

THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

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Internationalization is a rapidly growing trend among the higher education system around the world. Academic and research institutions demonstrate a growing interest in the processes of internationalization of higher education, at the international, regional, national, and institutional levels. Internationalization and global engagement are becoming key trends in the development of national systems of education in Armenia and abroad. Numerous researchers have highlighted the problematics of internationalization of higher education associated with the cultural impact of university education, a synergy of humanitarian and natural sciences, intercultural communication, digital and blended learning, international credit and degree mobility, the introduction of international standards for measuring the quality of education defined by the Bologna Declaration. Although internationalization has become established in education at the international level, it should be realized that at the moment there is no single policy or strategy for the internationalization of the higher education system in Armenia, both at the regional and national levels. The lack of uniform strategy is in some way offset at the institutional level: the increasing number of Armenian higher education institutions have integrated internationalization, to varying degrees, in their mission and vision. It can be seen in the activities of the leading universities in Armenia. The global knowledge economy requires all universities to be the competitors for students, faculties, strategic partnerships, and research funding, as well as to prepare their graduates to be global professionals, scholars, highly demanded and competitive. Indicating the mechanism of the implementation of an international component into the existing curricula, programs, research, teaching, and learning processes may contribute to the understanding of the process of internationalization of higher education. Thus, more research is needed on the experience of Armenia and other countries in implementing the provisions of the Bologna process. The purpose of this article is to examine the theoretical and practical aspects of the internationalization process, identifying some challenges and obstacles for the Armenian higher education system and presenting possible ways of overcoming them.

With the aim of the analysis of the higher education internationalization process mechanisms and their effects in Armenia as well as for the professional evaluation of the RA human capital reproduction and preservation processes, sociological research has been carried out, some part of which is introduced in

this article through the analysis of the opinion of the experts in this field. This article presents the findings and conclusions of the sociological research of higher education in Armenia, conducted between March 2019 and July 2020 and included all types of higher education institutions operating in Armenia: public, private, and international. It analyzes survey data from experts in higher education to understand their interpretations of the benefits and problems of internationalization. Within the scope of this research, the internationalization of education has been defined according to Knight's theory, according to which internationalization has two meanings: in a broad sense it means the development of higher education strategies in the international context, and in a narrow sense it means a series of specific processes aimed at the integration of the international component in the educational process, including:

- the academic territorial mobility (in two directions: both the "influx and outflow" of students and teaching staff);
- the review of subject programs according to the international standards;
- the international cooperation between higher education institutions/universities¹.

According to J. Knight², there are strategies where the main emphasis is on the internationalization of programs and the modernization of organizational structures. Each of these strategies includes several areas of work. The strategies for working with the programs have four directions: academic, research programs and scientific cooperation, extracurricular activities, and social activities. Strategies based on organizational structures are subdivided into human resource management, development and support service.

A Successful University is an International Center for Networking and Relationships, which vividly illustrates the concept of «network society» as defined by Manuel Castells³. In response to the challenges of the time, the university begins to work as a corporation. It is to ensure sustainable financing and competitiveness, to strengthen its position in the market of educational services, and to actively cooperate with business and production. It is internationalization that allows universities to go beyond education and participate in international political, social, economic, and other processes of modern society.

In many developed countries, the key trends of national education system reforms are the internationalization of the education system and the integration of the education area. Internationalization is a process of sustainable cooperation and interaction of national education systems based on general objectives and principles, which reflect the XXI century leading trends and meet the needs of the Worldwide Community. The national education systems should take into consideration the best

¹ Knight J. Internationalization Remodeled: Definition, Approaches, and Rationales // *Journal of Studies in International Education*. Vol. 8. 2004. P. 5-31.

² Knight J. Internationalization: Elements and Checkpoints. CBIE Research No. 7. Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE)/Bureau canadien de l'éducation internationale (BCEI). 220 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 1550, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5Z9, 1994.

³ Castells M. *The Rise of The Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

practice of internationalization activities in the field of education in the context of the development of globalization and the change of the global labor market demands. The internationalization of higher education is considered as internationalization at home and education abroad, across borders or cross-border education⁴.

