

# EDUCATION INTERNATIONALIZATION

## ASPECTS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN POLAND

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**Abstract:** In the last years the sector of non-public HEIs in Poland was very dynamic. Their attractiveness is demonstrated by a constantly growing number of schools and their increasing revenues. However, statistical forecasts show that within 10 next years the number of students will drop by around one third. Non-public HEIs will have to face growing competition which will not only be a result of the coming baby bust but also of a competition from foreign schools and from public HEIs. In order to grow further or only to keep their market position HEIs have to occur in the context of internationalization. Currently in Poland, seeing as these aspects is becoming increasingly important. But still, the Polish higher education system faces huge challenges. That's why the article is dedicated to the selected aspects of the internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Poland.

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## Introduction

Development of a HEI has occurred in an international context. There is no a good university without students from other countries, which view open new perspectives, without mobility, without English-language programs, and without building the most effective strategy in the global flow of the existence of scientific thought. Currently in Poland, we observe as this aspect is becoming increasingly important, gradually becoming one of the priority fields of the university. But still, the Polish higher education system faces huge challenges of building a culture of internationalization.

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Foreign students in Poland are among the most perspective customers for education institutions in Poland especially in view of large competition in the market and oncoming demographic bust. A global trend consists in the growth of migrations of young people seeking more favourable offers of studies in other countries (other continents). This trend is used by education centres located first of all in the USA and Western Europe.

Unfortunately the ratio of the number foreign students in Poland to the total number of students in our country is exceptionally low. Poland takes a distant place among OECD countries as far as the share of foreign students compared to the entire population of students as compared to countries like: Australia (20.6%), Switzerland (18.4%) and the UK (17.3%).

Poland is not doing very well when it comes to winning foreign students for full-time studies in our country. A weak activity of universities in acquiring students concerns all studies except for medical ones. Bearing in mind the above there is a big challenge for Polish universities when it comes to further internationalization of their fields of studies as well as creation an offer for potential students from abroad (*Higher Education to 2030*).

#### Internationalization of education as a challenge for universities in Poland

Changes to the geopolitical and economic situation of Poland, its membership to the European Union, tighter commercial and cultural relations with all European countries as well as the European integration process trigger a constant and necessary acquisition of new competences.

Over the last decade universities faced a completely new challenge of participating in building a European knowledge-based society. A proper development of internationalization in each university is a difficult task drawing attention of both the university authorities as well as the entire administration (Martyniuk, 2011).

Cooperation with abroad plays an important role in university development and does not only consist in organizing scholarship trips and the exchange of lecturers and students. As part of the international cooperation universities tend to take part in joint research projects, go to lectures of outstanding scientists, politicians and representatives of international organizations. Moreover, the staff visit foreign scientific centres, participate in conferences, seminars and symposia. They also conduct scientific research, lectures, exchange experiences and work on scientific projects. Where does this need to cooperate come from? Schools are aware that today good education cannot do without international contacts. Young people should be educated so that they are prepared for working not only in their country. This is a chance for an university to update didactics and raise the research potential.

Internationalization of higher education may bring a lot of benefits in modern, global world where innovations are more and more important. In the education area there is an urgent need of changes in previous education methods and management in order to release new initiatives and innovative skills accelerating modernization of the education system. Such a chance is created by internationalization of education and creative usage of community education programmes.

An ability to live and work in united Europe largely depends on new competitive competences. In order to meet these requirements HEIs must assume a new innovative quality. It involves changing goals, contents and methods of teaching. Having considered future needs of managers teaching should comprise vocational and interdisciplinary aspects.

### The development and internationalization of higher education in Poland

Higher Education Act,\* dated September 12, 1990, created a legal basis for the development of non-public education in Poland. A further Act (dated June 26, 1996) on higher vocational schools regulated activities only schools offering vocational higher education, whose graduates received a bachelor's or engineer. Law on Higher Education systematized division studies at the Bachelor's degree (BA or BSc) and a second degree (master's degree granting, master engineer or a doctor). Currently, private universities, according to their powers, have the right to educate students in the first degree, second degree, third degree (PhD) and postgraduate studies.

Number of higher education schools since 1990, is growing rapidly. Moreover, over the years the percentage of public universities and private ones has changed. The number of universities in the period 1999-2010 increased by about 60%, while the number of students only about 28%. Statistical predictions show that over the next 10 years the number of students dropped by about one-third (Kula, 2005).

These changes are associated with an ever decreasing number of population aged 19-24 years. This means that some of these schools will reduce its current market share, losing students to the university competitive. According to the Higher Education Development Strategy to 2020 in 2008-2020 the number of people aged 18-24 will decrease by about 36% (i.e. about 1.5 million). If we assume that enrollment rates will remain unchanged as a direct result the number of students will decrease by about 600-800 thousand.

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\* The Act of September 12, 1990. on higher education. OJ from 1990. No. 65, item. 385

## Internationalization and changes in the offer of Polish universities

Each HEI should try to modify its offer according to their capabilities and the needs of the labor market, so as to be clearly seen not only by candidates seeking a suitable offer for themselves but also by the employers looking for experts in the field. HEIs should therefore seek appropriate niche for itself in the field of education as well as to try to change its offer to match it to the trends in the market. You can also see the impact of Polish membership in the EU and other countries of the labor market, which the Poles are leaving in search of work. Recognizing these phenomena much more university introduced to its offer such directions as construction, social work, nursing.

In addition, entry into the European Union opened the possibility for future students to study outside Poland. In this aspect, the internationalization of the functioning of higher education institutions is particularly important. This applies to the increasing internationalization of research, which is also the flow of students and academic staff.

