrolment and drop-out. Nevertheless, the number of students has shown an increment shortly after the WW2 in the 1940s.

In the 1950s, an act on international development was implemented and followed by the universities. The implementation has led to cultural activities begun in gaining support from several foundations. This focus has placed the priority in pursuing peace and cultural policy to strengthening the international equilibrium.

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Afterwards, more and more resources were introduced as to manifest the mechanism development of cultural exchange that applies worldwide such as the publications platform, exhibit and performing arts, scholarly exchanges, and foreign cultural research centres (McCarthy, 1987) [32]. Later in the

year 1961, the Agency of International Development (AID) has been introduced, which formerly known as the International Cooperation Administration to assist the international program overseas (Knight, 2012) [23].

**Table 1: International Activities Evolution (Knight, 2012).**

International Education Elements			
1960s	1980s	1990s	2000s
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foreign students</li> <li>• Student exchange</li> <li>• Development projects</li> <li>• Cultural agreements</li> <li>• Language study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International students</li> <li>• Study abroad</li> <li>• Institution agreements</li> <li>• Partnership projects</li> <li>• Area studies</li> <li>• Bi-national cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education providers</li> <li>• Corporate universities</li> <li>• Liberalization of educational services</li> <li>• Networks</li> <li>• Virtual universities</li> <li>• Branch campus</li> <li>• Twinning and franchise programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional education hubs</li> <li>• International competencies</li> <li>• Degree mills</li> <li>• Visa factories</li> <li>• Joint, double, combined degrees</li> <li>• Branding, status-building programs</li> </ul>

In the 1970s onward, international education has continued to expand through various forms of activities such as mobility, engagement abroad, educational projects, agreements, and other more. These activities have evolved according to the current trend as shown in Table 1. Subsequently, international education has soared along with the 1980s and there was the introduction of the term internationalization started. By the time, internationalization was referring to a set of activities that consists of international elements. Nevertheless, the term international education was still being used today for some countries. From time to time, the internationalization has shown improvement in internationalizing the education not at the institutional level only but also at the national, sector, and regional levels.

## B. Defining Internationalization of Higher Education

According to Teichler (1999) [43], international education has substantially changed in its quality in the three quantum leaps of the world war. It has given many kinds of perspectives especially in its definition in which confused as much as it illuminated. The diversity of meaning appeared due to the terms related to internationalization such as global education, international education, intercultural education, multicultural education, and comparative education (Knight, 2003 & 2004) [26] [25]. Therefore, a comprehensive definition is required in helping to clear the confusion and gives a more reliable understanding of the whole concept of internationalization.

Initially, international education is the favoured term used widely before the initiation of the term internationalization of higher education (IHE). Despite the changes, the originate term are still being used until today for some countries. IHE is considered as multiple activities, programs and services related to technical cooperation, international studies, and international educational exchange (Arum & van de Water, 1992) [2]. At that time, the definition was referred to in describing the important transition which took place in the United States. The definition is an American oriented and too rhetorical for international educators. Furthermore, it is also thought as a very global and neutral,

bottom-up and institutional oriented of definition. Hence, the IHE has to be defined as a process of education development towards the international direction (de Wit, 1999) [11].

In 1994, Jane Knight has defined the IHE as the process of integrating international or intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service functions of the institution. Although it was criticised due to some limitations, it must not against the key concept of IHE which is considered as a dynamic process, integrating and sustainability (Knight, 1997) [29]. Subsequently, Soderqvist (2002) [42] has proposed a new definition of IHE as a change process from a national higher education institution by applying the international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies. Yet, the definition was too focused on the education change process and holistic view by the management at the institutional level (Knight, 2004) [25]. In addition, a general definition must be relevant to the institutional level as well as the national and sector level because of its dynamic relationship and ability in reflecting the reality of today. Hence, Knight (2003) [26] updates the definition of IHE as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, function or delivery of postsecondary education. This definition is used widely as most updated and relevant definition of IHE today. Nevertheless, the definition must also be adapted according to the priorities of a country or institution as it reflects the identity of a nation and culture.

