Armenian Higher Education Perspectives on Internationalisation

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	As truly mentions Knight (1999), given the rising interest in and understanding of "…international dimension of higher education…", the usage of the term "internationalisation" is becoming more frequent. Knight underscores two possible reasons for the aforesaid phenomenon: first, internationalisation is becoming more crucial for higher education providers, yet second, she posits that this can be accounted for by the fact that the term internationalisation is perceived differently by different people, thus giving rise to this plethora of interpretations. Even two decades following what Knight termed as "crucial" for higher education, we can still trace "globalization" and "internationalisation" as being increasingly popular terms when studying contemporary writings on higher education. Judging from a wide range of up-to-date research and literature on internationalisation of higher education, it can be inferred that the confusion and interchangeable use of the terms is still a reality all over the world, and Armenia is no exception. Given the ongoing debates on the terms and the scope each of them encompasses, the paper draws on international and Armenian literature and official documents to critically assess whether the term "internationalisation" is perceived the same way across Armenian HEIs, and whether RA institutions have a set model for internationalisation to compare their operations against. The research outcome will be principally important as it will provide insights into the generic picture of internationalisation in general and how it is seen by Armenian HEIs. It will also provide fertile ground for building up further studies on the issue.

1. Introduction

Even two decades following what Knight termed as "crucial" for higher education, we can still trace "globalisation" and "internationalisation" as being increasingly popular terms when studying contemporary writings on higher education (Huisman and Tight, 2019). Judging from a wide range of up-to-date research and literature on internationalisation of higher education,

it can be inferred that the confusion and interchangeable use of the terms is still a reality all over the world, and Armenia is no exception.

An expert report on analysis of accredited higher education institutions carried out by the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA) in 2018 highlights that one of the main weaknesses identified in the Republic of Armenia (RA) institutions that have undergone accreditation is the criterion IX "External Relations and Internationalisation". Armenian higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to as HEIs) lack defined directions or priorities for international cooperation, and there is no common policy. Among the factors that do not contribute to the development of internationalisation are: ineffective foreign language teaching in educational institutions, lack of programmes taught in a foreign language, jointly implemented or awarded double diplomas" (ANQA, 2018). Self-evaluation reports (hereinafter referred to as SER) of Armenian HEIs also contain quite vague formulations on what internationalisation means for their institutions, mostly focusing on student and staff mobility, and international agreements heavily accentuating the number of such documents, rather than the scope of activities they stipulate.

Given the ongoing debates on the terms and the scope each of them encompasses, the paper draws on international and Armenian literature (laws, regulations, self-evaluation reports, ANQA expert reports) and official documents trying to critically assess and answer the following questions:

1. What are the main obstacles to the internationalisation of Armenian HEIs?

2. Is the term "internationalisation" perceived the same way across Armenian HEIs?

3. Do the RA institutions have set rationales driving internationalisation to compare their operations against?

The research outcome will be principally important as it will provide insights into the generic picture of internationalisation as seen by Armenian HEIs, and will provide fertile ground for building up further studies on the issue. I begin by presenting how "internationalisation" is used by different international authors, and considering the components of the term. I then critically analyse those, drawing on the rationale and definition I will be using throughout the research. This will be followed by presenting the theoretical framework I will be using when studying the internationalisation in Armenian HEIs drawing data from scrutinizing the existing literature and published articles, policies, and regulations at the state level, self-evaluation reports of RA HEIs, ANQA reports.

2. Methodology

As highlighted in the article of D. Tranfield et al. (2003) undertaking a review of the literature to provide the best evidence for any type of decision and policy-making in any field is of paramount importance (Tranfield, Denyer and Smart, 2003). As is witnessed by the authors, in the post-World-War-II period the pace of knowledge production has increased and has ever since been rising, thus resulting in a body of knowledge that is increasingly fragmented and transdisciplinary.

Given the increasing amount of research on the internationalisation of higher education published in many languages, this study focuses on articles and books published in English relevant to the field of research. Where possible peer-reviewed articles have been taken into account. Comprising a number of mostly English-language articles published on internationalisation and globalisation in higher education throughout the last 30 years, this

review tries to present a holistic picture of opinions and views on the concepts, also drawing on the one which will be considered as a framework for the current study.