The internationalization of scientific research is reflected in the growing importance and scope of international research projects and scientific papers written by authors from different countries. Polish scientific institutions use the opportunity to participate in international projects funded by the European Union. In 2001-2006, just over 40% of Polish scientific publications indexed in the Web of Science database is created with the participation of non-Polish authors - mostly from Western Europe and the USA (Olechnicka and Płoszaj, 2008). Internationalization of scientific activity entails costs and requires proper support from the university administration (e.g. financial support and accountable international projects).

Internationalization of higher education in the field of education in Poland is relatively small. It is demonstrated by the very small number of foreigners studying in Poland. Educational Foundation Perspectives has published a report "Foreign students in Poland 2012" showing the latest trends in the internationalization of Polish higher education. Unfortunately, Poland is next to Croatia, the least internationalized country in the European Union and one of the least internationalized in the OECD. In Poland, is studying 24 253 foreign students from 141 countries - it's an increase of nearly 4,000 more than last year. They represent 1.39% of all students in our country (five years ago they accounted for only 0.6% of all students). Most students arrive at Polish universities from Ukraine (since 2009, their number has more than doubled! Poland, along with Russia and Germany is the country of choice for Ukrainian students), Belarus, Norway, Sweden and Spain. Unfortunately, Poland hosts still a few students from Asia (mostly Chinese, Taiwanese, Indian and Vietnamese), and also against the global trend their numbers in Poland is declining. More than 28% of foreign students studying in Poland, choose economic and business trends,

more than 26% medical sciences, 11% technical directions, and more than 8% social sciences.

The world more than 4 million students are enrolled outside their country. Moreover, by 2020, this number is expected to double. It is estimated that on a global scale, market of International Studies brings countries hosting foreign students about 80-90 billion dollars a year. In Poland, the estimated contribution of foreign students to the economy is currently about 100 million euro per year.

### Bologna process as an intensifier of internationalization

Introducing a number of changes to internationalization of the Polish higher education is connected to Poland's membership to the European Union. The Bologna Process initiated a fundamental and decisive change to structures of higher education studies in the European Area of Higher Education. Bologna reforms were introduced in the period of a rapid growth of higher education systems. Accessibility of higher education studies, mobility and financing were permanent priorities in the last decade (Szkolnictwo wyższe w Europie 2010).

All European universities, not only Polish, face new challenges nowadays resulting from the implementation of the Bologna process and also to a large extent from the necessity of solving current problems arising from ongoing political-social-cultural changes in European societies and labour markets in Europe and in the world\*

The Bologna process is slowly becoming an element of a wider process happening in Europe which follows political decisions made by the European Union namely by the European Council, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission.

The most important Bologna action lines comprise the following areas: three-cycle system of studies, qualifications, mobility, education quality, employment of graduates, joint degrees and scientific titles, diploma recognition and life-long learning. Introduction of European Qualifications Frame is a particular challenge for the Polish higher education system (Strategia rozwoju szkolnictwa wyższego w Polsce do 2020 roku). Implementation of reforms in the higher education system in accordance with guidelines of the Bologna process may constitute a foundation for universities with respect to improving the quality and standardization of education. Internationalization of education is a process of certain standardization of services in organizing education in the European area of higher education (Dworak and Jaworski, 2011).

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\* Polskie Uczelnie wobec wyzwań Procesu Bolońskiego, Janusz M. Pawlikowski Zespół Promotorów Bolońskich

## Usage of EU programs to improve the competitiveness Polish HEIs on the basis of Wrocław School of Banking

Wrocław School of Banking is a good example of internationalization evaluation. It aims at improving the quality and attractiveness by giving an international dimension in education so that additional experiences gained thanks to various forms of studying and internship done in the international environment contribute to the success of graduates in the labour market.

The school takes into account, as part of internationalization, trends in development of the labour market in Europe under circumstances of evolving the European area of higher education and increasing globalization.

The most important internationalization tasks in Wrocław School of Banking are as follows:

- enabling students to study at foreign universities and to gain experience in foreign enterprises
- development of curricula in English and commencement of foreign students admission
- promoting knowledge, cooperation and good practices by organizing conferences, seminars, scientific workshops with participation of international scientific environment and taking part in international research programmes
- conducting joint research together with foreign partners
- joint foreign studies ending with issuance of a joint diploma (direct entry)
- realization of international programmes like: Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Tempus, Grundvig, Youth in Action.

Apart from traditional teaching forms more often alternative, less formal but more practical forms are used by realizing education projects. The most frequent ones are as follows:

- foreign students exchange between HEIs
- specialized programs as such summer schools
- short international programmes such as: business week, conferences, symposia, championships, etc.

### Recommendations

Among the efforts to promote internationalization Polish HEIs should include (Olechnicka, Pander, Płoszaj, and Wojnar, 2010):

- special continuation of the Bologna Process
- increase universities participation in international research projects (especially in the EU Framework Programmes)
- increase the exchange of scientific staff (Polish scientists departures and visits of foreign scientists)

- activity in the field of international scientific conferences (participation and organization)
- increased activity in international scientific journals
- increase the mobility of students (Polish student departures and increase arrivals from overseas students)
- creation of common study programs with foreign universities
- development of the offer courses conducted in the English language at Polish universities.

### Conclusion

Polish universities should play a greater role in the international academic flow and increase international cooperation in the field of education. This will increase the competitiveness and visibility of Polish universities in international markets. However, this will require the involvement of not only the university authorities but also by government organizations. Higher education institutions should consider the development and internationalization of the international co-operation as one of its major goals. On the other hand, the central authorities task is to create a legal and institutional framework conducive to the development of international cooperation and funding mechanisms supporting it.

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