External internationalization is a modern process of interconnected development, which leads to international dialogue and exchange in the field of education: the process of integrating intercultural and global aspects of higher education goals, functions, development strategies, special policies of the state, the academic system and institutions and programs to respond to the challenges of globalization⁵. In other words, external internationalization is necessary to prepare society for full functioning in the globalized world. External internationalization of higher education institutions is aimed at the processes that will allow universities to be recognized as a competitive educational center and research university⁶. External internationalization also affects economic processes, as well as problems of teacher and student mobility. For example, in North America and Europe, many administrators of mobility programs try to motivate students to go to non-traditional places, such as Asia, Africa, Latin America. Students also find new opportunities to combine research and volunteering with studying abroad⁷.

The educational programs are aimed at the comprehensive development of students. The main emphasis is on providing students with good support abroad, being able to apply everything they received while studying abroad when returning home. All this has an impact on internal internationalization, as it is essential to create the appropriate conditions and environment in which it will be possible to realize the potential for the country's development.

Internal internationalization assumes the creation of a university culture-climate aimed at supporting international and intercultural processes of globalization, such as participation in international educational programs or the involvement of foreign students & lecturers. Internationalization is the most important factor influencing the quality of teaching, research, and university administration. Internationalization is an important factor, that impacts the quality of teaching, research, and university administration.

As a result, internationalization has become the main goal of most universities seeking to increase the quality and diversity of education offered. One of the key elements of the internal internationalization process is the established curricula by international standards, foreign teaching methodologies; classification & ranking (internal & external), English publishing activity, teaching and learning in a foreign language, academic writing laboratories, foreign-language websites, and

⁴ Knight J. Updating the Definition of Internationalization // International Higher Education. The Boston College Center for International Higher Education. 2003 pages 2-3

⁵Altbach Ph. The International Imperative in Higher Education. Global Perspectives of Higher Education. Sense Publishers. 2013. Vol. 27. p. 194.

⁶ Farrugia C. Education abroad: Moving out of the classroom and into the real world. 2013. <http://www.iie.org/Blog/2013/August/EducationAbroad-Moving-Out-Of-The-Classroom>.

⁷ Ibid.

documents. Some researchers consider it expedient to recognize strategy as the main direction of the process. Researchers identify various elements of internationalization that affect the professional activities of university teachers.

The main ones are.

- Programmatic-normative - for teaching, developing educational and methodological documentation, as well as receiving grants, teachers need knowledge of English.
- Institutional - responsible for providing educational programs to foreign students, international scientific communication.
- Individual, which includes aspects such as establishing professional connections around the world, as well as scientific and professional cooperation⁸.

The goals of internationalization are divided into academic and economic. Academic goals are aimed at improving the quality of education and research through the participation of students and lecturers in the international process of academic mobility, modernization of educational programs, etc. Economic goals ensure financial stability and sustainable development by attracting additional sources of funding, income from the sale of intellectual products, etc.

The main advantages of internationalization are the increase of innovation in education and that of the access to higher education, the universalization of knowledge, the expansion and strengthening of international cooperation as well as the increase of academic and student mobility.

Along with the positive aspects of internationalization, there are also negative aspects. First of all, the global competition of universities is growing. Its components are the commercialization of education, the inclusion of formal criteria for ranking (exclusion of ranking), the widening of the gap between weak and strong universities, rich and poor regions, the brain drain from weak and poor universities to rich and strong ones. Internationalization affects all components of global competition. This leads to the deliberate management of both educational concepts and their implementation mechanisms. The side effect of internationalization, as well as globalization in general, can be considered the destruction of national differences in education systems. Since the destruction of differences takes the form of an approach to Anglo-American educational standards, the aspect of internationalization should be classified as global competition⁹.

The level of the processes of the internationalization of education is one of the most important aspects of a country's social development. As the key informants state, internationalization is inevitable nowadays. Being a full member of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)¹⁰, Armenia automatically takes part in the internationalization processes.

Though it has been nearly 15 years since becoming a member of the Bolo-

⁸ Bedenlier S. Internationalization within higher education and its influence on faculty: experiences of Turkish academic staff // *Journal of Research in International Education*. 2017. Vol. 16(2), p. 185 – 196.