3. Section 1: Internationalisation in literature

3.1. "Internationalisation" and "globalisation": Two terms to mean the same?

How should we define the phenomenon called the internationalisation of higher education institutions? What components should this concept envelop? And how different and far away is this concept from what is termed as globalisation? The answers to these questions are essential for drawing on the model and definition of internationalisation I will be using throughout the research.

In this section I will be looking at some of the most widely spread definitions around the aforesaid two concepts trying to scrutinize and challenge those and finally come up with the one I will be using when analysing the SERs of Armenian HEIs. Notwithstanding the fact that the concept of internationalisation has received quite a lot of criticism in recent decades for being mostly a commercial approach aimed at solving economic issues in the receiving country institution, this aspect of internationalisation will not be studied in this paper.

Understandings of internationalisation in higher education have benefited from iterative theorizations and a progression of influential definitions of internationalisation processes ,(Brotherhood, Hammond and Kim, 2020). As indicated by Tight (2019), "Internationalisation" and "globalisation" are among the most discussed and researched aspects of higher education in the last two decades (Kehm and Teichler, 2016), as evidenced by being the subject of several edited books (e.g. Ennew and Greenaway 2012; King, Marginson, and Naidoo 2011; Maringe and Foskett 2010; Scott 1998a; Stromquist and Monkman 2000) and special issues of journals (e.g. Magyar and Robinson-Pant 2011; Maringe and Woodfield 2013; Sellar and Gale 2011, de Wit 2011). Teichler (2016), for instance, takes the stance that internationalisation radically differs from globalisation as it promotes the respect for differences and traditions of different states and nations. The reverse is true about globalisation, which tends to efface existing differences. This section presents the main divides when defining the terms "internationalisation" and "globalisation" drawing upon studies of existing literature.

As mentioned by Knight (2004), over the last decade the definition of the term internationalisation has undergone modifications. In the late 1980s, internationalisation was commonly defined at the institutional level and in terms of a set of activities. This can be proved by the definition that has been proposed by Arum and van de Water (1992). According to them, internationalisation refers to "the multiple activities, programmes and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation" (Arum & van de Water, 1992, p. 202; cited by Knight, 2004).

When trying to answer the question of whether terms like "global university" (Levin, 2010; cited by Hawawini, 2016, p. 4), "transnational university" (Lehman 2004; cited by Hawawini, 2016, p. 4), "cosmopolitan university" (Tilghman, 2007; cited by Hawawini, 2016, p. 4) and "ecumenical university" (Sexton 2010a, 2010b; cited by Hawawini, 2016, p. 4) mean the same, G. Hawawini (Hawawini, 2016) states that the standard and widely cited definition of internationalisation is that "Internationalisation is the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of the institution." He draws upon a more recent study published by the European Parliament, where internationalisation is defined as: "… the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of postsecondary

education, to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society." (European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education, 2015). As is later explained, the "…definition reflects the increased awareness that internationalisation has to become more inclusive and less elitist by not focusing predominantly on mobility but more on the curriculum and learning outcomes." It is recommended that the 'abroad' component (mobility) become an inseparable part of the curriculum in order to ensure that internationalisation is accessible to everybody and not only "the mobile minority". The study mentions that the majority of national strategies, including in Europe, are still largely focused on mobility, short-term and/or long-term economic gains, recruitment and/or training of talented students and scholars, and international reputation and visibility. This implies that far greater efforts are still needed to incorporate these approaches into more comprehensive strategies, in which internationalisation of the curriculum and learning outcomes, as a means to enhance the quality of education and research, receive more attention (European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education, 2015, p. 283). I am inclined to believe that the key words in the definitions are "process" and "intentional" as internationalisation, besides being quite "a la mode", generating income, boosting the ranking of the HEI, is the conscious decision of the HEI, its intension and commitment. Alongside, it is also a process that should not happen only once and should not be static, as just like any other process it undergoes changes reflecting geopolitical, purely political, economic and other alterations.

