Measuring the Awareness of Malaysian Private Universities towards Globalized Accreditation

Mahmoud Khalid Almsafir, Islam Faisal Bourini
College Of Graduate Studies, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Pahang, Malaysia
mahmoud@uniten.edu.my, islambourini@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Globalization, as a new socio-economic as well as political phenomenon, affects the higher education system elements in every single country. Accordingly, educational quality nowadays is affected by the Globalization environment. In a globalized environment, Higher Education Providers HEPs are anxiously looking forward to increase their educational quality to get better ranking worldwide. In addition, Students Mobility SM plays a bigger role in motivating the universities to apply for globalized accreditation agencies. Moreover, HEPs are not only emphasizing nowadays on capacity and profitability, but also on high reputation as well, where accreditation comes into picture within national context. This paper attempts to investigate three factors which can likely to be considered as the key determinants of Malaysian Private Universities’ Awareness MPUA towards globalized accreditation. These factors are: Global Accreditation Bodies Regulations GABR, Global Competition GC and Students’ Mobility SM. The relevant unit analysis is within the three similar private universities, namely: Tenaga Nasional University (UNITEN), Multi Media University (MMU) and University Technology PETRONAS (UTP). The sample we choose is based on non-probability sample method, combining purposive groups of people. Using survey tool, questionnaire and in-depth interview to investigate factors effects on MPUA, 200 questionnaires were distributed to the targeted sample. However, this topic needs more investigation, not only on global factors, but also needs some in-depth studies and further empirical studies on local factors as well.

Keywords: HEP, MPUA, GABR, UNITEN, MMU and UTP

1. Introduction

Enormous globalization influences around the world forced people to face many new challenges, specifically those related to trade, technology, environment, politics, and education as well. But it is known among researchers how much it is hard to establish certain criteria to measure the Globalizations' impacts on various socio-economic sectors. However, exploring Globalization's effects still represent one of the researchers' prime interests.

According to Gibson et al (2008), the effects of globalization can be summarized as an increased interdependence, interconnectedness, and cultural diversity. An example of global
interdependence is the climate change, which illustrates the cumulative effects of seemingly innocuous human activities when viewed at the level of the individual that translate into global-scale phenomena when multiplied up to whole populations and repeated over decades or centuries.

Hou & Chen (2011), suggest that globalization is influencing teaching and learning, and the ability of a learner to deal with social and cultural differences. Moreover, due to the globalization challenges many universities adopted the strategies of internationalization to cope with those challenges. Increasing foreign students, recruiting international scholars, supporting cross-campus research collaborations, conferences, developing branch campus abroad are all examples to said strategies. Hemes & Martin (2008), indicated that the growth of private provision of higher education is one of the significant impacts of globalization. Thus this paper concentrated on globalization impacts on private Malaysian universities.

Educational accreditation was found early 1970s. Since then it was practiced within national context. But in the past two decades, universities found themselves operating in an increasingly globalized environment. HEPs around the world began to adopt mutual regional accreditation agreement to enhance their ability to seek the recognition of the world rank system, and also to cope with the high competition. Researchers investigated in this paper a wider range of intention of private universities to apply for the global accreditation bodies. Unfortunately, most of private universities within Asia region haven’t had yet the intention to apply for global accreditation bodies such as; Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business AACSB, Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology ABET (American accreditation), and The European Quality Improvement System EQUIS. Particularly; within AACSB accreditation, there are only 14 private universities, six from South Korea, two from Chinese, two Japanese ones, one Pilipino, one Tia, and only two accredited universities in the Arab region. Accredited private universities by EQUIS are only two universities in Singapore, and one in South Korea. According to ABET accreditation list so far no private universities were accredited within the Asia region (AASCB, 2011; EQUIS, 2011; ABET, 2011)

2. Literature Review

Schrottner, (2010), believes that awareness, willingness, familiarity, and ability to adopt or adapt to global requirements are important phrases for the people to use in dealing with the global transformation and its effect on the various life sectors. Individuals and, particularly, educators need to develop a wider and deeper understanding of the meanings, challenges and consequences of globalization phenomenon. According to Lowry (2005), globalization requires the individuals, as a result of technological advances in communications and travel, to expand their awareness of other people’s cultures and religions.

