

## Globalizing Education through Academic Exchange Programs

By Mukesh Williams



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The retreat of the nation state in the West, the growing influence of the global marketplace, the rise of the knowledge economy, the dominant power of the English language as the *lingua franca* of the world, and the technological prowess of the West have forced Western academic institutions to globalize and sell their expertise for economic benefit. These are some of the reasons for Anglophonic academic institutions to globalize and also the very reasons for non-Anglophonic nations to seek their expertise. The rise of the Internet and academic information available online have further added to the salability of Western-style education. As such, academic exchange programs have emerged as one of the most effective ways to globalize Western education. Of course, there are other reasons not as pressing as the ones mentioned above.

The postwar awareness that cultural understanding and tolerance are necessary conditions to create a peaceful world has also led to the increase in academic and cultural exchange programs. As globalization advances along economic lines and developing countries acquire the economic capability to fund their students, cultural and academic exchanges between governments and between academic institutions are bound to grow. Nation states in the West are becoming weaker, and universities seek the finances of Asian, African and Middle Eastern students to survive. According to the Japanese thinker Kenichi Ohmae, nation states have become increasingly dependent on globalizing forces and have ended up being only “fictions”, forcing universities not to depend on the state for national funding. Universities are free to imagine their identities in whichever way they wish to. And they do so by turning global, seeking to sell their academic expertise globally. International exchanges have therefore become the order of the day in the West.

In his book *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping our Lives* (2000) Anthony Giddens sees globalization as a “shift in our very life circumstances. It is the way we now live.” The changed circumstances allow people to enter a new global flux. There is a new flow of people both locally and globally creating global networks of information and knowledge. In a truly Shakespearean sense the world has become a stage on which to enact the adventure of our lives. As globalization involved the rise of the market economy and the withdrawal of the nation state, universities have begun looking

for funds and students. Peter Scott, in his book *The Globalization of Higher Education* (1998), writes that universities have become both “victims” and “key agents” of globalization. The four rationales for globalization — economic, political, academic and cultural — expounded by Marijk van der Wende also fit higher education and its attempt to globalize. The rise of the Internet and English becoming the global *lingua franca* has forced universities to send students to the Anglo-American world to master its academic and linguistic standards and gain access to global markets. For the Anglo-American world the political rationale of globalization lies in fostering nation building and democratic reforms, modernizing the world and reducing conflicts. Universities globalizing through academic exchange programs see more opportunities for their citizens through education and its harmonizing effect on society.

### International Exchange Programs

International exchange programs are one of the best ways to globalize education and provide a life-changing experience to students. To send the best students to the best educational institutes helps not only the university to raise its academic standards but also the students to acquire skills they can never get at home. To move out of their comfort zone and participate in a new academic and cultural world broadens their horizons and improves their chances of getting a job. Students learn to make cross-cultural connections and open their minds to a globalized environment.

The students, faculty and the administrative staff learn skills which they would not be able to learn if they stayed at home. Students who may not normally be able to study abroad are able to enter world-renowned universities through international exchange programs. They are able to experience a culture and academic environment directly and not through a television or computer screen. They can make new friends and adjust to the demands of a new culture. After completing their courses, students become a part of international exchange alumni and truly represent a global community. In this sense and many others, studying abroad is a life-changing experience.

## Short-Term & Long-Term Academic Exchange Programs

Short-term exchange programs range from three weeks to a semester and long-term programs range from two-year dual degree programs to a full three- or four-year degree program. Short-term programs cost around US\$1,500-3,000 and deal with language proficiency, cultural understanding and homestay or community interaction. An intensive program is based around textbooks or specifically-created tutorials that introduce a student to academic scholarship and linguistic skills through intensive study. A long-term exchange program costs about \$10,000 in tuition fees for two semesters at Indian universities and \$20,000 at American universities. International students attend classes and can do a stipulated number of hours of paid part-time work on a student visa. Students must pay extra for board and lodging. There are many things required for procuring a visa, such as a letter of admission, payment of dues through international remittance and letter of accreditation to show the *bona fide* status of the university.

### Different Kinds of Academic Programs

There are different kinds of programs that universities seek to establish with each other and the conditions also differ from university to university. Some universities also provide credit transfers which can be added to the final evaluation of a student's academic performance. This system helps students not to think of exchange programs as academic tourism. Academic programs ranging from three weeks to a two-year dual degree program are quite common between English and non-English speaking countries. A three-week program exposes students to the culture and academic methodologies of foreign universities. A small group of selected students go with a professor to get intensive training, and can experience selective aspects of a foreign culture and make friends. In the three weeks they experience various aspects of an academic institution and create an unseen super highway, like birds and fish, on which they can travel whenever they want.