A similar view, to the one expressed in the study of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education, yet worded differently, is proposed by G. Hawawini, who distinguishes between inward-looking and outward-looking dimensions of internationalisation, pointing out to the fact that all types of definitions ignore the outward-looking aspect of the concept (Hawawini, 2016). He offers a wider definition, highlighting that internationalisation is a continuous process of transformation to integrate the institution and its main stakeholders (its students and staff) into the rapidly developing global knowledge economy. According to him, internationalisation necessitates modifications in the institution's existing structure, operational modes, and philosophy for the institution to participate in and shape the global knowledge economy. It advocates for the dismantling of ivory towers and the construction of two-way bridges to other educational and research institutions throughout the world (Hawawini, 2016). Though Hawawini's definition is quite inclusive, the accent he lays on the idea of "change" seems to be so all-embracing, that it turns the whole process of internationalisation into a "process of change" which obviously is what more often will happen, but this cannot be the core aim of internationalisation.

Opinions differ not only when it comes to definitions of internationalisation but also in distinction between internationalisation and globalisation. Some authors tend to talk about *internationalisation, Europeanisation* and *globalisation* (Teichler, 2004). Though these three concepts are similar in some aspects like the tendency to be higher than closed national systems, they are also quite different when it comes to their main meaning and the use of individual terms. Thus, internationalisation is said to address an increase in border-crossing activities. Globalisation tends to blur borders and national systems which might even vanish in the future. Europeanisation is the regionally defined version of either internationalisation or globalisation (Teichler, 2004). As far as the usage of individual terms is concerned, internationalisation is often used when talking about physical mobility, academic cooperation and academic knowledge transfer. Europeanisation would frequently refer to cooperation and mobility and also cover such issues as integration, convergence of contexts, structures and substance or segmentation between regions of the world. Globalisation is often associated with competition and market steering, trans-national education, and finally with commercial

knowledge-transfer (cf. El-Khawas 1994; Lenn 1999; Middlehurst 2000; Sadlak 2001; cited by Teichler, 2004, p. 7) (Teichler, 2004).

Gacel-Ávila fuels the aforesaid distinction mostly anchored in the idea of the existence or disappearance of borders, highlighting that globalisation shows little or no respect towards existing differences and tends to promote homogeneity. She argues that, "The concept of internationalisation differs dialectically from that of globalisation because it refers to the relationship between nation-states, which promotes recognition of and respect for their own differences and traditions. By contrast, the phenomenon of globalisation does not tend to respect differences and borders, thus undermining the bases of the very same nation-states, and leading to homogenisation. In this sense, internationalisation can be understood as complementary or compensatory to globalizing tendencies, given that it allows for resistance to the latter's denationalising and homogenising effects." (Gacel-Ávila, 2005). Another author, Dodds, holds almost the same viewpoint, presenting internationalisation as a relatively "benign force" as Tight puts it (Tight, 2021). Dodds states, that "A final conceptual ambiguity concerns the relationship between 'globalisation' and 'internationalisation'. Some theorists have been happy to use the two concepts almost interchangeably. Others have described globalisation as a particularly 'intense' form of internationalisation. However, 'internationalisation' is generally seen as a less critical concept within academia than is 'globalisation'." (Dodds, 2008)

A contrasting view can be found in the article of U. Brandenburg and Hans de Wit (2015). Quite ironically (this is how the author of this paper perceives it) they state that internationalisation has become the "white knight" and "the epitome of justice and equity". They challenge the perception that internationalisation and its definition drive to peace and mutual understanding. When referring to internationalisation as being "good" and globalisation as "evil", they state, "Alas, this constructed antagonism between internationalisation and globalisation ignores the fact that activities are more related to the concept of globalisation (higher education as a tradeable commodity) are increasingly executed under the flag of internationalisation, as the increasing commercialization illustrated at the conferences of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, the Asia Pacific Association for International Education, and the European Association for International Education" (Brandenburg and De Wit, 2015). In their article titled "The End of Internationalisation", they claim that we are witnessing devaluation of internationalisation.

