

**THE NEW GLOBAL REGIONALISM: A CASE FOR THE
GLOBALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CENTRAL
ASIA**

Gulnara M. Sarsenbayeva*

Abstract

The higher education policy development and reforms at regional level have attempted to overcome the challenges and impacts of globalization in the current transformation to knowledge-based global economy. Universities of Central Asia are being involved in internationalization processes establishing both bilateral and multilateral co-operations across borders.

Through integration schemes, international and regional institutions and their programs and programs of various countries are engaging in policy harmonization processes to foster more integration and provide regional remedies for the common challenges of globalization in their respective regions.

Researchers are also engaged in academic debates and analyze various higher education system integration discourses at professional level.

Most of the theories and practices used in higher education discourses however are taken from other experiences, best practices and when terms and concepts from other experiences migrate to the higher education sector of the region and vice versa there is sometimes a ground for misunderstanding unless they are conceptually framed and analyzed.

This particular article focuses on possible regional and global integration and higher education harmonization issues. It discusses the process of policy harmonization in higher education and interprets the notions of global and regional integration theories in the interpretive paradigms of policy formulations. These interpretive paradigms provide a theoretical perspective on conceptual framework of higher education harmonization and integration schemes.

Keywords: integration, globalization, higher education reforms, regionalism in higher education

Introduction

* Kazakh Ablaihan University of International Relations and World Languages,
Muratbaev Str., 200, Almaty, 050022 Republic of Kazakhstan.
guliesars@gmail.com

Currently, with care about creating an international educational space, where the international community is committed to the creation of a *global strategy for education* regardless of its place of residence and educational level, higher educational institutions in turn are challenged to be focused on training "*Global Professionals*" as their final product, or universities are responsible of their social role for developing "*Global Citizenship*" All the countries are united by an understanding that modern education has become international, school and university education acquire the features of multicultural, international education. It develops the ability to assess the phenomenon from the perspective of another country, different cultures, different socio-economic formation, created multicultural background.

The rapid pace of technology and innovation challenges integration and consolidation of all professional efforts in order to enhance higher education technologies globally.

IT and a knowledge-based society are the catalysts of overall development which requires highly competitive professionals with new thinking abilities.

Globalization is one of the trends which is working for the benefit of development of education, which has no boundaries. It helps to effectively collaborate and exchange ideas, best practices and experiences.

The main strategic issue that higher education comes across is how to train ahead, what is the quality of the final product of higher education, will it meet the employers' requirements and will it be able to move the market to new technologies, innovations and further development?

Joint international projects and programs are the efficient grounds for strengthening the global and regional integration processes.

The world educational space brings together national education systems of different types and levels which vary considerably in their national and regional traditions, level of goals and objectives, and its qualitative state. Therefore, it is necessary to talk about modern world educational space as forming a single body in the presence of each of the educational system of global trends and the preservation of national and cultural diversity.

1) Global Integration in Education

The educational integration is characterized by regionalism in order to enter the global educational space, such as regional institutions as, for example, the Asian-Pacific Region, the Eurasian Economic Unity, SOC, EC, etc.

In the world, a new Asia-Pacific Region (APR) is the active generator of integration processes. It includes the following countries: South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, as well as Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia. For all of these countries are characterized by a strategy to improve the quality requirements of education and training in the area.

By the end of the 20th century, in several regions, included the EU, the Arab countries, Eastern Europe and CIS countries, economic, political and social factors disturbed the educational and integration processes.

A very important trend was the widespread orientation of the majority of countries in transition towards mass education, education for all and towards solving the issues related to the quality of education in order to enter global educational space. This also holds valid for Central Asia where international institutions offer joint programs to ensure a better integration, and where the institutions themselves apply to international organizations to establish partnership. There are many programs aimed for developing education for Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. But the problem is that there are no strong regional institutions aimed at developing the regional growth of education for now, except regional programs within the Eurasian Economic Unity, Shanghai Organization on Cooperation and CIS.

Due to increase of international cooperation in the field of education, the national education systems started launching new reforms and building partnership turned into multinational collaboration.

New scientific and academic disciplines, focused on new thinking have been introduced.

Another important change in the development of global education is a significant spread of innovation while maintaining the prevailing national traditions and the national identity of countries and regions. Therefore, the space becomes a multicultural and focused on human development and civilization in general, more open to the formation of an international educational environment, the supranational nature of knowledge and familiarization of human values to the world.

UNESCO is implementing an organizational regulation of development of world education. This organization develops international legal instruments, both global and regional issues for all countries. Actively contributing to the development of integration processes in the field of education, UNESCO's standard-setting activities are focused on:

- creating the conditions for promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture;
- promoting universal respect for the rule of law and human rights;
- involvement of more countries in the process of preparing the legal framework for international integration in the field of education;
- Study the state of education in the world, including certain regions and countries;
- Forecasting the most effective ways of development and integration;
- promote adoption of Conventions and Recommendations;
- collection and systematization of reports on the state of education each year.