⁹ Краснощеков В. В. Всесторонняя интернационализация и другие тенденции, влияющие на качество высшего образования // *Международный журнал экспериментального образования*. 2017. № 6, с. 43-46.

¹⁰ EHEA (<http://www.ehea.info/page-members>)

gna Process today's higher education system can be generally defined as transitional. Nowadays several problems in the RA higher education system are being recorded related to the education system approach, the lack of qualified staff and that of motivated students in higher education institutions, the national curriculum of education, etc.

According to the experts, the Bologna Process is unprecedented both in its volume and depth and a lot of positive changes have taken place in the education system in Armenia due to the influence of these reforms. Structurally Armenia has achieved considerable success. Among them the new structure of the scientific degrees, the new mechanisms, and procedures (like e.g. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)¹¹ instead of a diploma), the establishment of the structural quality assurance units, etc. At the same time, the prevailing point of view was that most of these changes were external and formal, and the essence and content remain unchanged, and it is not clear how much the responsible people are the carriers of the knowledge, ideology, and system of values. As the BSU¹² expert notes: "For the successful realization of the internationalization processes Armenia lacks social inclusion, which refers to the ethnic minorities, foreigners, which also implies communication with the native people, since the development of intercultural communication and relevant skills, the exchange of knowledge and experience, as well as the cooperative brainstormings are the main objectives of the internationalization. This is not a successful attempt of internationalization".

As the experts state, the reason for this is that Armenia started to duplicate the education internationalization experience of other countries, without having a developed national education system. At the same time, according to the experts, there is a misunderstanding of the concept of internationalization and the Bologna reforms in the country. Though nearly all the higher education institutions are included in the process, they are still in the early stages of their conception. Neither the society nor the ones responsible for the field of education have any clear idea about the reforms of the higher education system in Armenia and the Bologna Process. It is perceived as a "foreign" process which means the replacement of national education systems with a new system. In fact, it is all about the harmonization of the higher education system¹³. It should be noted that this situation comes from the lack of a clear idea about the objectives of the reforms, which leads to great resistance, criticism concerning the issue of changes in the field of higher education and causes frustration that some vital change can take place.

As for the mobility of the students and lecturers, let us note that there are some problems. First of them is the insufficient level of education funding in the country, especially in state higher education institutions, which are funded by the state. Moreover, according to the latest data, the state funding of educa-

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

¹² Brusov State University, <https://brusov.am/en/>

¹³ Internationalization of Higher Education in Armenia: External Survey-Report 2017

tion in Armenia has been the 2,7% of GDP ¹⁴. In addition, the promotion of mobility contributes to the outflow of human capital. But according to the experts, this problem is not only in our country but in other countries, which do not have a developed economy and are unable to provide their citizens with job opportunities and social conditions: there is a big number of outflow from these countries (e.g. Lithuania). The graduates having this experience usually know foreign languages and the mechanisms how to find a new way of education and work in another country and they do not want to return to their homeland.

The comparative analysis of the research results allows us to conclude that internationalization contributes to the outflow of human capital by 80/20% - brain-drain(80%) and brain circulation (20%). They gain professional and personal growth due to learning abroad, and coming back to Armenia (by the way, coming back to Armenia is a mandatory condition) they are already free and leave because of different circumstances. As the National Academy of Sciences expert mentioned: “A good lecturer or a student will always leave and only financial motivation can make them stay in the country. A lot of people mention that they would like to stay here but the financial differences matter”.

As for the reproduction of human capital, we should mention that unfortunately, the higher education institutions do not take part in the process in any way, since higher education has become a kind of continuation of secondary education. But it is important to realize that the human capital is the graduate, who is an RA conscious citizen and can contribute not only to the economic development but also to society. “... No higher education institution can have such a citizen. Nowadays our higher education institutions lack what was so important during the Soviet Union times. It was ruined and did not develop according to the trends of the time.