Altbach (2004) defines globalisation as trends in economy, technology and science which have an immediate impact on higher education (Altbach, 2004). The phenomenon, according to Altbach, is inevitable. He adds politics and culture into the "melting pot" of globalisation and states that academic systems and institutions can but accommodate these developments, yet, they cannot ignore them. "Academe is affected by, for example, patterns in the ownership of multinational publishing and internet companies, the expenditure of R&D funds worldwide, and international patterns of cultural diffusion. All of these elements, and many more, are parts of a global environment that impacts higher education in different ways." (2004). For Steger (2003) the nature of globalisation encompasses four broad dimensions those being the economic, the political, the ideological and the cultural (Steger, 2003). It is evident that those domains are closely interconnected, since whatever happens in economy is dictated by political decisions, which are embedded in ideology. Yet, at the same time, it can be argued that economy, ideology and politics are part of culture (Maringe, Felix, 2012). For Altback internationalisation includes specific policies and programmes undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments or institutions to cope with or exploit globalisation. This approach of having something "unescapable" in the form of globalisation and a "straitjacket" in the form of internationalisation in order to "tame" the omnipresent and omnipotent force can be witnessed in the works of many authors. "While the

forces of globalisation cannot be held completely at bay, it is not inevitable that countries or institutions will necessarily be overwhelmed by them or that the terms of the encounter must be dictated from afar. Internationalisation accommodates a significant degree of autonomy and initiative" (Knight 1997; Scott 1998; De Wit 2002; cited by Altback, 2004). It is evident, that Altback also views globalisation as an omnipotent force that internationalisation can cope with by exercising different creative ways.

Beerkens, when discussing the meaning of both terms, puts forward four main interpretations of globalisation, highlighting that: 'the main disagreement is between the notion of global as a geographical concept on one hand and as an authority-related, cultural, and institutional concept on the other' (Beerkens, 2003). Dodds (2008), in his turn, highlights some additional meanings of the term globalisation: as flows of capital, people, information, and culture (associated with King), as marketisation (associated with Altbach), and as ideology (Dodds, 2008).

In summary, it can be stated that notwithstanding all existing definitions and approaches to globalisation and internationalisation, what seems clear is that in general globalisation is portrayed as a set of forces; oftentimes external, and internationalisation is regarded as the approach/response of policy-makers to underlying trends and opportunities. As Maringe puts it (2012, p.1), "These two concepts ate two sides of the same coin yet are not synonymous with each other, although they perhaps share many common characteristics." (Maringe, Felix, 2012)

In this paper, the definition suggested by Knight (2003) will be used as a working definition of internationalisation. And hence, "Internationalisation is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education." The usage of the word process implies that internationalisation is an ongoing process. Moreover, it is often viewed as a tri-part model of education-input, process, output. Knight has not used the words input and output on purpose, as if done so, the terms would become less generic. When referring to the "triad" of international, intercultural, or global dimensions, "International is used in the sense of relationships between and among nations, cultures, or countries. But we know that internationalisation is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exists within countries, communities, and institutions, and so intercultural is used to address the aspects of internationalisation at home. Finally, global, a very controversial and value-laden term these days, is included to provide a sense of worldwide scope. These three terms complement each other and together give richness both in breadth and depth to the process of internationalisation." (Knight, 2004) *Integration* is used to denote that international and intercultural dimensions are embedded into policies and programmes and that they remain central and not marginal elements. *Purpose* "refers to the overall role and objectives that postsecondary education has for a country/region or, more specifically, the mission or mandate of an individual institution." *Function* usually includes teaching/training, research and scholarly activities, and service to society at large. *Delivery* is a narrower term as Knight puts it, as it refers to the offering of courses or programs either domestically or in other countries. (Knight, 2004)

3.2. Rationales as a framework for internationalisation

We have already discussed in the previous subsection that internationalisation is not a new phenomenon, yet until recently no effort has been exercised to categorize the rationales behind university internationalisation. This growing interest in the underlying reasons and frameworks has been underway only since the 1990s (Cattaneo, Meoli and Paleari, 2015).