Globalization can be defined in a number of different ways depending on the context. Almsafir (2002) considers globalization as a capitalistic phenomenon, and according to him, it is one of the capitalistic faces where you can obviously see the hegemony’s’ characteristics of the limited number of western countries against huge deterioration in the conditions of mutual
transactions with the third world countries. He summarizes it in restructuring the capitalistic world for the sake of the developed countries.

According to Hsu et al. (2006), globalization was defined as commonly worldwide connections within economic, social, and culture context. As a trend of globalization, there is an increasing notice around the world about global events and crisis such as; transnational politics, pollution, terrorism, literacy, health issues, disaster relief, and human rights (Global Transformations). Peoples are more knowledgeable about global events and crisis around the world due to the opening markets overseas, and continually developing of communication technology.

Almsafir (2002) says when people are connected globally and meanwhile they have their own differences within social, economic, and political aspects, finding a new set of common criteria to enhance establishing intersect points among the different societies worldwide. He believes that these criteria should be within accepted ethics, legal, economic, social and political ones.

Here is the point where local people’s awareness about globalization comes into picture, and people have different levels of resistance, ability to adopt or adapt of globalization requirements.

Schrottner (2010) indicated that the differences among people are usually not the cause of conflict. Instead, it is often the misunderstandings arising from the differences. Moreover, misunderstandings lead to tensions in dialogue between people of different cultural backgrounds. These misunderstandings are often caused by the misinterpretation of basic cultural values such as individualism and collectivism, time, gender, power distance, uncertainty and avoidance of interaction.

Instead of setting up a new set of norms and values which can represent various kinds of people worldwide, USA availed itself of the unique opportunity of collapsing of bi-polarity system to impose American set of values and culture on the whole world (Almsafir, 2002).

3. Globalization of Education

In the past decade, as consequences of globalization, universities found themselves operating in an increasingly globalizing environment. In addition, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) recognized education in 1995 as a traded service. As a result HEPs are emphasizing on attracting foreign students by increasing the quality level of education where considered as a source of profitability and reputation. Also locally, HEPs are facing high competition within accreditation field.

Due to increasing of competition among HEPs, education service becomes as a business process, hence HEPs are looking to acquire big amount of students. According to Sciglimpaglia et al. (2006), Universities around the world are busy in completing accreditation processes, either in institutional level or in programs level to gain or maintain their lead in a highly competitive market. There are many accreditation bodies within global environment, that the universities attempt to apply for. Such as: AACSB, EQUIS and ABET.
4. Awareness of HEPs

Within modern education, we have become confused in our vocabulary and understanding of accreditation, McFarlane said “There is quality here! What we have forgotten to ask is, "Whose Quality?" We must remember that all accreditation agencies in the United States and those in many other territories are private ventures looking to profitability as a first priority, farther we take consideration of accreditation standards is within American regulation (McFarlane, 2010).

Some universities as well as schools decide not to apply for accreditation either local or international, mostly due to inflexibility of the accreditation standards, and a lack of pressure from stakeholders. In addition, accreditation bodies might emphasize heavily on aspects such as faculty research and publications instead of class materials or facilities, which conflicts with universities strategies (Sciglimpaglia et al., 2006; Romero, 2008).

According to Sciglimpaglia et al. (2006), there are several articles and surveys were conducted over the last years, sharing these perceptions about the advantages of accreditation. However, little knows about administrators and academicians’ views towards accreditation within developing and developed countries.

In national context recently researchers were investigated about awareness of academic staff and administrators by national quality assurance and accreditation system, and how local institutions play a significant role in enhancing universities’ awareness. Anaam et al. (2009) pointed out the status of quality assurance and accreditation systems within higher education institutions in Yemen. Hence, they observe there are no formal mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation processes have been fully developed within higher education institution. This is due to the lack of university officials, academic staff and administrators about quality concept, quality standards and quality assurance system.