It is the lack of the system of values and ideology, it is the representation of values. To what extent is the graduate the bearer and follower of the values of the higher education institution? The same cannot be said about the American university, where the bond with the graduates is very strong and this is typical of the American culture. They have an ideology: “give back, payback”, when they get something, they somehow return it, they have a high level of social activity. The social activity is highly appreciated – what you have done for the society, what you have for its benefit” (the BSU expert).

Armenia is quite developed in the field of institutional cooperation - the other component of internationalization. There are a lot of cooperation agreements. There are international higher education institutions in the country: Russian-Armenian, American and French universities, which grant international diplomas and are the bearers of the educational culture and traditions of these countries. Both the state and international universities have a lot of inter-university agreements and contracts (particularly between Russia, Georgia, Ro-

¹⁴ Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP). 2017. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?end=2017&locations=AM&nam=null&start=1996>

mania, Jordan, China, and Poland¹⁵).

There are two groups of opinions of experts on whether the education system of Armenia can be considered national.

According to some of them, our education system is rather national, which can be explained first of all by the fact that the Law implies that teaching should be conducted exclusively in the Armenian language at all levels of education, the Armenian History and Ecology are compulsory subjects: this is rather a national peculiarity. Though we should mention that this is the knowledge that is provided at the level of secondary education and not in that of higher education, and we cannot say that the national problems are solved in this way. On the other hand, teaching exclusively in the Armenian language makes some obstacles and difficulties for attracting foreign students. One of the main reasons is that with its education system Armenia is not considered as a competitive country in the European Higher Education Area. Here rises the need for immediate legislative changes, after which it will be possible to invest some tools and implement reforms in the lower echelons.

As the key informants in this group mention, students from Armenia taking part in the international programs have a clearer and more expressed sense of belonging to the national education, this sense of national belonging is even too much.

The national education system keeps up with the CIS countries in terms of quality of education but should have all the relevant preconditions and criteria for competing with other European countries and the full implementation of internationalization processes: laboratories, modern equipment, research centers, etc. The competitiveness of the education system is not possible to ensure in this way.

In this regard, it becomes a priority to realize how to raise the competitiveness of the RA higher education system and fully take part in the internationalization process. It is necessary to show what the Armenian education system can suggest to the world (these may include national programs based on the Armenian component, joint programs, new professions, new directions) taking into consideration our Armenian Diaspora, which is open to new suggestions and ideas.

According to the approaches of the other party, internationalization leads to a non-national education system. The border between what is national and what is international is very unclear. As one of the experts of the field mentioned, our education system is not independent, there are still some duplicated items that remained from the Soviet Union and other countries, so we followed the European sample without forming the Armenian one and now we are facing very serious problems. We do have our national system yet and cannot say which is our national and which is international. There is a need to develop a pro-ethnic education system in line with the region, then localize the international experience taking into consideration the local peculiarities and problems. One of the experts describes our education system in the following way: “Our

¹⁵ International Programs/ RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. URL: <http://escs.am/am/category/interprograms>

graduates should be ready to change and develop our market. At this moment they are not ready since the higher education institutions do not know well the problems of the country themselves, that is why they do not teach the students making them problem-solving people”.

According to almost all the experts, the internationalization processes make a positive effect on our education system, since they make it work. The education system will stagnate without the international programs because in this case the student and the lecturer will not develop themselves. If there is an international program or a motivation, there are standards and this leads to the construction and development of human and technical resources. Internationalization cannot absorb what is national, since it concerns the development of the national education systems and raise of competitiveness.

As a conclusion, we can state, that Armenia is involved in the internationalization processes of the higher education system despite some problems. We can say that very often the recorded indicators do not reflect reality, they are just a formality. No matter how successful the international experience is, it is impossible to implement without taking into consideration the peculiarities of the national systems. In this regard, it is necessary to clarify the requirements for national systems, set the criteria, and then adapt them to the international standards. Under these conditions for the effective development of education, it is necessary to review the management approaches of higher education institutions taking into consideration the main problems of preserving the peculiarities of the national education and the integration of educational institutions into European and Eurasian higher education systems. Meanwhile, new mechanisms are needed to be developed at the institutional level, the implementation of which will enable us to reproduce the human capital in the country.