Invariably such a short and structured environment leaves a pleasant and positive experience and they return to the country once more either as students or as professionals. A six-month exchange for faculty staff could also prove useful in experiencing both teaching and research in a foreign academic institution with less pressure. The sense of participating in a new academic environment rejuvenates and generates new ideas that both institutions benefit from. A one-year academic exchange program greatly advances the learning skills of students, and helps them to compete globally and be successful in global and local competition for jobs. An undergraduate dual degree program provides them with two almas maters and two undergraduate degrees within a period of four years, apart from exposure to a new academic and cultural ethos.



St. Stephen's College-Soka University Global Exchange Program 2014

As economic recovery is taking time, students from Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries are finding universities in the Anglo-American world expensive. Either they prefer to stay at home and pursue higher education there or seek Asian and African destinations. Well-known colleges and universities in Asia, such as Delhi, Beijing, Hong Kong and Macau universities, have become popular destinations to study the humanities, literature, and languages. As people travel to new destinations their understanding, often shaped by negative media publicity, also changes. Their skill development and internationalization happens at a fast pace as they become familiar with a new environment and make new friends. Speaking only in English or the local vernacular helps them to develop their English skills and ability to think.

### British Council's "Going Global" 2014 Survey

In 2014 the British Council conducted an analysis of the international scholarship programs of the governments of 11 countries to encourage their citizens to go abroad and studied what their governments "hope to gain from them, and the extent to which they document the results and impact of scholarship" programs. The report was called "The rationale for sponsoring students to undertake international study: an assessment of national student mobility scholarship programmes." The British Council's "Going Global 2014" report involved non-English speaking countries, namely Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam. The survey concluded that most countries provide scholarships to masters and doctoral level students who can enhance their "knowledge base" of the country and boost "economic development, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, called STEM fields." Financial support by governments in non-STEM fields and undergraduate study is not high, though numbers of undergraduates studying abroad are many. Most students after completing their

study successfully abroad and upon their return home were given further assistance to attend prestigious universities to hone their skills. Academic discourses in these countries assumed that there was a positive relationship between “education and prosperity”, and financial investment in their upward mobility would ultimately bring “benefits” to the sponsoring nation.

Most students are keen to choose universities abroad which would not be expensive but at the same time help them to build job skills and language proficiency, and help them develop intercultural communication. Understanding a foreign culture and its ambiguities plays an important role in selecting both the country and the institution. They see their seniors exhibiting a self-assured independence and expanded circle of friends and they wish to emulate their experience. Obviously the experience of “returnees” help them to decide and fire them with a desire to travel to the recommended countries. The belief that it is a “once in a lifetime experience” to travel and study abroad makes students decide to venture out of their home country.

### Expanding Horizons

Obviously until students travel abroad to study they cannot expand their horizons quickly. A short term one-semester or three-week program helps them to keep pace with studies at home and yet acquire skills not easily found at home. A two-semester course is more challenging and meant for students who have been abroad on shorter programs and who know what to expect. They are usually brighter and more skilled than the average student and are willing to exert themselves and succeed in a foreign environment. Most Japanese students now prefer to go to universities closer to home, such as in Beijing, Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, or India, as the tuition fees for two semesters is half that of Anglo-American institutions and board and lodging much less. If students go under the exchange program umbrella even if they are self-financed, they still get to complete their graduation in four years, though they do three in their parent university.

### India-Japan Academic Partnership

Establishing a partnership in higher education has been a prime focus of the Indian and Japanese governments since 2007. Members of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) met with representatives of Indian universities in 2007 to woo the best Indian students to come to Japan, especially to its most prestigious universities where there are just a handful of Indian students. Tokyo University has been under pressure from many Western countries over its reluctance to internationalize quickly. It has now decided to open a recruiting office in New Delhi, which can be used by any other Japanese university, to persuade the best Indian students to come to Japan. This will be a daunting task

for Japan as it wants only the best students from India. Most students from elite institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), Indian Institutes of Management (IIM), or St. Stephen's College get admission to American universities with full scholarships even before they complete their graduation. It will be difficult for Japan to lure such students.

India, however, has 700 universities, 35,000 undergraduate colleges and 12,748 diploma institutions, and trains 4.4 million graduates and post-graduates every year. Over 11 million students study in its various institutions. With a modest 18% enrollment, its student population ranks just behind China and the United States and will soon surpass both. Philip G. Altbach, in an article entitled “India: The Dilemmas of Reform” (*International Briefs for Higher Education Leaders*, No. 3, 2013), points out that India has one of the “largest higher education systems in the world” but is “poorly organized, overly bureaucratic, [and] lacks direction.” But it seeks “quality, relevance and efficiency.” A lot of students who come from mediocre academic backgrounds would be keen to come to Japan and invest their time and energy in learning the Japanese language. But would Japan want such students? It must, however, be understood that universities do not excel simply by getting more students, but by recruiting capable teachers.

