

# Internationalization of Higher Education: Promotion, Implementation and Improvement Strategies in Korea

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to throw more light on the internationalisation of higher education in Korea. Despite the fact that the world is now a global village and people can interact with one another with the help of information and communication technologies, there is still the need for them to move across geographical boundaries in search of knowledge. Korea has put in place several measures to promote internationalisation. These measures are being enforced by several institutions, the universities and companies all under the auspices of the government. Due to the enforcement of these measures the number of international students in Korea is on the rise. Korea has an advantage in influencing higher education but due to language and cultural barrier, the influence is not being felt. It is rather unfortunate that most Universities in Korea use only 33% using English as the language of instruction. Thus this study attempts to bring forth suggestions to improve and promote internationalisation in Korea.

**Keywords:** Internationalisation, Globalisation, Higher Education, Internationalisation of higher Education

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that the world is now a global village and people can interact with one another with the help of information and communication technologies, there is still the need for them to move across geographical boundaries in search of knowledge. Thus, they can directly experience the culture and context of that area. The movement of these people across geographical boundaries is just one aspect of internationalisation. However, internationalisation involves much more than moving across geographical boundaries. Internationalisation could also be achieved through collaboration between schools, using foreign languages or improvising the curriculum such that aspects of other cultures could be represented in the teaching and learning process.

Internationalisation is an integral part of mainstream higher education policies and programmes in Korea and is increasingly perceived as a key tool for improving the quality of higher education (Byun and Kim, 2011). Studies suggest that for Korea to more effectively cope with internationalisation in the future, it must address some challenges like: establishing an effective quality assurance mechanism for cross-border educational activities; redressing the government's previous, overriding emphasis on the quantitative aspects of internationalisation, at the expense of quality; and maintaining a balance between the conflicting demands of competition and cooperation with other countries (Byun and Kim, 2011).

Notwithstanding internationalisation's growing role and importance in Korean higher education and related policymaking, relatively little research has been devoted to this topic in Korea (Choi & Kim, 2007; Kim et. al., 2008; Lee & Kim, 2009). With very few notable exceptions (Kim, 2005; Rhee, 2006), most previous studies have been on a specific issue regarding the internationalisation of higher education (trade liberalisation, quality assurance, brain drain/gain). Recent researches ignore the contributions of stakeholders like government agencies, universities and industries in the implementation of internationalisation in Korean educational system. Therefore, this study will make it known to the international audience the role various stakeholders play in the implementation of internationalisation programs in Korean higher education.

In Korea today there are about 376 official Higher Education institutions that support 3.7million students and 60,000+ academic staff. This includes 179 private four-year universities, 43 national universities, polytechnics, cyber-universities and other types. Two-year and three-year Junior colleges number 149, with a student population of 770,000 and 12,500 faculty. In 1970 there were 160 higher education institutions serving about 200,000 students (NIIED, 2014).

Although Korean Higher Education institutions are well known domestically, they do not hold significant world rankings and are not household names in the manner of Ivy League schools. Korea has its top 20 and the top three universities are referred to as 'SKY', for Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University. Korean students compete for placements based on rankings more so than the quality of the programmes. In Korea, it is important to know the university from which someone has graduated. This alumni connection influences employment opportunities (Parry, 2011).

### **The concept:**

Many people have a misconception assuming that both globalisation and internationalisation are synonymous. However, looking at the definitions by most authors this is not the case.

Wächter (2000) defines globalisation as the changes of the society, the formation of a society of information, ways of mobility, integration of markets and also political, economic and socio-cultural changes. According to Reichert and Wächter (2000) globalisation refers to forceful changes in the economic, social, political and cultural environment, brought about by global competition, the integration of markets, increasingly dense communication networks, information flows and mobility. De Wit (2011), defines globalisation as the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions.

Internationalisation is the integration of international, intercultural, and global dimension into the purpose, function, and delivery of higher education (knight, 2004). Wächter (2000) also defined Internationalisation as the variety of policies and programs that universities and governments implement to respond to globalisation.

Thus internationalisation is the vehicle by which globalisation is realised.