Globally, there are different educational models existing in different systems as: the *American model*, *French model*, *German model*, *British model*, *Russian model*, *Kazakhstan model*, *Uzbekistan model*, etc. and all these models are aimed to provide the market with competitive professionals with new thinking skills.

The reform of the system of higher education in countries is characterized by the search for the optimal fit between existing traditions in the national high school and the new trends associated with the entry into the world educational space. One of the most important changes which have been taken in Central Asian area is the development of multi-level system, as for example, in the universities of the Republic of Kazakhstan. It is the three cycle system of higher education, such as: bachelor-master-doctor, secondary school school-leavers may apply to vocational schools, preschool system was included into the system of education which has not been included before.

Another change started in modernizing facilities with modern information technologies, including the widespread use of the Internet and the rapid development of distance learning students. Some years ago, in most of the Central Asian countries facilities were available to purchase only due to their involvement into joint international programs, such as: TEMPUS, INTAS, ERASMUS, etc., but at present, universities can afford themselves to be equipped in accordance with their needs.

The next change was related to improvement of quality assurance through participating in the global university ranking, international accreditation. But this process happened in a more intensive way only in Kazakhstan among the other Central Asian countries as the Government still funds and supports the development of education, higher education in particular in the frame of national strategic policy of industrialization and training modern specialist to a new market. 5 national universities of Kazakhstan participated in institutional international accreditation and accreditation of degree programs. The process of moving to international recognition and quality of education has moved and has a potential to continue.

At present rapid development of higher education can be followed by the raise of public funding from year to year. Public spending on education, total of government expenditure is 12.09 % and Kazakhstan is taking 62 place out of 103 countries of the

world (as of year 2012).¹ Therefore educational institutions of Kazakhstan are more or less well funded. The idea for building system of QA which could harmonize different educational practices and values of modern education systems and qualifications has been offered by various national and international experts. Most of the providers of national education reforms are from accreditation and rating systems and they present a well-known and practice based challenge of transfer of western practices to national context. Kazakhstan has been trying to adapt the best practices in education from various countries for over a decade, but still quality assurance is lacking in most of the institutions exist. Therefore, if the education reform is to take its effective outcomes in countries like Kazakhstan, any effort to derive quality assurance frameworks must be a well thought process not cutting everything from the root or not trying to repeat in the same way a successful story of other experiences.

And another change is to include universities in the renewal of higher education to meet international requirements and the rapidly changing market. Therefore, there is a shift in new curricula, modern educational standards, new teaching technologies, management technologies and modern structures.

When the engineer or any other graduate from different fields comes today in the life of engineer or at real technological process he faces constant and rapid environment changes in his activity. As a consequence, young specialists are always undereducated, are "unfinished" and are not able to cope with professional tasks on a required level. Employers spend additional time and money on training to work in the conditions of the enterprise. To become professionals or perform themselves as experts they are required some time and practicing. Therefore, universities have to take into account practical, real production requirements, requirements of the employers of its graduates and establish the "university-industry" cooperation in order to model a correct professional profile. In these issues of Quality Assurance or in developing a professional profile, the Central Asian educational market has not been regionalized yet.

2) Problems of Regional and Global Education

Globalization and internationalization as main trends in the development of society have increased the requirements for recognition and transferable content and the outcome of higher education of all countries involved in the integration processes. Therefore, during the last quarter of the 20th century various international and bilateral conventions on the recognition and equivalence of diplomas and qualifications, degrees, cycles and periods of study in continental Europe mostly within Bologna Declaration been adopted.

The Bologna Declaration was adopted in 1999 which identifies four mandatory principles of comparison of educational programs, structures and systems of education modules:

- Readability - a single form of the Diploma Supplement;
- Comparability - on the basis of the European system of credits (loans) ECTS;
- Compatibility - on the basis of common methods and technologies of education,
- Transparency - access to all information within the European educational space.

On the basis of the principles of the Bologna Declaration proclaimed aim is not just to admit the integration and harmonization of education in Europe by modifying national education systems. To achieve these objectives it is necessary:

- Establishment of a comparable system of higher education degrees
- Introduction of the three-cycled structure of education (bachelor-master-doctor)
- General use of the European system of credits (loans) ECTS;

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-Development of a common methodology and comparable criteria for assessing the quality of education, quality assurance

- Promote the mobility of students, teachers and researchers across Europe which was identified as *internationalization*.

Among the Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan signed Bologna Declaration in 2010 and changed the system of higher education to 3-cycled system and is following all the priorities of this concept.