Now universities need to develop a comprehensive model to profit by their skills and create an educational partnership in higher education that would be viable for students and mutually profitable to the economies and demands of both nations. There should be more comparative studies amongst nations and their universities to chart the efficacy of their international exchange programs. The findings should provide a clear study of expectations, time-bound programs and comprehensive global partnerships which includes the exchange of faculty, staff and students. Such researches can be expanded and modified to include other systems of higher learning such as those dealing with technology, medicine, agriculture and aerospace. In India, IITs and polytechnic institutes can be included but the model has to be adjusted to suit their specific needs. Such studies can help promote direct investment of talent and resources and create viable exchange and global partnership programs between Japan and other countries. They can also provide knowledge of Japanese and foreign perspectives, which differ in many areas and come together in others. Attempts to translate disparate cultures and methods of discussion and to highlight areas of disagreement can be mutually beneficial to nations and the global community at large.

International exchange programs fire the imagination of upwardly mobile students and give them new enthusiasm to pursue their studies abroad. Students can be ideal representatives to bring back authentic culture and skills from another country and great marketing agents for both countries. If countries and academic organizations increase financial assistance and scholarships, they add to greater global mobility and cross-cultural relations. Students

who go abroad get a taste of new places, acquire new skills and enhance their ability to live successfully in foreign environments. They develop intercultural understanding and become a bridge between two or more cultures. Though many academic departments may not have a clear plan to promote international exchange programs, financial assistance provided by government ministries can prove to be a big incentive for inward competition.

## Japanese “Abeducation” Strategy

There has been a steady decline in the number of Japanese students going abroad to study due to financial costs and poor language skills. *The New York Times* pointed out that in 2004 about 83,000 Japanese students studied abroad. This number dropped to 60,000 in 2009, 58,060 in 2010 and 57,501 in 2011. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is keen to increase the participation of Japanese students in international education by introducing a series of educational incentives termed “Abeducation”. The strategy aims at globalizing higher education by improving the global ranking of Japanese universities and academic governance, broadening online studies and increasing student mobility.

In the Global 30 Program introduced by the MEXT, Japan aims to attract 300,000 international students to the country by 2020. Under the program, enrollment of such students has increased from 124,000 (2008) to 137,750 (2012). Abeducation also aims to increase the number of Japanese students going to study abroad in collaboration with market needs. The aim is to double the number of Japanese students going abroad to study by 2020 to 120,000 for university students and 60,000 for high school students. The MEXT has a budget of 15.3 billion yen for fiscal year 2014 to fund Japanese students studying abroad, a significant increase of 9.9 billion yen. This money would be able to fund 32,500 university and 3,600 high school students. In collaboration with the private sector in Japan, the MEXT wants the industry to hire more graduates with overseas experience under its program called “Tobitate! Ryugaku Japan” (“Go abroad! Study Overseas, Japan”). A special website, a Facebook page and seminars are some of the ways it is promoting study abroad.

## University of Tokyo & Keio University Programs

The University of Tokyo has begun two undergraduate programs for international students in English and initiated a collaborative research and teaching program with Princeton University. Keio University has been inducting foreign students under its GIGA programs. In order to help the MEXT realize its goal of 300,000 by 2020, Keio University SFC has developed the GIGA Program for its undergraduate foreign students. In an article on Keio University-SFC entitled “New Education & Fukuzawa’s Legacy at Keio SFC” in *Japan SPOTLIGHT* in 2011, I wrote:

The program brings together info-communication technology and governance to conduct 124 credit courses in English from September 2011. It aims to teach courses in technology, engineering, mathematics and sciences, buttressing them with basic knowledge of international relations, development studies, political science and language. After completing the course in four years, students will be awarded a BA degree from the Faculty of Environment and Information Studies. Students and departments at SFC are now preparing to welcome international students through various programs. The GIGA program at SFC is especially advantageous to most foreign students as all courses are being taught in English. So basically students do not need any prior knowledge of the Japanese language, a barrier that most foreign students find hard to overcome.

It is now increasingly felt in academic circles in Japan that although English is the global language, Japanese universities have not been able to instruct their students in English. As Japan globalizes, its academic institutions feel the urgency to use English as the *lingua franca* of academic instruction. As Japanese tuition fees and other costs are relatively high for students from developing countries, Keio University offers scholarships such as that with Hanoi University of Technology supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

## The Asian Initiative

Increasing economic interconnectedness, the global power of the English language, and the spread of knowledge capitalism in the world are now empowering Asian nations with knowledge-based resources, like India and China, to reap the economic advantages of academic exchange programs. A World Bank report of 1998 pointed out that technologically advanced economies have moved away from culling “resources” to being “truly knowledge based”. As the paying capacity of students becomes weaker, especially within Asia, they have shifted to Asian academic institutions to seek their fortunes. Since the Asia option is cheap and equally competent, international exchange programs within Asian universities will increase. Asian universities will buttress their brand image to cash in on imparting knowledge and skills in a globally-connected knowledge-based economy, just as multinational corporations do. Students will continue to seek educational brands but at a low cost. JS

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