

A View Point on Internationalization in Higher Education in the MENA Region



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I want to be quite specific in this note. This is because there is far too much general discussion about internationalization. Actually, what we really need is some inspiration that can lead to clear, practical, and useful outcomes with a closer horizon for success. I want to discuss two recent projects with which I have been involved. I hope they may stimulate ideas and actions. The first is a project to develop and install a cutting-edge computational intelligence laboratory in Saudi Arabia. The second concerns a workshop I recently led in Jordan at the headquarters of the Association of Arab Universities. [See: www.khozama.co.uk/workshops-and-training and www.khozama.co.uk/educational-technology for more details.]

The project in Saudi Arabia is multi-dimensional. I think it could be a model for future international cooperation in research and education between MENA and the West. It began five years ago with the realization that simply sending students (and financial resources) to the West for advanced education often did not provide sustainable benefits at home. Students who returned to underdeveloped research communities were given managerial responsibilities too early in their careers. Within a few years, the benefits of their PhDs were all but lost. Our project has linked the education of such students with systematic international cooperation with their home university. We have built local capacity in PhD training through collaborative co-supervision.

We have provided training in research supervision and management and aided the development of a local PhD program. Alongside this, we have also helped develop the specialist curriculum at the Masters' level. This is to provide a constant supply of talent into the PhD program and research area. We provided teacher training in advanced topics to support the Masters' program.

We also supported the development and installation of the best research and teaching laboratory for computational intelligence in MENA. This systematic international collaboration has created a sustainable research environment. International partners in the West also benefit through co-authored publications (many IEEE proceedings, and some best-paper prizes at leading conferences), test-beds to undertake leading research in robotics, internet-of-things, and cutting-edge approaches to collaborative distance learning.

At the workshop in Jordan, we were more than 30 presidents and vice-presidents from universities located throughout the MENA region. Our task was to consider how our institutes of higher education could and should respond to the opportunities and threats of globalization. This could be possible by developing appropriate internationalization strategies and operationalizing them. Two major themes developed during the workshop. The first theme concerned with opportunities for intra-regional internationalization.

The mobility of students and faculty members for study and research between institutions within the MENA region is on the increase. This evidently helps develop a more robust regional identity. More ambitious still, there is evidence of joint academic programs and branch campus activities located entirely within the region. This surely provides a firm basis for broader international activities. It would now be good to see strong regional networks, leveraging their complementary strengths.

See: www.khozama.co.uk/workshops-and-training and www.khozama.co.uk/educational-technology for more details.

The second theme emerged from an audit of the often rather asymmetrical internationalization activities between MENA institutions and their partners in the West. In these relationships, the western universities are typically the dominant partners. This is either through franchise and validation arrangements or as importers of talented students and exporters of specialist education. However, we also observed that MENA institutions are now recognizing their own strengths. More evenly balanced relationships are emerging based on local expertise and resources and leading to mutual and symmetric benefits.

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About CLICKS

CLICKS has been established with the aim of supporting Higher Education Institutions in specific areas that are new and emerging and very much required to by institutions of learning today.

CLICKS has as a mission to provide innovative and customized knowledge solutions that build education institutions' internal capabilities in the MENA region and facilitate their transformation to achieve excellence.

VISION

To be the trusted partner in shaping the future of education for the MENA region

MISSION

To provide innovative and customized knowledge solutions that build education

Projects with MENA universities with which I have been involved have included research in plant biology. In this research, there is local expertise in desert plants and habitats, and also in linguistics. In linguistics research, there is access to dialects of Arabic language speakers, expertise in Arabic grammar and linguistics in the field. These are very precious commodities. Hence, international partnerships built on leveraging complementary resources such as these are now resulting in world-class research contributions.

I think we are beginning to see a welcome shift in approaches to internationalization in MENA. There is evidence of a more mature and confident style. These changes are not yet occurring everywhere. However, it is time for colleges and universities in the region to take another look at their responses to globalization and to adopt a bolder and more self-confident approach. Indeed, the time is now right for those with the vision to lead the way and help their institutions stand out as regional leaders by creating new and ambitious internationalization strategies.

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institutions' international capabilities in the MENA region and facilitate their transformation to achieve sustainable results on their journey towards academic excellence.