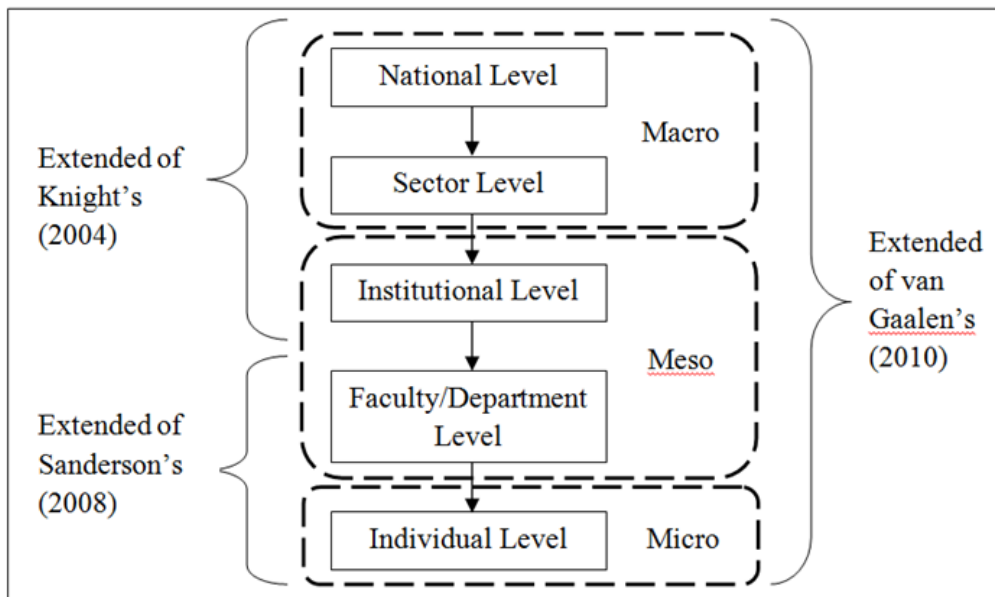
## C. The Concept of Internationalization of Higher Education

The IHE has gone through many revolutionaries to reflect the current global trends. Its existence has grown rapidly from before the World War until to this century. IHE is viewed from the perspectives of its definition, rationales, strategies, and approaches in establishing relevant acts around the world without changing it fundamentally (Knight & de Wit, 2018) [22].

Nevertheless, any practitioner countries must comprehend on the concept of internationalization to make sense of its diversity and complexity which will be affecting the higher education (Altbach, 2002) [1]. It is extremely imperative to determine the internationalization implementation process

and the level of determinants that involved.

According to Elkin, Farnsworth and Templer (2008) [13], the internationalization concept



**Fig.1: The Expanded of Internationalization of Higher Education Stratification (Knight, 2004; Sanderson, 2008; van Gaalen, 2010).**

had a large measure of agreement on its importance but not in the definition. Initially, the internationalization concept is framed through the activity approach where those activities are international oriented and it is due to the transition of international education in the America. Given the constant change in the IHE, an updated definition is required not only to reflect the current trends but also to ensure that the concept of internationalization carried can be the guideline and realistic towards the new developments (Knight, 2004) [25]. In this era of globalization, internationalization is viewed as a process of an on-going and continuous effort where it denotes the quality development of its concept. Prior to this development, the internationalization process is thought as the tri-part model of input, process and output but it becomes less generic when it supposed to reflect the priorities of a country or institution. Hence, Knight (2003) [26] suggested a comprehensive definition of IHE as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. This concept has characterized the internationalization into a process approach as it involves the process of infusing, incorporating or inserting the international and intercultural dimension into policy and program to centralize and sustain these dimensions along with the current trends (Knight, 1994; 2003 & 2004) [30] [26] [25].

A general definition of IHE is to effectively advocate and achieve the internationalization of a country or institution. However, the diversity interpretation in internationalization illustrates a complexity on its concept in which it may lead to confusion in its purpose and importance. This will result in a weakened sense of its legitimacy and impact (Knigh, 1994) [30]. Furthermore, lacking agreement in its concept could hamper the coordinated research within

the institution and also hindered the institution effort towards the internationalization. Subsequently, the difficulties will reflect the development of an effective strategy and approaches of an institution in internationalizing their institution (Elkin, Farnsworth & Templer, 2008) [13].