Keywords: *higher education, internationalization, Bologna process, national educational system, human capital, academic mobility*

ԵՎԳԻՆԵ ԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ – Հայաստանի բարձրագույն կրթության միջազգայնացումը – Հայաստանի բարձրագույն կրթության միջազգայնացման գործընթացի մեխանիզմների և դրանց ազդեցության վերլուծության, ինչպես նաև ՀՀ-ում մարդկային կապիտալի վերարտադրության և պահպանման գործընթացների մասնագիտական գնահատման նպատակով իրականացվել է սոցիոլոգիական հետազոտություն, որի շրջանակներում ստացված փորձագիտական գնահատականների վերլուծությունը ներկայացված է սույն հոդվածում: Կրթության միջազգայնացման գործընթացներն արտացոլում են կրթության ոլորտում առկա հիմնախնդիրները, կրթական համակարգի մակարդակը, պետության կողմից սահմանված առաջնահերթությունները: Հայաստանի գրեթե բոլոր բուհերն ընդգրկված են միջազգայնացման գործընթացում, ու չնայած որոշակի ձեռքբերումներին՝ իրականացված բարեփոխումները հիմնականում վերաբերում են բարձրագույն կրթության կառուցվածքային բնութագրիչներին և ընդհանուր առմամբ դեռևս չեն անդրադարձել կրթական ծրագրերի բովանդա-

կությանն ու որակին: Ինչպես ցույց են տալիս ուսումնասիրությունները, ՀՀ բարձրագույն կրթության համակարգի միջազգայնացմանը խոչընդոտում են, մասնավորապես, բուհական համակարգի բարեփոխումներին պետական ֆինանսական աջակցության փաստացի բացակայությունը, բարեփոխումների հիմնական շահառուների՝ ուսանողների և դասախոսների աննշան ներգրավվածությունն ու իներտությունը միջազգայնացման գործընթացներում, շատ տեղերում բարեփոխումների մակերեսային իրականացումը և ձևական բնույթը, բարեփոխումների երկարաժամկետ ազգային ռազմավարության բացակայությունը, բուհ-հասարակություն, բուհ-աշխատաշուկա կապերի անարդյունավետությունը, գիտամանկավարժական ներուժի շարունակական արտահոսքն ու սպառումը: Անհրաժեշտ է հստակեցնել ազգային կրթական համակարգին ներկայացվող պահանջները, սահմանել որակի և զարգացման չափանիշներ, այնուհետև դրանք համեմատել միջազգային չափանիշների հետ և կիրառել ազգային ու միջազգային տիրույթներում առկա դրական ներուժն ու հնարավորությունները՝ առանց թերագնահատելու սեփականն ու գերագնահատելու արտաքինը: Կրթական ոլորտի միջազգայնացումը պետք է միտված լինի ներքին շուկայում մարդկային որակյալ կապիտալի պահպանմանն ու զարգացմանը:

***Բանալի բառեր** – բարձրագույն կրթություն, միջազգայնացում, Բոլոնիայի գործընթաց, ազգային կրթական համակարգ, մարդկային կապիտալ, ակադեմիական շարժունակություն*

ЕВГИНЕ АПЕРЯН – Интернационализация высшего образования в Армении. – В статье представлена часть результатов исследования интернационализации высшего образования в Армении и ее последствий, включая экспертный анализ. Интернационализация образования – один из важнейших аспектов общественного развития, отражающий его проблемы и возможности. Эффективной интернационализации университетской системы страны препятствует ряд проблем, в том числе фактическое отсутствие государственной финансовой поддержки реформ, их поверхностность, слабое участие в них студентов и преподавателей и отсутствие долгосрочной национальной стратегии в данной сфере. Имеют значение также неэффективные связи между вузами, рынком труда и обществом, а также продолжающаяся «эрозия» и старение научно-педагогического ресурса. Необходимо уточнить требования к национальным образовательным системам и стандартам, установить приоритеты развития высшего образования и синхронизировать их с международными, не обесценивая внутренний потенциал и не преувеличивая важность внешних стандартов.

Ключевые слова: *высшее образование, интернационализация, Болонский процесс, национальная образовательная система, человеческий капитал, академическая мобильность*