In particular, CLICKS provides services and solutions including capacity building programs (both public and tailored to specific institutions), consultancy services, knowledge solutions development (i.e. frameworks, strategies, plans, tools, etc), knowledge transfer and mentorship at both individual and institution level in the following key areas:

- Leadership Development and Governance in Higher education
- Strategic Planning and Performance Management
- Quality and Accreditation
- Innovation in Teaching and Learning, including technology integration in Higher Education
- Research in Higher Education

The Center through its headquarters located in Dubai, UAE and its two branches in the UK and Malaysia is associated with an impressive pool of international experts at the disposal of its clients and is guided by the knowledge and expertise of a formidable international leadership advisory board whose membership includes some of the best leaders in higher education.

CLICKS has also a strong emphasis on research and development and engages in publishing best practices, reports and working series as well as organizing conferences and setting up networks to promote the dialogue between and among Higher Education various key stakeholders.

A Case Study on Internationalization in Higher Education from Tehran University of Medical Sciences

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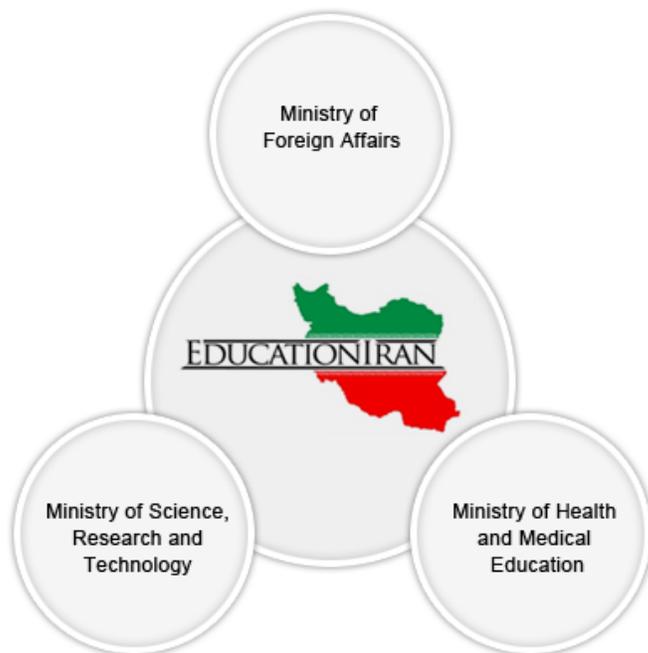
The commencement of modern globalization goes back to the major economic crisis of the early 20th Century (O'Rourke & Williamson, 2000). It was also in parallel with technological changes, changing skill requirements in the labor market and the knowledge big bang (Archibugi & Pietrobelli, 2003). Globalization affects each country in a different way. This is because each nation has its own individual history and traditions; culture and value system, and priorities and needs. Similar to economies and businesses, universities are also competing, expanding abroad and striking cross-border deals.

Higher education systems are being transformed by globalization in all aspects. They are also becoming more flexible and open regarding change and development compared to other sectors of societies as a result of their immersion in knowledge (Marginson & van der Wande, 2006). Similar to national and international economies or commercial businesses, universities have entered an international arena of competition, striving towards expansion and establishing cross-border agreements for cooperation. Over the last two decades, globalization has become a central component of a number of academic discussions. Its impact and influence are increasingly becoming difficult to ignore. Actually, as Marginson and van der Wande state, international and global aspect of education must be taken into account in any future consideration. Governments and higher education institutions all over the world have adopted policies of internationalization as a response to globalization.

Many countries have resorted to internationalization of higher education as a national policy and enrolment of international students, or student mobility as a general concept. They consider this as one of the marketing trends for universities. Various countries have set up robust policies, ambitious goals, and extensive services to recruit international talent. They have adopted a broad range of operating models to guarantee their entry into the market and the international landscape of higher education. Indeed, there are different trends in the market of international student recruitment. It is very important to grant a country's higher education system the international recognition it deserves. Annexation and transformation of systems that were abundant in globalization must not be accommodated in an internationalized model of higher education. In other words, national and international value systems, policies, needs, and goals must be brought together in the form of a developing coexistence.