The reasons why HEIs undertake particular internationalisation activities and strategies differ (Knight 2004; cited by Maringe et al, 2013). The list of the rationales is not static per se as it

is fuelled by data coming from different studies. De Wit (2002), for instance, when updating the existing list, highlights that the academic rationale of *profile* and *status* seems to be gaining more importance in higher education systems worldwide. This shift is thought to have been influenced by increasing competition for international rankings (Wit, 2002).

Knight (2004), however, indicates that there is a clear distinction between *national* and *institutional* rationales. Suggesting a total of 4 rationales for internationalisation (social/cultural, political, economic, academic), she highlights that at the national level human resource development, strategic alliances, commercial trade, nation building, and social/cultural development are the important rationales driving internationalisation. As far as the *institutional* level is concerned, she mentions international branding and profile, income generation, student and staff development, strategic alliances, and knowledge production as motors for the internationalisation (Knight, 2004)

Table 1.

Rationales Driving Internationalisation

Rationales	Existing-National and Institutional Level Combines
Social/cultural	National cultural identity
	Intercultural understanding
	Citizenship development
	Social and community development
Political	Foreign policy
	National security
	Technical assistance
	Peace and mutual understanding
	National identity
	Regional identity
Economic	Economic growth and competitiveness
	Labour market
	Financial incentives
Academic	International dimension to research and teaching
	Extension of academic horizon
	Institution building
	Profile and status
	Enhancement of quality
	International academic standards
Level	**Of Emerging Importance— Level National and Institutional Levels Separated**
National	Human resources development
	Strategic alliances
	Commercial trade
	Nation building
	Social/cultural development
Institutional	International branding and profile
	Income generation
	Student and staff development
	Strategic alliances
	Knowledge production

Based on a wide range of literature reviews and undertaken research, Maringe et al. (see, for example, Altbach 1998; de Wit 1999; Knight 2004; Scott 2000; Wang 2002, 2007; cited by F. Maringe et al, 2013) have elaborated the below given table where 6 rationales and their corresponding meanings are drawn upon and explained. (Maringe, F., Foskett and Woodfield, 2013).

Table 2.

Mapping of rationales of internationalisation

Rationale	Meaning and focus
Economic	Based on ambitions of becoming economically competitive, independent and increasing institutional financial revenue streams
Political	Based on the idea of creating world understanding, eminence and leadership, peace and development
Sociocultural	Based on the ambition to forge greater understanding between nations and cultures and enriching the learning experience
Technological	Development of a heightened responsiveness to current technological developments and becoming leaders in this field. Exploitation of technology to create access, social justice and equity in the sector
Educational	Internationalisation as an educational quality marker. Motives around the creation of learning and scholarship communities. Development of partnerships for interrogating institutional and cross-institutional issues and forging progress and development links
Pedagogical	Based on the idea of internationalising the university curriculum, in terms of content, teaching principles and approaches, assessment, support for learning and the student experience

(Maringe, F., Foskett and Woodfield, 2013).

Seeber et al. have singled out a total of nine rationales for internationalisation. Alongside, they also investigate the relationship of the aforesaid rationales with: (1) the environments, i.e. the global and national arenas in which a HEI is located, (2) the organizational level, i.e. the HEI's goals, and (3) the intra-organizational level, i.e. the role played by different internal actors in internationalisation processes (Seeber et al., 2016)

Table 3.