## II. INTERNATIONALIZATION APPROACHES

The IHE has got more attention and recognition due to its benefits and importance which makes it be applied in the way that best suits the purposes (de Wit, 2002) [10]. The IHE has become a very broad concept and this includes many new approaches in different and constantly changing context (Knight, 2018) [22]. It is exposing to know how the IHE being practice and access ever since the past five decades. Besides the comprehensive definition and concepts, a focused approach is necessary to be determined to effectively achieve the internationalization goals. There are numerous approaches in internationalization and each of it may not be applied simultaneously as it may change by the suitability of the development (Elkin, Farnsworth & Templer, 2008) [13]. Every approaches applied must be in-line with vision and goals set by the practitioner. Thus, it is required to consider a more comprehensive approach to internationalization (Knight, 1999) [28].

Over last three decades, a typology of approaches to internationalization was found which are the activity approach, competency approach, ethos approach, and process approach (Knight, 1997) [29].



The typology is to illustrate the difference of emphasizing area given to internationalization by different perspectives. Subsequently, the approaches to describe the concept of internationalization were then the process approach, activity approach, competency approach, and organizational approach (Knight, 1994) [30]. Thereafter, the internationalization presents a more general approach through the multilevel determinants such as the national or sector, and institutional or provider level (Knight, 2004) [25]. These approaches are illustrated from the previous approaches with different terms used and adding in new categories. Later, the analysis of internationalization uses the top-down and bottom-up approach to refer to the national or sector, and institutional level (Knight, 2007) [24].

Sanderson (2008) [39] then expanded the internationalization stratification by adding another two levels namely, the faculty or department and individual level. Afterwards, the internationalization has been extended into Macro, Meso and Micro levels by Deardorff and Van Gaalen (2012) [9] to illustrate the internationalization from the perspective of outcomes and impact. This assumption has indicated the role of each part and applied different approaches to internationalization. Fig.1 shows the expanded of IHE stratification from the past until this century.

Having analysed the definition and concepts of internationalization, it is likely to look further in this phenomenon in terms of its actual approaches used at a different level of determinant of IHE. According to Knight (1999) [28], the definition of IHE used in 1970s and early 1980s by professionals was synonymous with the concept of an activity approach. However, this differs from the latest definition presented in this century where internationalization is a process or a planned cycle and spontaneous initiatives in the organizational structures and its systems of the institution as well as the academic activities (Arum & van de Water, 1992) [2]. In addition, it was also emphasized that the real process of internationalization is actually happened at the institutional level (Knight, 2004 & 2007) [25] [24]. Therefore, it is essential to determine the approach that applies in each level of the determinants as to view the dynamic relationship between each of the approaches.

### A. Activity Approach

The activity approach happened at the national, sector and institutional level where the reason to internationalization is viewed. Activity approach delineates internationalization from the context of activities such as curriculum, scholar and student exchange, and cooperative programs with the community (Harari, 1989; Knight, 1994 & 1997) [17] [30] [29]. From the international dimension perspectives where it is a series of activities, the institution is prone to isolate international programs from their daily operations. This phenomenon always leads to fragmented and irregular approach to internationalization because of its relationships, effects, and advantages between activities are ignored (Knight, 1997) [29]. This approach is considered as a highly abstract and complicated issue due to its process of application (Huisman, Adelman, Hsieh, Shams & Wilkins, 2012) [19]. Besides, the activity approach is equivalent to the top-down process where the IHE from the aspect of

