

Original Article (Quantified)

Designing a model for the internationalization of universities in emerging markets

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to design a model for the internationalization of universities in emerging markets. This research is applied in terms of purpose and quantitative in terms of implementation. The statistical population of the present study consisted of 125 faculty members of the universities of Sulaymaniyah, Soran, Qaywan, and Komar, as well as university managers and experts, who were selected as the sample using convenience sampling. The data collection tool in this study was a questionnaire. Structural equation modeling and PLS software were used to analyze the data. The results show that the significance of all variables and subcomponents of the study is confirmed at the 0.05 confidence level, and the model of university internationalization in Iraqi Kurdistan is statistically valid, reliable, and well-fitting. The overall goodness-of-fit index (GOF) was 0.484, indicating a strong overall fit of the research model, which can be used as a valid framework for analysis and planning in this area. In addition, universities in Iraqi Kurdistan, given their geographical location and cultural commonalities with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, can provide a suitable opportunity for developing scientific cooperation and attracting international students.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In the era of globalization, the internationalization of universities, especially in emerging markets, has emerged as one of the key strategies for improving the quality of higher education and strengthening participation in the global economy. The globalization of higher education has caused today's universities to undergo extensive transformations in terms of academic values and professional missions. In recent years, many developed countries have adopted specific national policies aimed at enhancing the international scientific activities of their universities (Mehravar Giglou et al., 2020). Internationalization is an effort that is simultaneously competitive and collaborative with other international organizations (Pouratashi, 2018). Given global competition, universities in these countries face challenges such as attracting international students and faculty members, improving research quality, and enhancing curricula, which require attention to internationalization indicators, including research collaborations, exchange opportunities, and research impact. This process not only helps improve university rankings, but also leads to the development of scientific and technological capabilities in these countries and plays a key role in their sustainable advancement (Maleki et al., 2023). Increased international cooperation, capacity building, and improved quality of teaching and learning have been identified as the most important benefits of the internationalization of higher education, while "international opportunities accessible only to students with financial resources," "difficulty in evaluating/determining the quality of courses/programs offered by foreign institutions," and "excessive competition with other higher education institutions" have been mentioned as the highest risks. The main barriers include insufficient financial resources, administrative/bureaucratic problems, and a lack of foreign languages (Zahed Babelan et al., 2022). The internationalization of universities in emerging markets is expanding as a key strategy for improving the quality of higher education and strengthening their global position. This process includes attracting international students and faculty members, creating globally oriented curricula, enhancing international research, and strengthening participation in global scientific consortia. In addition, international research collaborations, publishing articles in reputable journals, and increasing student exchanges are among the important indicators of this process. Challenges such as language limitations, cultural differences, and the lack of sufficient infrastructure must also be taken into account (Bustos-Aguirre, 2020). These measures have improved universities' international rankings and strengthened their participation in global scientific communities (Maleki et al., 2023). Therefore, the main research question of the present study is: What is the model of university internationalization in emerging markets?

Theoretical Framework

Internationalization of Universities

The internationalization of higher education encompasses the scientific connections between domestic and foreign faculty members, inviting foreign professors and their presence in universities to provide short- and long-term training to domestic students, faculty participation in international scientific conferences, professors' utilization of study opportunities, their involvement in international research projects, membership in international associations and societies, and the establishment of scientific communication between Iranian students and students from other countries (Maleki et al., 2023).

Ghaffari et al. (2024) investigated the national and international experiences of universities, education systems, and higher education institutions in the age of globalization. The results indicate that, in the era of globalization, educational systems face unprecedented challenges and opportunities that increasingly highlight the need for transformation and innovation. The

experiences of various countries show that success in this regard requires aligning curricula with labor market needs, effectively utilizing modern technologies, and training teachers with new skills. Furthermore, creating a space for exchanging international experiences and learning from one another can help improve the quality of education. Despite challenges such as the diminishing authority of teachers and the instability of teaching quality, attention to developing job skills and creating equal educational opportunities can help improve the educational situation. Ultimately, in order to achieve educational goals in the age of globalization, it is necessary for policymakers, educators, and universities to cooperate closely and implement innovative approaches in the teaching and learning process. This will not only help enhance the quality of education, but also prepare students to face future challenges.

Mousaviamiri and Naveh Ebrahim (2024) examined the strategies and executive solutions for implementing the indigenous model of internationalizing the country's public universities. In this study, 208 executive solutions (codes) and 71 specialized strategies (concepts) were identified within three policy domains—education, research, and services—which need to be considered by policymakers and managers in the field of higher education. It is recommended that the specialized strategies (concepts) identified and articulated in the three policy domains of education, research, and services (separately for the two managerial-staff and scientific-professional subsystems) be taken into account by those responsible for implementing the model of internationalizing the country's public universities. Moreover, it is recommended that the executive solutions (codes) identified and articulated in relation to managers and experts in the two managerial-staff and scientific-professional subsystems be emphasized by managers, planners, and practitioners in the field of higher education and the country's universities in pursuit of realizing the aforementioned model.

Research Methodology

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and quantitative in terms of implementation. The statistical population consisted of 125 faculty members from the universities of Sulaymaniyah, Soran, Qaywan, and Komar, as well as university managers and experts, who were selected through convenience sampling. The data collection tool in this study was a questionnaire.

Research Findings

Structural equation modeling and PLS software were used to analyze the data. The results show that the significance of all variables and subcomponents of the study is confirmed at the 0.05 confidence level, and the model of internationalization of universities in Iraqi Kurdistan is statistically valid, reliable, and well-fitting. The overall goodness-of-fit index (GOF) was 0.484, indicating a strong overall fit of the research model, which can serve as a valid framework for analysis and planning in this area. Furthermore, universities in Iraqi Kurdistan, given their geographical location and cultural commonalities with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, can provide a suitable opportunity for developing scientific cooperation and attracting international students.

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**Research Findings**

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Conclusion

The present study aimed to design a model for the internationalization of universities in emerging markets. The findings of this study are consistent with those reported by Ghaffari et al. (2024), Mousaviamiri and Naveh Ebrahim (2024), Corsi et al. (2022), Jampaklay et al. (2022), Maneshgar et al. (2021), Mahdi and Barani (2021), Jabbari et al. (2020), Alsharari (2020), Ziae et al. (2019), and Kim (2017). Corsi et al. (2022) demonstrated the role of universities as catalysts of internationalization for companies involved in university-industry collaboration. This reflects an important and less explored component of the triple helix perspective. The type of knowledge exchange in university-industry collaborative relationships indicates a possible reversal of roles between firms and universities, whereby knowledge and technology are provided by companies, while market access is coordinated by universities that become platforms for internationalization.

Based on the research results, the following recommendation was proposed: focusing on improving macro-level policies and reforming the management structure can pave the way for sustainable university development; updating policies and increasing managerial transparency can help improve efficiency and accountability. It is also recommended to revise and update university rules and regulations to increase flexibility and efficiency, and to create agile and responsive organizational units to accelerate decision-making.