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Special Issue

on

GLOBALISATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

on the occasion of

AIU NORTH ZONE VICE CHANCELLORS' MEET—2023-24

&

THE BHARAT-NEPAL HIGHER EDUCATION SUMMIT

hosted by

KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY, DHULIKHEL, NEPAL

on

February 15-17, 2024



**Association of Indian Universities
New Delhi**

&



**Kathmandu University, Dhulikhel
Nepal**

Welcome

The Delegates

of

AIU North Zone Vice Chancellors'

Meet-2023-24

&

The Bharat-Nepal Higher Education Summit

(February 15-17, 2024)

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Reimagining Internationalisation: Thinking Globally and Acting Locally

Pragya Chaube* and Rajesh Tandon**

Amidst the evolving landscape of internationalization, Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are presented with new opportunities and trials. While the historical trajectory highlights the benefits of standardization resulting from internationalization, a one-sided approach poses challenges. The implementation of National Education Policy 2020, while driving global integration, warrants a cautious approach to ensure alignment with local needs. HEIs must recalibrate to incorporate the ethos of “Thinking globally, acting locally,” striking a balance between the global and local. This necessitates a nuanced approach to internationalization, ensuring that Indian HEIs remain globally competitive while addressing the unique needs of the local context.

Some attribute the phrase “Think global, act local” to a Scottish biologist, social activist, and town planner Patrick Geddes in his pioneering 1915 book *Cities in Evolution* (David Barash, 2002). While the phrase did not appear explicitly in the book, the idea of considering the entire planetary health and taking action locally clearly transpired. The revolutionary idea conceived over a century ago in the context of environmental protection remains pertinent in today’s globalized world in several contexts.

The world is grappling with contemporary challenges of today, particularly the global climate crisis, which disproportionately affects certain populations. Additionally, issues such as food shortages, socioeconomic disparities, biodiversity loss, and numerous other challenges confront societies worldwide, with marginalized groups and historically disadvantaged communities bearing a disproportionate burden. While low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) often suffer more acutely at a macro-level, at a granular level, women, marginalized communities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups endure significant challenges. Addressing these collective issues demands solutions at both the global and local levels.

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Higher education institutions (HEIs) play an important role in this ecosystem. With the end goal to impart and create knowledge, HEIs are uniquely placed to find long-term solutions to societal challenges. HEIs possess the capacity to simultaneously address local community challenges and tackle large global issues through a multifaceted approach. By establishing community-centred research in collaboration with local stakeholders, HEIs can co-develop tailored solutions to address pressing issues such as healthcare disparities, education access, and economic development. These initiatives not only benefit local communities directly but also provide valuable learning opportunities for students and faculty. Additionally, HEIs can leverage their expertise, resources, and networks to contribute to global initiatives, such as climate change mitigation, food security, and socio-economic inequality. Through collaborative research consortia, international partnerships, and experiential learning opportunities, HEIs can empower individuals to become global citizens and advocates for systemic change, thereby fostering a more just, equitable, and sustainable world for all. However, despite being in a globally interconnected world, there is a knowledge unidirectionality that often plagues and limits our definition of what we consider “global” and how it affects our local actions.

In India, this knowledge unidirectionality is a remnant of our colonial history. The colonial legacy is an important aspect in contextualizing the internationalization of Indian HEIs for how it shaped knowledge, the conception of modernity, and ourselves in this evolving landscape of education and labour markets. This legacy has been a double-edged sword: while it affords Indian graduates a competitive edge in a job market largely oriented towards international or Western clientele, it also precipitates the erosion of traditional, contextual, and cultural knowledge. Consequently, in today’s globalized context, HEIs are increasingly tasked with navigating the delicate equilibrium between the global and local spheres, whether in fostering knowledge creation or cultivating a workforce capable of navigating diverse cultural contexts.

Indian Higher Education: A Brief History

India’s higher education system has evolved

over centuries, drawing from ancient centers of learning like Nalanda and Takshashila to more modern institutions established during British colonial rule. In 1857, the establishment of the first colonial universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras marked the beginning of British India's higher education system. Initially modeled after the University of London, these institutions served as examining and affiliating bodies rather than centres of teaching or research. They oversaw the expansion of English-medium colleges, reinforcing the colonial division between knowledge production in the metropole and its circulation in the colonies (Ali, 2023). The spread of English education, part of the imperial "civilizing mission," spurred debates about cultural domination and hegemony (Ali, 2023). The superiority of western thought, materialism, western values, lifestyle, and English language were asserted while denying Indians their own identity (Sultania, 2020). Many were swayed, equating modernism with Westernism (Sultania, 2020), the echoes of which can still be heard today. Indian HEIs, with varying degrees of adaptation, have since retained the system of governance, regulation, examinations, degrees, and quality assurance introduced by the British. This has, in some respects, standardized Indian HEIs according to global metrics, which over the years has resulted in complex dynamics.