rationales, policies, goals, competency issues, benefits, impact and outcomes are discussed (de Wit, 1995; Knight, 2004) [12] [25]. This is a leadership-driven where the leader of its members required to articulate the shared goals, identify the institutional complementarities, balance the institutional self-interest and group benefits, human mobility and funding resources, as well as the communications support among stakeholders (Heyl & Tullbane, 2012) [18]. However, this level of execution sometimes become fragmented as it does not take into consideration the relationships, effects and benefits in between each of the implementation (Knight, 1997) [29]. Additionally, there are salient motives presence behind the internationalization efforts such as in terms of profit (Knight, 2004; Shin & Harman, 2009; Scott & Carrington, 2011; Brooks & Waters, 2007; Courtois, 2016) [25] [41] [40] [3] [8], reputation and name recognition (Chan, 2004; Knight, 2004; Robertson, 2008; Long, 2018) [6] [25] [37] [31], and service quality (Knight, 2007; Chan, 2013; Grapragasem, Krishnan & Mansor, 2014) [24] [5] [15]. Therefore, this level of execution does not guarantee the success of internationalization of a country because it does not take into account the effects and consequences of the implementation as a whole.

### B. Process Approach

The term process is referred to as an on-going and continuing effort of internationalization. The process approach took place at the institutional level where it involves the faculty, administrator and staff, academic staff and students which focuses on the primary function of institution includes its extracurricular, curricular, and organizational aspects as well as operationalization of the activities, strategic focus, and individual experiences (Knight, 2003 & 2004) [26] [25]. Subsequently, the students and staff are also part of the driving forces in the internationalization process and these actors should be included in the understanding of the concept to internationalization as they are whose affecting and being affected the most by the process (Sanderson, 2008) [39]. This approach is associated with organizational procedures, policies, systems, and supporting infrastructures that will assist the international programs, and to nurture the international dimension. Besides that, the process approach also related to activities with academic in nature such as teaching, advising, research, training, and sustaining the institution at home and abroad. In addition, process approach is equivalent to the bottom-up process which required faculty-driven as it involved the initiatives in formulating learning outcomes for each discipline and to understand the curricular better as well as to make them comparable with others (Deardorff & Van Gaalen, 2012) [9]. This approach focuses on the practices which may influence the identification of concept use, policy development to internationalization, goals setting for the institution, generate a comprehensive strategy for the institution, investing in student services and experiences (Knight, 1994 & 2004; Pandit, 2009; Green, 2013; Choudaha, 2016; Khanal & Gaulee, 2019) [30] [25] [35] [16] [7] [21].

### III. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF MALAYSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the previous two decades, the Malaysian IHE has moved into a receiving country from a sending country for students (Tham, 2013) [44]. Malaysia has strived to make its higher education system to be ranked among the world's leading education systems since the implementation of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007-2020. One of the key strategic principles is to intensifying internationalization which is through the aspiration of Malaysia for becoming an education hub in Asia. Hence, this thrust has put Malaysia in the aims of achieving a target of 200,000 international students and becomes a top-six destination for international students by the year 2020 (Aziz & Abdullah, 2014) [3]. In the 1980s, Malaysia has started to brand the country as the regional higher education hub and to internationalize the higher education through Transnational Higher Education (TNHE) (Morshidi, 2006) [34]. Starting from the 2000s onward, Malaysia has focused more on the cooperation strategy as to learn and transfer the practices from foreign partners to further improve higher education and institutions quality (Chan, 2013) [5].

In recent year, branding and competition have become part of the tools to internationalization because it can enhance the visibility of an institution in the international sphere (Chan, 2004) [6]. According to Robertson (2008) [37], the branding of the institution is an imperative approach to draw international students targeted. Thus, most of the higher institutions especially public universities would focus on achieving goals, key performance indicators (KPIs) and standards (Ghasemy *et al.*, 2018) [14]. Back in 2005, the Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA) was formed to be responsible for the educational quality provided by public universities through the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF). The MQA also motivates the public universities to be in the position of the competitiveness ranking among the world-wide nations. Besides, all universities are encouraged to participate in the QS World University Ranking to be recognized as the world class university. However, due to rapid growth in the higher education system, an effective tool for institution's recognition among the Malaysian universities is through the quality assurance. This has become an aspiration for the country to make Malaysia as the hub of education, especially in Southeast Asia (Grapragasem, Krishnan & Mansor, 2014) [15].