Rationales for internationalisation

Increased international awareness of/deeper engagement with global issues by students
Internationalisation is expected to contribute to the training of opened-minded and dynamic citizens able to work in foreign and culturally diverse environments, to deal with an increasingly diverse and internationally mobile society and labour market Altbach and Knight (2007), Denson and Zhang (2010), Knight and de Wit (1995). This is based on the increasing need to contribute to evolving global labour markets and, therefore, to foster international and comparative learning Maringe (2010).
Enhanced internationalisation of the curriculum
Internationalisation enables the HEI to adjust curricula to international standards, and to develop joint curricula with external partners thus offering national students greater competencies and opportunities, as well as resulting in being more attractive to foreign students Luijten-Lub (2007).
Improved quality of teaching and learning
Internationalisation is perceived to have beneficial spill-over on the quality of the educational services, by spurring the conformity to international quality levels Taylor (2004 a, b), easing the development of joint programs, through the involvement of foreign professors, and the organization of extra-curricular activities (such as international and intercultural campus events) Van der Wende (2007), Hudson (2016).
Strengthened institutional research and knowledge production capacity
The growing complexity and costs associated with doing research implies that a single country or institution can hardly possess sufficient resources and capabilities. Internationalisation is thus essential to complement resources, skills and knowledge to stand at the frontiers in science, discover innovative solutions and respond to present global challenges, such as health, climate change and food supply Fielden (2006), Knight (2004).
Enhanced prestige/profile for the institution
Internationalisation can be a valid strategy to increase the HEI's prestige in the eyes of national and international peers and stakeholders, and legitimate themselves in the local environment Chan and Dimmock (2008), De Wit (2002), Knight (2004). As a matter of fact, most scientifically reputed universities are quite often highly internationalised as well Horn et al. (2007), Seeber et al. (2014), which

suggests that highly internationalised HEIs tend to be perceived as being high quality as well. Further, the prestige rationale has become more important since the introduction of international rankings, as international outlook is often included among the performance indicators Saisana et al. (2011).

Opportunity to benchmark/compare institutional performance within the context of international good practice

Universities internationalise to understand their position in relation to international practices and performances and consequently improve through comparisons with their competitors and peers Knight (2004).

Enhanced international cooperation and capacity building

Internationalisation is beneficial to institutional cooperation, which is essential to strengthen their activities beyond the constraints of local resources Knight and de Wit (1995). In this respect, the development of international strategic alliances aims to create synergies, capitalize on collective efforts and investments Knight (2007)

Increased international networking by faculty and researchers

Internationalisation may foster researchers' networks beyond national borders, resulting in positive effects such as reduced academic parochialism and more central positions in research networks de Wit (2002), Knight and de Wit (1995)

Increased/diversified revenue generation

Internationalisation can increase the number of full-fee paying foreign students and partnerships with enterprise, hence increasing revenues and contributing to the diversification of resources Luijten-Lub (2007), Knight and de Wit (1995).

(Seeber et al., 2016)

The rationales suggested by Knight (2014) are quite detailed yet at the same time rather embracing. This does not restrict the inclusion of some new ideas and concepts into rationales at the same time setting the right direction. For instance, when comparing the sociocultural rationale in the tables suggested by Knight (2014) and Maringe (2010), we can see that the one offered by Maringe is too broad and too generic and it does not take into consideration the national and institutional levels which can thoroughly change the whole perception. Maringe and the team have indeed undertaken an extensive research based on a wide range of literature review (2013), yet, given that different levels have not been singled out, at times it is difficult to place this or that operation of the HEI under the corresponding rationale. For instance, the Educational Rationale, "… Development of partnerships for interrogating institutional and cross-institutional issues and forging progress and development links", can be part of the Political Rationale both at institutional and national levels. On the other hand, the levels/factors (1. the environments, i.e. the global and national arenas in which a HEI is located, 2. the organizational level, i.e. the HEI's goals, and 3. the intra-organizational level, i.e. the role played by different internal actors in internationalisation processes) highlighted by Seeber and others (2016) can very nicely fit into the national and institutional levels as highlighted by Knight (2014). Hence, the rationales suggested by Knight will be used as a framework for this paper.

4. Section 2: Internationalisation in the landscape of RA HEIs

4.1. Brief introduction to the Armenian landscape of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

The Armenian landscape of HEIs is quite diverse. The RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport (MESCS) distinguishes between the below-given categories of HEIs:

- Public HEIs

- Interstate HEIs

- HEIs defined as institutions established with state participation

- Private HEIs which have been awarded accreditation

- Private HEIs

Following 2020-2021 data, there are a total of 20 public HEIs with 11 branches in different regions of the RA, 2 interstate Universities, 2 HEIs with state participation, 5 private HEIs which have been awarded accreditation with 1 branch, 18 private HEIs (ESCS).