### **Legal framework:**

In the Bologna Declaration of 1999 and the Lisbon Strategy of 2000, the two dimensions of internationalisation meet: cooperation and competition. On the one hand, both processes emphasise that there should be more cooperation in order to develop a European area for higher education and research: 'A Europe of Knowledge'. On the other hand, there is considerable emphasis on the argument that this cooperation is required in order to face up to the competition from the United States, Japan and, increasingly, China, as well as other emerging economies.

Some policy issues instituted to facilitate the internationalisation process in Korea include:

- (a) Allowing for collaborative curriculums between Korean and foreign universities beginning in 1997;
- (b) Permitting foreign Higher Education Institutions to set up branch campuses in Korea starting in 1998, while keeping the existing domestic regulatory framework largely unchanged; and
- (c) Considering further deregulation to attract more foreign branch campuses after 1999 (Lee, 2009). This was the first official government policy to directly address the issue of opening the Korean higher education market to the global community. There is a considerable evidence of internationalisation in terms of overseas academic excellence in Korea. According to the Korean Council for University Education (KCUE), the proportion of doctorate degree holders in the University academic profession in Korea is 82.9%.

The Brain Pool Programme which was created in 1993 aimed at attracting renowned foreign scientists/engineers and Korean scientists/engineers residing overseas so that they come and work in Korea so that their contribution can fortify Korea's national competitiveness in this globalised and informative world. The Programme aims to enhance the Research and Development level of Korea by injecting foreign scientists with quality experience and knowledge into the domestic Research and Development field. Another aim of the Programme is to contribute to achieving the national policy goal of joining the advanced Science and Technology countries, by enhancing domestic Science and Technology level through bringing more distinguished researchers to fill the vacancies at the national research institutes, universities and industries.

Since its creation, it has worked with 1578 research institutions. These institutions include 749 universities, 658 National/Public Research institutions, 92 corporate Research institutions, 53 Government funded Research institutions and 26 Non Profit Foundations institutions. These institutions are from all over the world with 333 from the United State of America, 329 from India, 278 from China, 136 from Russia and 502 from the rest of the world (Korean Brain Pool Program, 2013).

## II. INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH KOREA

### The Korean situation:

Korean Higher Education had received influence from both the Japanese and Western Educational System. The first generation of Korean Higher Education in the Public sector was mainly Japanese oriented. Whereas in the private sector, the academic profession was dominated by the Western, more specifically the United States of American system. This was as a result of the influence of the Japanese colonial rule in Korea that lasted up to 1945 and the United States of America's influence after the 1953 Korean War. Nowadays, in both public and private higher institutions, the Japanese influence is no longer felt because of the dominance of the American system in both Korea and Japan. However, Korea with the dual cultural influence from Japan and the United States of America, still endeavours to maintain and spread its culture to the world through the award of scholarship and university admissions using Test of Korean Language Proficiency (TOPIK) as a criterion for admission.

Korea being the 9<sup>th</sup> world economic power and the 15<sup>th</sup> in terms of Education according to the Legatum prosperity index (2014), still needs to strive towards achieving both economic and educational potential. Korea being a leader in terms of higher education enrolment amongst the OECD countries, can take a lead in helping developing countries in achieving effective, efficient and appealing education. This is proven by the statistics which shows that Koreans aged 25-64 who have attained a tertiary education have increased by 18 percentage points to 42%, the fifth highest share among OECD countries (OECD average: 32%). Among those aged 25-34 years old, 66% held a tertiary qualification, the highest share among OECD countries, compared with an average of 39%. In this age group, Korea ranks first for both men (62%) and women (69%). Korea has an advantage in influencing higher education but because of language and cultural barrier, the influence is not being felt. It is rather unfortunate that most Universities in Korea use only 33% using English as the language of instruction. Even though Korea is leading the OECD countries in terms of higher education enrolment, the number of foreign student enrolment, foreign professors and lecturers and foreign programs are significantly low compared to other top OECD countries (OECD, 2012).

### Different levels of implementation:

Internationalisation of higher Education is implemented by various stakeholders, means and levels in Korea.

#### Education system level:

At the educational system level, two major parties play a vital role in helping the government achieve the policy of internationalisation of higher Education. These parties include the National Institute of International Education (NIIED) and the Korean International Corporation Agency (KOICA).