Beyond the British influence, Indian HEIs continued internationalization efforts. Between 1880-1945, universities played a pivotal role in facilitating transnational scholarly encounters between Indian and German nationalist thinkers providing critical spaces for intellectual exchange during the swadeshi movement and interwar years (Ali, 2023). Furthermore, the establishment of new departments and research programs, drawing on German academic models and international faculty, aimed to enhance India's academic stature globally. Influential scholars like Ashutosh Mukherjee and Meghnad Saha leveraged universities to bolster international credibility and cultivate forms of anticolonial soft power, transcending the colonial dichotomy (Ali, 2023). Beyond the Indo-German connection, South Asia's participation in the internationalist moment involved diverse intellectual exchanges, particularly for elite anticolonial scholars.

After 1945, global changes such as decolonization and the Cold War reshaped transnational knowledge circulation. Western higher education institutions,

aided by expanding networks of agencies and organizations, increasingly influenced postwar development globally. The emergence of "Cold War universities" in the USA played a significant role in shaping development expertise. However, non-Western institutions often remain overlooked in historical narratives, portrayed as passive recipients of expertise and aid (Ali, 2023). In 1947, India and Pakistan inherited an uneven and underdeveloped higher education system: few colleges and 20 universities, with only two in Pakistan, mainly following an affiliating model, concentrated in urban areas, lacking resources, and deficient in technical and vocational training. Recognizing the pivotal role of higher education in future economic development, there was huge investment in university development over the next two decades, leveraging substantial international aid from foreign governments, philanthropic agencies like the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, and global bodies such as UNESCO, focusing on both monetary and pedagogic assistance.

A major example is from India's early independence period, when the Sarkar Committee advocated for specialized institutions focusing on scientific and technical education, inspired by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) model (Leslie & Kargon, 2006). The establishment of the first Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) followed this recommendation, with IIT Kharagpur receiving support from UNESCO, IIT Bombay collaborating with the Soviet Union, IIT Madras partnering with West Germany, and IIT Kanpur receiving aid from the United States. While research on early IITs is limited, the India-USA connection, explored in works like "The Technological Indian" (Bassett, 2016) highlights influential postcolonial elites shaping India's technological development in alignment with America's global technological system, impacting student mobility and India's workforce participation in global markets for years to come.

The Indian HEI system, after colonialism, was borne out of English system and since then has mostly evolved under international influence. However, it needs to be noted here, that this process has been predominantly unidirectional. The Indian HEIs have been more receptive of adopting global academic, research, funding models and even adapting to global pedagogy and knowledge systems. In contrast, the exportation of Indian knowledge or teaching methods has been limited.

Internationalization of Higher Education in an Increasingly Globalised World

The first question we need to ask is why do we need to internationalize HEI? Firstly, it is imperative to understand ‘internationalization’. Although sometimes used interchangeable with globalization, internationalization is the process through which nationally produced knowledge is disseminated to individuals and nations beyond its border (NV Varghese, 2020). While globalization refers to the process of increased interconnectedness and interdependence among countries, economies, societies, cultures, and people worldwide that largely shapes our societies today. The internationalization of higher education is a proactive measure in response to globalization, aiming to elevate education quality to meet global standards. This involves aligning curricula to cultivate skills necessary for enhanced productivity in a competitive, globalized economy. Such efforts are crucial for equipping graduating students with the capabilities to thrive and navigate effectively in an interconnected world. Internationalization of higher education serves three primary purposes: academic, economic, and political. In academia, internationalization elevates teaching and learning standards, cultivates academic excellence, and nurtures intercultural competencies and awareness. Economically, it caters to the demands of a knowledge-based economy, while politically, it bolsters national identity and encourages collaboration with developed and transitional economies, thereby potentially enhancing economic development and social cohesion. Additionally, it facilitates upward social mobility, fosters personal growth, resilience, and instills a sense of global citizenship. These are the ethos that are also aligned with India’s National Education Policy 2020, “As the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, Global Citizenship Education (GCED), a response to contemporary global challenges, will be provided to empower learners to become aware of and understand global issues” (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020).