### IV. METHOD

The findings were carried out by summarization of the most significant literature resources relate to the internationalization of higher education to generate an understanding of the concept and its practices. A range of interpretations arise in the process were documented. The literature gathered through various forms of databases such as online journals, articles, books publications, reports, and circulars is considered robust. Younger (2010) [46] recommended uses more databases in the searching process to increase the likelihood of getting reliable sources. The literature selection process works through the keywords such as internationalization, international of higher education,

higher educational institutions, international education, and international students. Nevertheless, the selection criteria of the selected resources are specifically focused on the approaches in internationalizing the higher institution. Thus, there are a total of 46 databases retrieved on this paper throughout the selection process.

### V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

It was very much challenging and difficult in internationalizing education. Internationalization has evolved over the decades, yet its foundation is substantially unchanged (Knight & de Wit, 2018) [22]. The internationalization implementation needs a continuous effort as its concept constantly undergoes an evolutionary and developmental in its quality (Knight, 2004) [25]. Most of the country is leading towards internationalizing their education to influence the outside world so that they have the opportunities to head in line with the other countries. For centuries, despite a lot of positive attention has been given to the IHE and the process itself holds many benefits in its application. Yet, there are severe risks, challenges, and controversies that are part of this multifaceted and growing phenomenon (Jibeen & Khan, 2015) [20]. Furthermore, internationalization is not an objective but it is to improve the education quality, research and service function of the institutions (Perez-Encinas, 2018) [36]. Although the IHE can be beneficial from any element of international dimension, it required a cost to improve and sustain its quality for the benefit of both international and domestic students, the institution, and the nation. Any practitioner countries require different approaches and strategy to accomplish internationalization. Each approach and strategy took place at a different level of executions in internationalization which is the activity approach (top-down) and process approach (bottom-up). Clearly, internationalization has to be comprehended at the national and sector level as well as at the institutional level due to the dynamic relationship between those levels (Knight, 2004) [25].

Likewise in the higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia, it was seen in improving and empowering the home country education to become more comparable to the best in the world (Tham & Kam, 2008) [45]. Due to this setting, most of the institutions are likely to pursue the target set rather than monitoring the quality in their services (Ghasemy *et al.*, 2018) [14]. Although the national government has transformed the HEIs according to the current trends and needs with the purposes of improving the social and economic of the country, it does also affect the practices, policies and strategies of internationalization which has been initiated by the government (Mitter, 2003) [33]. Apart from the generic terms, the major success of IHE is the approach and strategy used as it measured the level of accomplishment in internationalization. It is essential to agree with what internationalization means to identify the proper approach and to consider the strategy required in accomplishing internationalization (Elkin, Farnsworth & Templer, 2008) [13].

Generally, the Malaysian higher education system is to ensure that all the higher institutions are able to strive in building their reputation with own capabilities, competitive globally, predict future challenges and be prepared in the global growth. This is expressly true for Malaysian higher institutions specifically in the Malaysian Technical University (MTU) setting. MTU is consists of four technical higher education institutions with a growing number of international students enrolled and striving to be rank in QS World University Ranking. Recently, featured for the first time in QS World University Ranking 2020 among the MTU are the Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) and Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) between positions of 700 to 800 ranked from 1000 universities.

However, another two technical higher education institutions, the Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) and Universiti Teknikal Malaysia (UTeM), are still left to be included in the ranking even though there is an increment in the number of international students enrolled. Despite the challenges with a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) background, the temptation of two universities from MTU which successfully be ranked in the list has proven that TVET setting institutions is able to compete with the other types of institutions in Malaysia.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This literature review has revealed the terminology used, working definition, concept and approaches to internationalizing the education in the past few decades. The terminology explains the revolutionaries of term used and the meaning that carries the concept of internationalization of higher education (IHE) globally. The approaches to IHE include the activity approach and process approach where it is applicable at national or sector level, and institutional level. This study will be exploring further the approaches in the MTU setting where it applicable. Although the impact of this study is yet to be proven, the review could at least provide a valuable and new perspective due to its dynamic relationship between those approaches in the internationalization.

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She stands by her belief that whatever we decide in life, we must understand the purpose of doing so.

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