Involved in this trend, Iran has been a major supplier of international students. About 51,549 Iranian students (UNESCO, 2014) are pursuing their education all over the world, from individuals studying in countries of the Far East to those in Europe and North America. With this background in mind, Iranian universities are interested in hosting more international students with the intent of pursuing knowledge development and scientific exchange. The alumni and graduates can provide better services for their homeland, intercultural communication, and world peace. However, thanks to the recent endeavors of a few leading universities in the country, Iran has gradually shifted its direction. It has taken on the role of the host country with a relative level of success, with more than 14,000 international students currently studying in different Iranian universities.

This new course of action, with its rather challenging practices and growing responsibilities of enrolling, admitting, and eventually accommodating international students, certainly calls for the establishment of an effective system. Such a system should be capable of handling these general, and other more detailed responsibilities with a high level of efficiency and accuracy. It must be a system with comprehensive jurisdiction, abundant resources, national support, and high-quality services and facilities that can act as a pioneer organization. This organization must lead other Iranian academic entities into the current arena of internationalization in higher education. This is why the offices of Vice-Chancellor for Global Strategies and International Affairs of Tehran University of Medical Sciences have proposed the establishment of an organization having the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, and Ministry of Health and Medical Education as its principal founders. It will be a powerhouse, which will take charge of numerous functions in terms of the international dimensions of higher education and endeavor to overhaul the country's system of higher education. Iran's great potential of contributing to the global higher education community is recognized and, more than ever before, it is time to work toward realizing this potential. EducationIRAN aims at acting as the main gateway in introducing Iran's higher education to the world. In return, it aims at spreading the beneficial aspects and good practices of internationalized higher education among Iranian academic institutes.



The Proposal made by Tehran University of Medical Sciences for EducationIRAN

EducationIRAN believes in providing every individual with the most suitable academic services and opportunities. It also believes in, and constantly works toward a global society, where people are able to follow their dreams, realize their capabilities, and reach their goals. In its vision, EducationIRAN sees the goal of entering and remaining in the global higher education society. It will operate based on these ideas and that is not going to change. The organization hopes to contribute its share in improving constantly Iran's, and the world's higher education landscape. It also hopes to provide international students with the chance of benefiting from the resources Iran's higher education institutes can provide.

In its agenda, EducationIRAN has listed many responsibilities. The main aim is to develop an effective system. This system must monitor and govern a great portion of Iran's higher education system in terms of its involvement as an educational destination of international students. As an organization with primarily international roles, EducationIRAN is the main administrative face of Iran's higher education system. It provides the necessary information about every aspect of higher education in Iran. It includes rules and regulations, information about Iran and its various cities, information about individual universities, rankings, scholarships and funding opportunities, majors, levels and so on. It is the system, which will scrutinize all applications to higher education institutions in Iran. As this is the case, such processes will greatly facilitate individuals and universities alike.

Furthermore, through this organization, international students and other interested individuals or groups will have easy access to current and comprehensive information about Iran's system of higher education and its higher education institutes. It will also provide access to up-to-date news, including, but not limited to, subjects, student populations, events, and the like. In addition, it will function as an informative organization in higher education sector and offer the best of universities, majors, and facilities to every applicant. These will be the major tasks of this organization.

From another viewpoint, this organization aims at providing domestic higher education institutions with opportunities to have a constant presence in the international higher education community. It also aims at maintaining productive interactions with other educational entities around the world. In due time, EducationIRAN will be able to provide these educational organizations with valuable information regarding number of students, potential target populations, trends and patterns in demographic statistics, accurate data on universities, introduction to majors, levels, cities and so on.

The most prominent reason behind establishing this organization is that its main task is studying, monitoring, and promoting the most beneficial practices, trends, and innovations in international higher education. Moreover, it does not arise from national and domestic values and frameworks but is established with international aims and visions. Therefore, as time passes, EducationIRAN will help raise standards inside the country and assist all academic institutes in improving their overall position as

per international standards. This position will help them enter international settings of higher education as world-class universities. The sole purpose of this organization is to modify the current perceived standards of higher education in Iran and enhance its overall quality.