The internationalization of higher education is characterized by several prominent trends that reflect the increasing interconnectedness of educational institutions across borders. Historically, internationalization of higher education has been characterized by international student mobility. According to UNESCO-IS, international student mobility rose from 2.1 million in 2000 to 6.3 million

in 2021 and is expected to rise further in the coming decade (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023). Globalization and technological advancements have led to other trends in comparatively recent times. For instance, there’s a proliferation of international courses and joint degrees, expanding educational opportunities and enhancing global mobility. Also, the establishment of offshore campuses by higher education institutions promotes cultural exchange and economic development in host countries while catering to local educational needs. Lastly, the integration of pre-packaged online learning modules leverages technology to offer flexible and accessible learning opportunities, transcending geographical barriers and reaching a broader audience of students worldwide.

The global landscape of international student mobility is marked by inequality, with developed nations hosting the majority of students (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2023). In 2021, over 6.4 million students studied abroad, primarily in high-income countries (HICs), while over 60% of them hailed from LMICs like China, India, and Vietnam (Pawar, 2024). Leading host countries include the US, UK, Australia, Germany, and Canada. India ranks as the second-largest contributor after China, with the UK, US, Canada, and Australia being preferred destinations. However, while India sends out over half a million students, its inflow of international students remains low, with only 48,035 enrolled in Indian HEIs in 2021 (Pawar, 2024).

This internationalization legacy on Indian higher education is evident in the global workforce. Indian students excel in navigating cross-cultural professional environments in the West compared to their peers worldwide. This trend is reflected in the significant number of Indians holding key positions in international organizations and companies, and the prominent presence of the Indian IT sector on the global stage.

NEP–2020 and Impetus to Internationalization of Indian HEIS

The Indian government introduced the NEP 2020 to chart the course for the country’s education system. A key aspect of NEP 2020 is the emphasis on internationalizing education in India, aiming to align with global standards and attract foreign students. To realize the goals of NEP 2020, University Grants Commission (UGC) released the Guidelines

for Internationalisation of Higher Education in July 2021 (University Grants Commission, 2021). The overarching goal, as articulated in NEP–2020 and the guidelines, is to position India as a leading global education and research destination, with ambitious targets of 10 Indian HEIs in the top 200 world rankings (QS or THE) and increasing international student enrollment by 2 lakhs and 5 lakhs in 2030 and 2047, respectively (Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Samagam, 2023; University Grants Commission, 2021). The guidelines further elaborate on the strategies.

Firstly, integration of internationalization at home, i.e., providing world-class international facilities and facilitate integration of incoming students through initiatives such as courses in local languages, quality residential housing for students, adopting international quality assurance processes for teaching and learning and student satisfaction. Secondly, Indian HEIs are encouraged to sign MoUs with foreign institutions for twinning or joint degrees which would allow students to complete part of their program in foreign institutions. Academic and research collaboration with foreign partners has been further explored through short-term student exchange programs, formation of knowledge partnerships, exploring collaboration through alumni network, and faculty capacity building through foreign exposure. Thirdly, the values and curriculum should be redesigned to inculcate the values of global citizenship in students. Fourth, emphasis has been on upgradation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure to smoothen the admission processes for foreign students, enable virtual mobility and partnerships, leverage and explore pedagogical opportunities of ICT in internationalisation through MOOCs and such avenues. The use of ICT is further discussed under “Brand building” to provide short online courses and extend our HEIs reach. Furthermore, to attract foreign students from a particular country, targeted strategies and market research has been advised. An important dimension here is that Institutions of Eminence are permitted and encouraged to set up offshore campuses. Lastly, it has been advised to establish Office for International Affairs at institutions level to facilitate and operationalize effective approaches and be the single point-of-contact for internationalisation.

Moreover, with prior UGC approval, top 500 foreign universities (according to QS world ranking) are also allowed to open campuses in India. Last year, Australia’s Deakin University became the first foreign university to open its campus at GIFT City (Gujarat

International Financial Tech) to offer a range of courses, including financial management and STEM subjects (Caitlin Cassidy, 2023).

Whose Internationalisation?

The ambition of internationalisation as laid out in NEP–2020 is crucial in an increasingly global world. On one hand, it lays out the foundation to attract foreign students for higher education within the country. On the other, it also seeks to provide opportunities for Indian students and academics to gain international exposure.

The internationalization process typically involves the standardization of curriculum, pedagogical methods, and structure on a broader scale. In the Indian context, as discussed above, this process has mostly been influenced by the top few Western countries that played a significant role in the colonial and post-colonial periods and beyond, which have become the biggest receivers of student outflow, with India mostly being the recipient of their ideas and models. Using the framework provided by NEP 2020, new approaches to internationalisation of higher education can be strengthened. However, caution should be exercised to prevent repetition of past errors by endorsing internationalization based on Western norms that promote unidirectional internationalization and knowledge flow.