Within developing countries, Anaam et al. (2009) mentioned that to increase the awareness of universities’ administrators and academic staff, the ministry of higher education and scientific research in Yemen took the lead through organizing a workshop in 2002 on accreditation and quality assurance of higher education. This workshop was attended by rectors, vice-rectors and other officials from higher education institutions across Yemen. In 2006, two more training workshops were conducted for officials as well as university rectors and other staff. Farther, to establish a solid quality assurance and accreditation system Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Yemen signed a contract with British Council Project Excellence in Higher Education, from the United Kingdom (UK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

While within developed countries, a research was conducted in Netherlands to clarify the resistance of academic staff against accreditation system. It investigated what factors cause willingness and/or resistance among lecturers in universities towards external evaluation systems, especially about accreditation. They found that resistance to accreditation could be within work in term of (workload), negative emotions (stress and insecurity); the lack of
knowledge and experience (help from specialists is needed); and lack of acceptance (Kemenade, and Hardjono, 2009 p.27-42).

Kemenade and Hardjono (2009), discuss that highly educated professionals are confronted with a mandatory accreditation system who were very little involved in its design. In a series of meetings with ten respondents after the online survey, the lecturers said they prefer the old visitation system directed towards quality improvement. Thus, the paradigm of accreditation (control) doesn’t correspond with the desired paradigm of the lecturer (commitment to profession and student). It is quite possible that this also refers to other forms of accreditation and certification and its acceptance by professionals.

5. Global Factors

This paper adopted three hypotheses for the global factors might affect private universities towards applying for global accreditation, combines: GABR, GC, and SM. This section discusses GABR in terms of criteria and regulations. Then GC is discussed in terms of accredited universities competitors. Finally SM is discussed as a motivator towards global accreditation. According to Yoder (2006), global pressure drives nation-states and individual universities. Each nation-state selects and adapts with global pressures, which affect individual universities through policy of ministry of education, and university administration.

Despite the importance of the local factors effects on the awareness towards the global accreditations, the researchers preferred to concentrate on global factors and leave the local ones to be taking care by further separate study.

5.1 Global accreditation bodies regulations GABR

Worldwide accreditation is a new form of accreditation was designed to facilitate global transformation in education. The advent of globalized education due to online schooling or virtual schools, increased internationalization and the need for acceptance of education across national and regional boundaries, increased competition, and increased decentralization of education across the globe (McFarlane, 2010 p. 19-20). This section discusses the effect of GABR on HEPs about accreditation standards and regulations. There are diversities of observations and findings in prospect of the impact of global accreditation bodies within previous literatures.

Accreditation has both side impacts; negative and positive within profitability, reputation, and internal process such as: graduate quality, extra effort for academic staff and administrators, and research quality. Romero (2008) claims that accreditation standards have negative effects. He adopted his from Julian and Dankwa (2006), were they emphasized in their study that accreditation standards adhere led to reduce the universities flexibility reacting to market change. In other side Romero noticed in another literature of Ireland and Hitt (2005), that AACSB
accreditation has positive, not negative impacts in terms of strategic performance, feedback, competitive advantage, and continually improving quality.

However, foreign accreditation bodies require from HEPs specifying a big amount of money. Consequences influence on administrators or shareholder’s willingness towards spending a big amount of money. But we can’t generalize shareholders reactions on all HEPs. Shareholders have the authority to refuse or to support decisions that related to university strategy. Further it could be related to the level of shareholders and administrators experience and academic qualification background.

In addition, university’s staff has a fundamental role in accreditation process. More specifically, to meet accreditation standards, universities administration have to restructure, change the responsibilities by empower staff more tasks. Within intangible costs as mentioned before, it might effects on academic staff attitudes, create resistance or reduce the willingness towards enhancing the assessment process which effects on accreditation (assessments) result.

5.2 Global Competition GC

In the global context, increasing moves in educational competition and students mobility ratio and universities abroad offer similar programs of study, accreditation becomes prestigious among global universities. Universities start to be aware about competition situation and they are thinking about how to maintain and gain international competitive advantages.