EducationIRAN aims at undertaking such a responsibility through its own set of standards, which naturally follow the most important frameworks of internationalization of higher education. This organization will establish cooperation with and render its services to Iranian universities through membership. For those universities that are interested in joining this organization, it has defined certain requirements. Only after meeting these requirements can a university benefit from EducationIRAN's services. Undoubtedly, the organization will revise and redefine the membership prerequisites on a regular basis. In this way, as EducationIRAN evolves year after year, so will its members. This will certainly benefit the students.

We acknowledge the national and governmental support that EducationIRAN enjoys. Those members who constantly observe and meet their membership requirements and maintain their overall quality will have this support as well.

Moreover, EducationIRAN has planned to benefit from the unique network of Iranian embassies and consulates around the world. This means that the Iranian higher education system and all of its universities have the opportunity to be introduced in various places around the world. This will raise their chances of enrolling a higher number of international students.

Also, EducationIRAN has attracted the attention of some of the most qualified workforce of the country. It will definitely make use of the brightest minds and the most capable individuals to pursue its vision, undertake its responsibilities, and achieve its goals. Such a unique and powerful community of experts can create many opportunities and advantages. These will be of great use not only to Iranian higher education institutes but also to the students.

It is in line with this vision that EducationIRAN has been created. It can and will certainly play a great role in the national landscape of higher education in Iran. It has the potential to make a great contribution to the international higher education setting in Iran.

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About the Authors

Tehran University of Medical Sciences (TUMS) is the only internationally accredited institute of higher education in Iran, evaluated and accredited by ASIC. It consists of 11 schools, 16 hospitals, and about 70 research centers. The faculty and student population is more than 1500 and 15,000 respectively. With this strength, TUMS is one of the biggest and most dynamic communities of medical sciences in Asia.

TUMS has so far hosted international students from nearly 30 countries. It is actively expanding its range and capacity of activities in the international higher education landscape. The university has vast resources and incredible population of scholars and students. TUMS aims at being a pioneer in the field of higher education and leading the country and the region into a new era.



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Poll Time

What are the top benefits for internationalization of Higher Education within the MENA region in your views?

- Encourage student mobility
- Achieving international academic standards
- Improving research outcomes
- Exporting/ importing expertise
- Encourage diversification

What in your views are the most significant risks associated with internationalization in Higher Education within the MENA Region ?

- Commercialization of Higher Education
- Limited funding to advance internationalization
- High level of competition
- Difficulties with aligning with national regulations
- Maintaining good quality

In your views, do you believe that internationalization will provide opportunities for higher education in the MENA region to communicate negotiate & exchange information?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Does your institution have an internationalization policy or strategy in pace?

- Yes
- No

what are your institution's current priorities with regards to internationalization (if any)

- Joint curriculum development
- Research and development activities
- Students' exchange
- Faculty exchanges

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#1 CLICKS Offers Capacity Building Programs in Different Arab Countries During The Academic Year 2014–15.

To fulfill its vision and mission, and continue serving higher education within the region, the Center for Learning Innovations and Customized Knowledge Solutions (CLICKS) will be offering a number of public capacity building programs during 2014-15. The offerings will be available in different Arab States, including Oman, Jordan, and Sudan. CLICKS' decision to run programs in different locations other than the UAE comes in response to increasing demand from institutions offering training opportunities in different countries. While offering these programs, CLICKS will work with partner institutions and ensure that its programs are contextualized to the particular needs of the region or country, where the programs are offered. At the initial stage, the center will start by offering two programs. The first is on "*Excellence in Innovative Learning and Teaching*", together with the International University of Africa, Sudan, from 10th to 12th of November, 2014. The second program, titled "*Using Educational Technologies to Improve Learning and Teaching*", will be with the Philadelphia University, Amman, Jordan, from 14th to 16th of December, 2014. CLICKS is also planning to offer programs in the near future in Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco and Bahrain as well.

For more details and information on the 2014–15 schedule of public programs, please visit our website at: www.cli-cks.com

#2 CLICKS invites Bilingual Experts to Join its International Network of Associates

In pursuing its vision and mission, CLICKS leverages on regional and international expertise, wherever it is located. To that extent, it has established and aims at continuously growing its pool of international associates. They include Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), who are called upon to support and assist CLICKS in achieving its objectives and delivering its services to the highest level of quality. Associates are aligned with the center through a long-term relationship because of common and shared vision and set of values.