#### National Institute of International Education (NIIED):

Every year the Korean government through NIIED provides a number of Global Korean Scholarships (GKS) to deserving scholars worldwide with the sole objective of generating deeper mutual understanding between world countries by facilitating educational exchange, human resource mobility, thereby contributing to the development of international education peace.

This Global Korean Scholarship include: Korean Government Scholarship Program (KGSP), Korean Government Support Program for Foreign Exchange Students, Support Program for Self-financed Students, Short-term training for Undergraduate Students from Major Countries and the Government Scholarship Overseas Study.

Korean Government Scholarship Program (KGSP): It is provided to both International undergraduate and graduate students to give them the opportunity to conduct advanced studies of programs at higher educational institutions in the Republic of Korea in order to promote international exchange in education and mutual friendship between countries. Grantees are required to take Korean language training course for a year at a language institution decided by NIIED which is usually different from the University in which the student is duly admitted. This decision is to enable the incoming student to interact with students from other universities and nationalities. Moreover since they are in a University different

from that which they will eventually do their degree they get to experience living in various cities in Korea. Students who achieve TOPIK 5 and above prior to the award of scholarship are excepted from taking the Korean Language course.

**Korean Government Support Program for Foreign Exchange Students:** To induce the influx of potential foreign students by subsidising selected foreign exchange students who are currently studying in Korea based on Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) between universities

**Support Program for Self-financed Students:** To raise awareness on the benefits of studying in Korea, to motivate financially self-supporting foreign students by subsidising outstanding ones.

**Short-term training for Undergraduate Students from Major Countries:** To invite excellent foreign students who have potential to become leaders in their home countries, to deepen their understanding of Korea provide motivation for future study pursuits in Korea, through education cultural experience programs.

**Government Scholarship Overseas Study:** To balance the development of studies by fostering world-class human resources in areas required for national strategic development, by supporting pure fundamental fields of study in which self-paying students studying abroad are at a disadvantage.

### **Koica**

According to Article 1 of KOICA constitution, KOICA aims to promote international development cooperation by enhancing friendly and cooperative relations and supporting mutual exchanges between developing countries and Korea. In order to achieve the objective, KOICA implements projects such as building infrastructures, inviting trainees, conducting development studies, dispatching overseas volunteers, supporting NGOs and overseas disaster relief and reconstruction, and carrying out cooperation projects of international organisations.

### **University level:**

Higher education institutions in Korea are largely divided into junior colleges (2~3 year program), universities (4-year program) and graduate schools. In recent years, with the development of information and communication technologies, cyber universities that deliver education in the format of e-Learning are also growing. Graduate-level programs (Master's and Doctoral degree programs) are generally provided at 4-year universities. But recently, separate 'graduate schools' are also being established to exclusively offer graduate programs with no affiliation to universities. By establishment type, Korean universities are divided into national universities that are established and operated by the central government, public universities that are established by local governments and private universities that are founded by private non-profit educational foundations. To promote quality assurance, the Ministry of Education imposes certain requirements for higher education institutions with regard to faculty composition, curriculum, facilities, degree conferment, etc. Therefore, all private universities which take up the largest share of higher education institutions in Korea are regular educational institutions that have fulfilled the ministry's requirements for establishment and have acquired official accreditation. The Ministry of Education and Korean universities have been actively promoting 'Study in Korea' with a view to gaining international competitiveness and international exchanges and cooperation. As of December 1, 2012, there are roughly 89 thousand international students studying in Korea, among which 64,000 are in degree programs.

Universities implement different program strategies to foster internationalisation of higher education. These program strategies are academic programs, research and collaboration and co-curricular activities. As regards to academic programs, almost all universities in Korea take part in exchange programs together with universities in and out of Korea. The universities also serve as centres for learning Korean language and culture where thousands of students are enrolled. As concerns the language of instruction, all universities are required to teach at least 33% of their courses in English. Almost all of the renowned universities in Korea have graduate school of international studies (GSIS) which admit students in and out of Korea. This department offers courses in international developmental studies and regional studies which enables students to have broad knowledge on global issues. The Universities also organise summer programmes for both foreign and Korean students and lecturers. Moreover, these universities invite lecturers and scholars with international background as guest speakers or guest lecturers.