NEP–2020 and the UGC guidelines explicitly mention providing short courses or degrees on Indian knowledge systems and then proceed to mention which systems: Yoga/Ayurveda/philosophy/ Sanskrit. Focusing on Indian knowledge systems is required to maintain bidirectionality in internationalization. However, by solely focusing on few areas, it perpetuates a narrow view of Indian knowledge systems, without recognizing the broader spectrum of Indian knowledge. More importantly, such approach often miss the importance of inclusion of local traditional knowledge of the communities and indigenous tribes that has not been institutionalized and historically been excluded from the knowledge systems.

Equally, if not more, problematic is the focus on university world rankings. These rankings sustain the narrative of academic excellence within the top-performing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), purportedly based on impartial comparisons across various indicators. However, upon closer examination, several issues arise. Firstly, there are

reports highlighting the conflict of interest among the rankers, the majority of whom are private entities. These entities may manipulate rankings to favour universities that are their business clientele (Chirikov, 2023). Secondly, more importantly, the narrative overlooks the fact that such lists do not solely assess institutions based on merit alone. There exists a significant degree of bias, which perpetuates the status quo. This bias stems from the rankings being primarily influenced by the competence and prominence of their researchers. The ranking criteria consist of nine indicators: Academic Reputation (30%), Employer Reputation (15%), Faculty-Student Ratio (10%), Citations per Faculty (20%), International Faculty Ratio (5%), International Student Ratio (5%), International Research Network (5%), Employment Outcomes (5%), and Sustainability (5%) (Quacquarelli Symonds, n.d.). Among these indicators, Academic Reputation and Citations per Faculty hold substantial weight, accounting for 50% of the total ranking. Consequently, focusing solely on these two indicators exposes biases within the system, potentially leading to profound effects on our education and university research ecosystem.

Firstly, academic reputation, as an indicator of university ranking, is subject to bias and significant criticism due to its inherent subjectivity. Globally renowned universities with a historical prominence tend to possess an unfair advantage in this regard. Additionally, biases may arise from regional disparities and language barriers, further exacerbating the issue. Furthermore, academic reputation reinforces other outcomes such as employability and attractiveness to international students, thereby perpetuating its own influence. This cycle also positively impacts metrics like publications or citations per faculty, as the reputation of a top university plays a crucial role in achieving success in top journals and garnering citations (Safón & Docampo, 2020). Consequently, this perpetuates spurious reputational advantages stemming from past acclaim (Safón & Docampo, 2020).

Focusing on the Citations per Faculty indicator, it is easy to observe the long-term effect on the research ecosystem. The publication and citation numbers are skewed towards HICs over research from LMICs (Skopec et al., 2020). Therefore, excessive pressure on faculty to publish and get citations has resulted in two concerning trends. First, there has been a rise of publications with flawed data, increasing the number

of retractions of published articles from Indian authors. According to a study, India has the third-largest share of retractions globally (R. Shimray et al., 2023), which is quite counter-intuitive for India's effort towards brand-building on the international education platform. Second, to overcome citation bias, Indian academics feel more compelled to research on problems that are not locally relevant. The focus tends to be on problems that are trending in HICs and are more likely to be published in international journals. According to a study, Indian biomedical research is more focused on health issues prevalent in HICs over diseases that have higher burden in Indian populations (Kumar et al., 2023). In 2023 QS ranking, Indian Institute of Science, an Institution of Eminence, ranked highest in the world for Citations per Faculty indicator. Extrapolating from the previous studies and structural biases, it is suggestive of the resources that are being spent on research lacking local relevance. Lastly, an observable trend globally in academic publishing is that STEM subjects receive more citation over social studies and humanities. Therefore, this leads to creation of an institutional ecosystem that supports STEM more over other disciplines (Lee et al., 2020).

Finally, each academic institution is established and developed with its own unique mission and objectives. However, the educational policy's emphasis on international rankings could potentially lead to unintended consequences through the standardization of certain procedures and processes. For instance, Sido Kanho Murmu University in Dumka serves as an exemplary tribal university, not only providing education to tribal students but also playing a crucial role in preserving their traditional knowledge. In this context, internationalization should be approached bidirectionally, wherein local students gain exposure to international perspectives while also ensuring that their traditional knowledge gains visibility on the global stage. However, within the current framework of internationalization, there may be pressure on universities to prioritize research on issues relevant to the West and adapt solutions locally, potentially neglecting the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge.