The criteria for the selection of associates vary based on the particular role they are to assume. However, the general criteria for selection of associates include:

Domain Expertise: All associates aligned with CLICKS demonstrate in-depth knowledge, proficiency, and achievements in their area of expertise. Associates are selected not only on the basis of their credentials, but also depending on the practical experience they possess, their active on-going engagement within the field, and their ability to understand the region's higher education scene vis-à-vis the target population they need to serve. Overall, the center seeks to engage associates in areas of expertise of CLICKS. The demand is currently high on teaching and learning; leadership development and technology integration, which will for now constitute our core focus areas.

Research Track Record: CLICKS considers engagement of associates who demonstrate an active track record in research and scholarly work. This area becomes much more significant in certain sectors, where associates maybe engaged in activities involving design and development of frameworks, strategies, and toolkits.

Business Process Understanding: Sound knowledge of business process design principles, including Process Mapping and Business Process Reengineering (BPR), is considered crucial for certain types of engagements. Here, the SME will be expected to understand the client's requirements, existing systems, and regulations to ensure that appropriate services are provided to the center's clients

Diversity: CLICKS' associates are expected to bring a wide spectrum of expertise from various parts of the world, which aligns with the portfolio of services that the center offers. The center's pool of associates will continuously grow to reflect the needs as well as cultural and geographical diversity spanning Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, and North and South America.

Commitment: CLICKS is keen on engaging associates who share a common vision with the center. They also need to demonstrate willingness to engage in a long-term relationship and fulfill to their best the anticipated roles and responsibilities stipulated at the time of their engagement. Further, the associates are expected to comply with the center's policies and regulations and abide by the highest level of ethics. All the appointed associates will go through an induction program prior to their engagement with specific activities.

Communication Language: All associates should demonstrate proficiency in English, as it represents the language adopted by the center to deliver the vast majority of its offerings and services. However, the center has recently received requests to design and deliver capacity building programs in Arabic language, mainly in the areas of quality assurance, strategic planning, and leadership development.

Areas of expertise include:

- Educational Leadership
- Educational Policy Development

Strategic Planning and Performance Review in Higher Education

- Benchmarking and Best Practice Management in Higher Education
- Quality Assurance in Higher Education
- Program Assessment
- Teaching and Learning
- Students' Assessment
- Instructional Design

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#3 CLICKS Invites Sponsors to Support the 2nd MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum

CLICKS, in partnership with the International Council for Open and Distance Education, the Association of Arab Universities, and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, UK, is pleased to announce the availability of sponsorship opportunities for the second MENA Higher Education Leadership Forum (HELFF) 2015. The Forum will be held from the 10th to 11th November 2015 under the theme "Towards Transformative Higher Education in the MENA Region: The Role of Innovation in the 21st Century Digital and Knowledge-Based Society". Institutions are invited to help and contribute to the success of the second MENA HELFF.

Various sponsorship packages have been designed, ranging from AED 25,000 to AED 75,000. These opportunities offer many benefits to sponsoring institutions. These may include prominent recognition and acknowledgement throughout the forum, invitation to the pre-forum press conference, inclusion in media coverage, recognition on Forum's website, complimentary admissions to the forum and, most importantly, the opportunity to contribute to the advancement of higher education within the region.

The Forum aims to attract decision makers and leaders from within the community of higher education around the globe. They are welcome to share their ideas and new perspectives on a wide range of issues concerning higher education in the MENA region. Addressing this year the importance of leadership and innovation in achieving and sustaining excellence in higher education, the Forum, as in its precedent edition, will provide a unique opportunity for leaders of Higher Education (HE) and decision makers. They would engage in an open dialogue on how innovation and entrepreneurship today is reshaping and transforming higher education and how the latter are becoming essential to the existence of universities. Leaders of higher education will be invited to discuss the role universities and colleges play in supporting the long-term economic growth of nations. They will debate on various frameworks and strategies to support the integration of different innovations as a mean to achieve excellence and competitiveness. Success stories from universities from across the globe will also be shared.

The 2013 Forum has been successful in attracting over 180 decision makers and leaders of higher education with rich and diversified expertise from over 30 countries. We hope that the number of attendees and participating countries will further increase in 2015.

Other forms of 'in-kind' sponsorship are also available. Institutions are invited to contact us at inquiries@cli-cks.com for further information.

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