In the area of research and collaboration; most lecturers embark on joint research with other university lecturers in universities in and out of Korea. Furthermore, these universities also host international conferences and seminars and publish lots of papers in international journals. For instance according to Times Higher Education (2014-2015), Pohang University has a percentage citation of 84.4%, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) 71.4%, Seoul National 48.7% and Korea University 39.9% in University World Ranking.

Concerning co-curricular activities, all Korean universities have a buddy program that helps international students to adapt easily in Korea. The universities also organise culture classes in the forms of field trips to museums, art and culture gallery, folk tale villages and Buddhist temples. There are also international cultural events in the form of sports, food festival and many others.

#### **Classroom level:**

In terms of the classroom with the influx of international students and the need for students to achieve high level of creativity, and high academic performance, there has been improvement in the teaching and learning process. The use of ICTs has enabled students to have free lectures through YouTube or through partner universities. Hence helping all the students to have same level of understanding of concepts with students who are at the same level in other universities across the world. With 33% of courses taught in English, students are equally free to do assignments and write examinations in English in Korean taught courses. Thereby, enabling fairness in evaluation since the students answer in their most comfortable language. In some Korean taught courses students are allowed to ask and answer questions in English. More so, even in some Korean taught courses the teacher sometimes explains in English for the foreign students to better get the concept. In terms of pedagogic materials, most of the textbooks and articles used especially in the graduate school are in English.

#### **Industrial level:**

In Korea there are many industries with most of them having high international reputation. Amongst these are Samsung electronics, LG electronics, Hyundai motor company, KIA motor company and SSAYONG motor companies. Most of these industries are in partnership with Universities and thus help them both directly and indirectly.

Samsung offers two different scholarships: On the one hand, the Samsung Scholarship. Formerly known as The Samsung Lee Kun Hee Scholarship Foundation, which was established in 2002. The Samsung Scholarship provides financial support, encouragement and opportunities to gifted Korean students pursuing higher education overseas. On the other hand, the company offers the Samsung Global Scholarship Program (Samsung GSP), which offers similar opportunities for talented international candidates interested in obtaining a Master of Science in Engineering or an MBA.

Apart from giving out scholarships, Samsung also helps in the construction of buildings in Universities that are used for classes, as library, seminar halls and auditorium. They also provide electronic gadgets to schools and support research and development projects financially.

LG Electronics has a program to select excellent foreign talents studying in Korea and help them learn LG Electronics' management philosophy/style and expertise by working in Korea. Eventually, they will transfer to subsidiaries in their mother countries and be nurtured as core talents who will lead the subsidiaries in the long term. It includes the main program and internship program. For the main program which comprises a probation period for 3 months, the scholarship recipient will work in Korea for one year, move to subsidiaries in home countries and nurture as local core talents. For the internship program, the scholarship recipient joins the winter internship program for 7 weeks while as a student, work in Korea for one year, move to subsidiaries in home countries and finally nurture as local core talents.

Moreover, as part of school support project LG Electronics also provides buildings in Universities that serve as lecture halls, libraries, seminar halls and auditoria. Furthermore they make available financial and material support for research and development projects in these Universities.

Hyundai motor company is contributing to internationalisation by providing constructions in schools that could be used for seminars, lectures, reading and offices. Constructions provided by Hyundai motor company could be found in Korea University, Hanyang University, Seoul National University, Yonsei University and many other universities.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

This paper shows that Korea is achieving some level of internationalisation in its higher education sector with the help of institutions like NIIED, KOICA, the universities and the industrial sector. Despite this level of achievement, compared to other OECD countries, Korea is still lagging behind in terms of the number of international students enrolled in its higher education sector. This could be associated with the language and cultural barrier as many universities require Test of Korean Proficiency (TOPIK) in order to gain admission in these universities. Moreover, students think that the one year spent in learning the Korean language is time they could have spent doing a degree programme in another country. In a bid to break these cultural and language barriers, Korean universities should increase the rate of use of English language

as a medium of instruction and to influence higher education in developing countries, Korean Universities should partner with developing country universities so as to improve an effective, efficient and appealing practice of education.

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