Higher education (HE) is considered to be one of the most important areas for the development of the Armenian economy, and hence it is included in the priorities of the Government of RA. RA Constitution stipulates the rights of Armenian citizens to higher education. Article 39 states that "All citizens shall have the right to free higher and other vocational education in state higher and other vocational educational institutions based on competition as prescribed by the law". The regulatory framework of RA higher education comprises two main laws; the Law on Education (1999) and the Law on Higher and Postgraduate Vocational Education (2004). However, in parallel with the development and reforms in the Armenian HE system, both laws have been amended several times. In addition to the aforementioned laws, individual areas of HE are regulated by a range of sub-legislative acts. Among other areas are: quality assurance, national qualifications framework, the system of accumulation and transfer of academic credits, student mobility, etc. Once in 5 years, the Government of RA develops a five-year education development program setting the objectives for education development, priority directions, current challenges, and ways to overcome them (EU, 2017).

4.2. RA state policies and strategies on internationalisation.

The concept of "internationalisation" is non-existent in the RA Law on Education (1999). Article 5 of the said Law stipulates the "integration in the international educational system" when specifying the principles of state policy in the field of education. Article 51 of Chapter 7 stipulates some instances of international cooperation, highlighting the need of carrying those out in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Armenia (RA Law on Education).

The RA Law on Higher and Postgraduate Vocational Education (2005) moves a step forward and in Article 4 stipulates that promoting international student mobility is among the principles of state policy in the field of higher and postgraduate professional education.

Article 5 of the draft law (at the time of writing this paper) of the Republic of Armenia "On Higher Education and Science", when discussing the main directions and functions of HEIs, stipulates that "Internationalisation of higher education and research activities" shall be one of the main directions of the university's activities.

The MESCS has been part of a three-year national project called "Boosting Armenian Universities Internationalisation Strategy & Marketing" under the priority of Governance Reform. The specific objectives of the project were:

- Development of national policy framework and tools for facilitating internationalisation practices in Armenian HE.

- Creation of a National Platform and online tools for mapping and benchmarking internationalisation processes in Higher Education.

- Build capacities of ICO staff of HEIs, MoES and social partners on strategic management, marketing and cultural challenges as well as the implementation of credit mobility, ensuring a holistic approach to internationalisation management issues.

- Create or enhance ICO resources and service-oriented centres at the Armenian HEIs, including the development of strategic & marketing plans and tools (ESCS).

Following official information (ERASMUS+) the project ended back in 2019, yet, no national policy framework could be found at the time of writing this paper. Moreover, the official webpage of the project was not functioning (http://boost.aspu.am/).

The only organization where internationalisation at institutional level is present is the National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA). ANQA is an independent organization founded by RA government in 2008. ANQA implements quality assurance processes through institutional and programme accreditation in preliminary, vocational and higher educational institutions. Their goal is to support tertiary level institutions to create a quality culture in accordance with the legislation of RA (ANQA). Article 14 of the draft Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Higher Education and Science" stipulates that "In case of non-application for institutional accreditation within the established period or rejection of institutional accreditation twice in a row, the license for the implementation of educational programmes of the university is terminated, and the license is recognized as invalid."

4.3. Internationalisation as perceived by the ANQA and Armenian HEIs

Given the fact that the legal field regulating the sphere of higher education had almost no mention on internationalisation at the time of writing this paper, a deliberate decision has been made to first analyse how internationalisation is perceived and defined by the ANQA, having an essential empirical observation that this perception is shared by all HEIs who have undergone accreditation. For doing so, all published expert reports on institutional accreditation have been scrutinised.

The ANQA carries out institutional accreditation based on 10 criteria. Criterion IX is called "External Relations and Internationalisation". It is further subdivided into 4 standards, those being:

9.1 The TLI promotes its external relations through sound policies and procedures aimed at creating an environment conducive to experience exchange and enhancement as well as internationalisation.

9.2 The institution's external relations infrastructure ensures regulated process.

9.3 The TLI promotes fruitful and effective collaboration with local and international counterparts.

9.4 The TLI ensures internal stakeholders' appropriate level of a foreign language to enhance productivity of internationalisation (ANQA Manual).