According to Sciglimpaglia et al. (2006) accreditation is a key element to gain competitive advantage. Thus, international universities tend to gain not just local accreditation but seeking to apply for global accreditation as well which qualifies them to be in the world rank system. North America, east Europe, and Asia universities are looking to be global competitors. Hence, local governments attempts to support local HEPs to seek international accreditation. According to Hou and Chen (2011), Taiwan colleges and universities have been encouraged to seek international accreditation over years by the government to strengthen international outlook and global competitiveness of Taiwan colleges and universities. As a Consequence, Taiwan’s ministry of education internationalizes Taiwan's higher education by four polices. First, in 2002, the ministry of education launched the "Enhancing Global Competitiveness Plan" aimed at fostering international exchange activities to improve international competitiveness of institutions. Second, increasing the number of foreign students studying in Taiwan by offer scholarships and English taught courses in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs to achieve this objective. Third, the ministry of education encourages Taiwan students to study abroad by launching the "Study Abroad Loan Program" in 2004. In addition, the MOE expanded Taiwan Culture Research Program in scale with foreign academic institutes to attract attention on the academic stage globally.

In the other side another governments have an educational discrimination toward HEPs. According to Yoder (2006), in the case of Chinese universities, whether they could have international programs or not, especially whether they can host international students, is
regulated by the government. Public universities are encouraged to develop international partnerships and exchanges on their own within the regulations of the state, but private universities have prohibitions against student exchanges. Furthermore, universities are different in the degree of the frequency of having international.

According to universities’ administrators, it is very hard for private universities to get permission from the government to host international students. Particularly, university having agreements with universities in South East Asia like Malaysia, Korea and Japan; but didn’t discuss the nature of the agreements. The university has taken the initiative to develop international linkages, although the types of international programs possible at the university are limited by government policy (Yoder, 2006).

5.3 Student mobility SM

Travelling students it’s a very old phenomenon and certain regions of the world have a long experience with it. Hence, students mobility considers as a controller of competition among HIEs within these regions such as; Asia, Europe, and America.

According to the UNESCO, the number of mobile students has grown by almost 350%. Students decide to study abroad for many reasons; some want to learn more about others’ languages and cultures. Some might have no choice, but to go abroad to study in a particular field. Internationalizing the educational programs has been the priority of nearly every university worldwide. The top 6 countries, including USA, UK, France, Australia, Germany and Japan hosted around 62% of the world’s mobile students (Ratanakarn, 2011).

It is no wonder that the newly industrializing economies of the Asian and Pacific region (Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, China, Hong Kong) are major sources of foreign students, who aspire to fill the ranks of the growing professional classes (Damme, 2001).

6. Methodology

This paper attempts to investigate three factors which likely to be considered as the key determinants of Malaysian Private Universities’ Awareness MPUA towards global accreditation. These factors are: GABR, GC and SM. The adopted regression model equation shown as bellow:

\[ MPUA = B_0 + B_1 \text{GABR} + B_2 \text{GC} + B_3 \text{SM} + e \]

The relevant unit analysis is within the three private universities namely; Tenaga Nasional University (UNITEN), Multi Media University (MMU) and University Technology PETRONAS (UTP). The reason behind choosing these universities these three universities are owned by Government Linked Companies GLC. The sample we choose is based on non-probability sample method, combining purposive groups of people like; deans, deputy deans, heads of departments, heads of units and senior academic staff, who are considered as essential key in any accreditation process. By using survey tool, specifically questionnaire and in-depth interview in order to investigate the factors affect MPUA. 200 questionnaires were distributed to the targeted sample.
To investigate whether there are any significant impacts on MPUA by the three global factors; GABR, GC and SM, the regression analysis model is approached as the best method to indicate the impacts independent factors on the dependent one. The hypotheses were investigated as bellow:

H_{11} : Global Accreditation Bodies Regulations affects on Malaysian Private Universities Awareness toward applying for globalized accreditation.

H_{12} : Global Competition affects on Malaysian Private Universities Awareness toward applying for globalized accreditation.

H_{13} : Student Mobility affects on Malaysian Private Universities Awareness toward applying for globalized accreditation.

7. Expected Conclusion

The awareness of globalized accreditation represents nowadays an important element to enrich educational quality, and further to enlarge HEPs’ reputation and profitability. The three global factors that are proposed in this paper, mainly; global accreditation bodies’ regulations (GABR), global competition (GC) and student mobility (SM), are showing high impacts on MPUA. This paper clarified also the importance of senior administrators and senior academic staffs’ awareness towards the global accreditation and they interact with the new global accreditation requirements, as well as how they reciprocate the information among them about the new global regulations.

References


WEB References