In 1989, the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa, Hong Kong and, more recently, Japan have signed the Washington Agreement (WA) on mutual recognition of equivalence of accreditation of engineering education programs. In 2003 status of conditional membership in WA was given to Singapore, Korea, Germany, and Malaysia. Each signatory country of WA implements its own approach to guarantee the quality of education. However, by mutual analysis criteria and procedures for accreditation of educational programs, the country joined to WA acknowledge their equivalence and thus confirm the high quality of training under these programs during their employment in the engineering positions in any of the countries participating in WA.

The process of developing a unified approach to creating professional associative institutions has been created in different fields, for example, European Federation of National Engineering Associations (FEANI), ABET, ASIIN, etc.

The activities of these and other professional organizations representing the interests of industry, has shown that the level of performance achieved earlier signed conventions in the field of education, is clearly insufficient - the labor market is still full of professionals with engineering diplomas poorly prepared for professional work. Despite the large number of universities and students industry is experiencing an acute shortage of professionals.

In 2001, the European Charter of quality was adopted. The established European quality systems in various fields include quality of professionals, quality of graduates of the education system and quality of education. It became evident that in order

to improve the quality of education. The recognition of awards (diploma, degree, qualification) is not enough, including teaching, practice, training, planning, it is necessary to industry to impact and interfere into the internal processes of higher education institutions.

The Central Asian higher education institutions' participation in such institutions or their activity is not intensive regionally, but Kazakhstan is participating in the Global university ranking, international evaluation of their academic programs and undergoing through national and international accreditation. By the initiative and support of the President of the country, all companies were united under the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs, many professional associations of Petroleum Engineers, Metallurgical Engineers, Companies dealing with Petroleum Services, etc. were created and many of them established collaboration with universities and developed professional standards.

3) Route to Globalization

Globalization, which is the essential foundation of the information revolution, has a decisive influence on all spheres of human life, such as, economy, politics, culture, language, education, personal development, interethnic and interreligious relations. All these areas, being involved in speeding up the pace of development and exchange of information, acquire qualitatively new features. Now there are processes of intercultural and interreligious interaction in the formation of a unified people of Central Asia. Thus, globalization is a complex process that requires scientific and theoretical understanding from the standpoint of systematic and comparative approaches to modern science.

Globalization brings the positive growth of communication and contacts capabilities, the acceleration of information and goods flows, foreign investment and also the tendency towards standardization, losing national identity. It is particularly important to study the mechanism of the impact of globalization on the cultural identity of the Kazakh people, on the ethnic and cultural

traditions of the peoples of Central Asia which influences greatly their education.

First of all, we need a comprehensive, interdisciplinary study of the process of globalization in all its dimensions, such as: economic, political, cultural, educational, linguistic, legal, social and other aspects. The system analysis of all aspects and manifestations of globalization, as well as its implementation, perception and interpretation should help to identify opportunities for the development of a model for sustainable development strategy of Central Asia in conditions of accelerating globalization.

Exploring all aspects and sides of the complex process of globalization, we need to focus primarily on the economic aspect, consider the impact of globalization on the development of national economy. It is known that big business increasingly concentrated on a global scale, moving across national borders. What are the characteristics of the national economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian Republics, related to their involvement in the process of economic globalization and integration? This process should be considered in all its forms and at all levels: the integration of the Central Asian region, the Eurasian Economic Community, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, relations with Russia and China, as well as the introduction to the economy of transnational companies and institutions. It is necessary to recreate a complete picture of the economic life of the transit company, seeking to defend their own national model of a multipolar globalization.

Conclusion

Globalization in higher education and research is obvious and it is a natural process where education cannot exist in isolation in the 21st century. The borders in education have no limits. The Internet, academic mobility, internationalization and many other developments will lead to the creation of an international educational space. The increasing interaction of academia, students, research, ideas and experiences is accompanied by the globalization process.

The most important aspect of the study will be not only education but also the analysis of the culture of the peoples of Kazakhstan and Central Asia in the context of globalization as well.

It is important to analyze the educational programs, educational technologies and innovations in order to compare them with the regional context, but it is not less important to study cultural aspects of social dimensions as well.

The key idea is to justify the possibility to change the model of globalization, transforming its type in accordance with regional needs. Globalization, embodying great potential scientific mind of all mankind, and should be carried out for the benefit of all countries and peoples. Globalization, which has the potential of a new social identity - a citizen of the world - at the same time, must leave the peoples the right to their own national image of the world and their own independent national development.

The interstate dimension of globalization requires the identification of a new geopolitical strategy in Central Asia in the modern fast-paced world. It is necessary to answer the question which asks how it is possible to combine the values of a liberal developed societies with the values of the traditional culture of the peoples of Central Asia.

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