India-Centric Internationalization

Universities in the East Asian nations, including Japan, China, and Korea, benchmarked their progress against globally renowned American research universities as established leaders. In their effort for

internationalisation and to be relevant in the global rankings, they emulated American university models, which gave temporary boost in their world rankings and helped them modernize. However, the short-term policies that supported the initial rapid progress, ultimately hinder real advancement and innovation by neglecting long-term improvement and academic freedom (Lee et al., 2020). This also resulted in stagnations of ranking of Japanese universities, while the Chinese and Korean universities clustered between top 200-500 rankings (Lee et al., 2020). The push for internationalization, guided by Western parameters and standards, presents a familiar challenge for Indian HEIs. It creates an uneven playing field that tends to benefit only a select few. To avoid this pitfall, the Indian HEI ecosystem requires long-term strategies and policy support tailored to its unique needs.

Alongside internationalization efforts, there's a need for flexibility, supporting HEIs influenced by national context and local requirements. For instance, the knowledge unidirectionality not only tends to flow predominantly from the west to other parts of the globe, but also from HEIs to communities (Hall & Tandon, 2017), is reflective of historical legacies, structural inequalities, and power dynamics within the global academic landscape. Taking into account geographic and cultural diversity, even smaller regional or local universities can cultivate strategic strengths in specific fields, as seen in the case of SKMU Dumka. Fostering such regional collaboration and research integration efforts can yield research that are both, locally relevant and globally impactful. For example, offering pertinent solutions to local communities most impacted by climate change would not only benefit the Indian economy, but also contribute to the global knowledge base and solutions for addressing the climate crisis. Moreover, such approach would enhance the presence of diverse Indian knowledge systems on the global stage through systematic institutionalization, hence promoting knowledge bidirectionality. Furthermore, co-creating knowledge with local communities and incorporating indigenous knowledge fosters internationalization ambitions by aligning our higher education institutions with the globally adopted Open Science Framework (UNESCO, 2021).

To advance this strategy and mitigate the drawbacks of Western-centric standardization prompted by global rankings, the Indian academic ecosystem requires structural adjustments. Such as,

research in local languages should be encouraged to promote inclusion of local and indigenous communities. The national ranking frameworks should continue to be strengthened and tailored to align with the Indian context and requirements is crucial. This can be further reinforced by advocating for Indian journals and revamping research assessment methodologies, focusing on societal impact and other relevant factors rather than traditional altmetric methods.

This doesn't imply that India should entirely disregard global standards. Instead of adhering to a "one-size-fits-all" approach borrowed from the West, Indian HEIs could emphasize what sets them apart. They can align with international trends while preserving their uniqueness. For instance, the rapid integration of AI into education is undeniable, yet many generative AI models, trained on Western data (UNESCO, 2023), may not resonate with the Indian context and may unintentionally perpetuate biases. This underscores the need to incorporate AI into the education curriculum with a nuanced understanding of the Indian context. Achieving this requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing policy development, cutting-edge research, technology infrastructure enhancement, capacity building, social dialogues, and cultural localization efforts (UNESCO, 2023).

Indian HEIs need to provide an ecosystem that nurtures academics and future professionals who can traverse the global and local simultaneously. The policies should be such that encourage Indian HEIs cater to the demands of the local needs and push for innovation to tackle local problems with contextually relevant solutions.

Concluding Remarks

Examining the historical trajectory, Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have evolved under the influence of internationalization, resulting in the standardization of various elements within the Indian tertiary education landscape. However, this internationalization has primarily been a one-way process. Initially stemming from colonial legacies and later driven by the desire to be globally relevant, it has to some extent benefited India, as evidenced by numerous Indian professionals holding key positions of significance worldwide. This has created a class of professionals capable of cross-cultural collaboration with the West. Yet, a pertinent question arises: can they navigate local systems with equal efficiency?

This approach has led to several drawbacks, such as lack of motivation to address local issues through research, posing a significant obstacle to long-term innovation in the country. While NEP 2020 has provided momentum to the internationalization process, it inadvertently appears to repeat the past mistakes by promoting internationalization through adherence to Western standards. This risks perpetuating a unidirectional form of internationalization rather than fostering bidirectionality.

This prompts us to consider the extent to which we should adhere to these standards while simultaneously addressing our local needs. Indian HEIs now need to rethink their positioning and values that reflect the ideology in “Thinking globally, acting locally”.

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