In the Comparative Analysis on System Problems in Armenian HEI's, the ANQA highlights that one of the main weaknesses of Armenian HEIs is internationalisation (out of 10 criteria used for accreditation). The HEIs do not have any defined directions or priorities of international cooperation and there is no policy as such. The level of participation of students and teaching staff in exchange programmes is low. The number of international and local cooperation agreements is small. The insufficient level of English is a serious obstacle in the process of internationalisation. The English level of the teaching staff is quite low. Among the factors that do not contribute to the development of internationalisation are: ineffective foreign language teaching in educational institutions, lack of programmes taught in a foreign language, jointly implemented or double diploma awarding academic programmes (ANQA, 2018).

Based on the analyses of 32 expert reports on institutional accreditation, the ANQA perception on internationalisation has been drawn, comparing it against the definition of Knight used in this paper.

The said analysis revealed that the ANQA underlines the importance of having elaborated strategy/policies, procedures on internationalisation/promoting external relations. As is evidenced in the paper on "Comparative Analysis on System Problems in Armenian HEI's" many universities in Armenia do not seem to have any clear vision on internationalisation and in some cases, there are no documents guiding internationalisation processes. Moreover, at state level the existing laws, by-laws and regulations (except for the draft law on "On Higher Education and Science") do not stipulate any directions the HEIs could follow to guide their international operations. Hence, the attention the ANQA's attaches to existing documents is in reality a response to the fact that neither at state, nor at institutional level are there any directions, priorities or rationales the universities could follow. Since accreditation standards and criteria are identical for all institutions, the same phenomenon can be observed in all expert reports which also hold information taken from the self-evaluation reports of the HEIs. The HEIs who have elaborated strategic plans, regulations or procedures on internationalisation, consider that they comply with the requirements of standard 9.1 (see above). In almost all cases these documents merely mention the goals that need to be achieved without fully analysing what the rationale behind each goal is and what outcomes these goals can engender (e.g. "Fostering internationalisation processes of research activities of the Center, integration into European Higher Education Area, expanding international networking, fostering educational and scientific cooperation with European universities and international organizations of higher education as well as promoting participation of students and teaching staff in international exchange programmes (ANQA, 2017)).

The existence of a separate infrastructure (department) in charge of internationalisation (for ensuring regulated processes, undertaking actions, etc.) is another positive factor that is often mentioned in expert reports. Obviously, the same is underlined by HEIs. Quite often reference is made to HEI' budget allocations to internationalisation to see how concrete operations targeting internationalisation are carried out.

Cooperation with foreign universities and other organizations is also an important factor against which ANQA expert evaluations on Criteria IX are carried out. International cooperation is not understood as a mere number of signed agreements and MOUs, but rather quantitative and qualitative indicators that could prove the effectiveness of signed bilateral documents. The HEIs follow the same path when describing their international experience. All of them provide information about the number of signed agreements, MOUs, cooperation and indicate how many students, teachers and staff have participated in exchange programmes. In the majority of cases there is no mention as to how the information, knowledge, skills, competences gained throughout different exchange programmes have been integrated and

shared. In some rare cases HEIs make reference to workshops and seminars that are organized in order to ensure the information is shared with internal stakeholders. Some expert reports hold information on how international experiences are being introduced and implemented in the local context, yet, such cases are but rare.

The importance of environment conducive to internationalisation, academic and research exchange programmes, teacher and student mobility, the level of foreign language acquisition as one of the main drivers of internationalisation are also repeatedly highlighted in expert reports. Though the ANQA does not offer any uniform definition on internationalisation, when comparing criterion 9 and analyses reflected in expert reports against the definition offered by Knight, we can ascertain that at this stage internationalisation is mostly limited to elaborated documents and quantitative data on student and staff mobility. Nevertheless, certain elements highlighted in Knight's definition can be projected to the ANQA criterion 9 as well. In particular, the ANQA views internationalisation as a process, asking the HEIs to reflect back and to analyse all their operations against the PDCA cycle. In contrast, *international, intercultural or global dimensions* have not been referred to in any of the reports under analysis nor did the rationales and the way they may alter purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education.

5. Conclusion

We have seen that while the term "internationalisation" has been used for a long time, it has undergone and still undergoes modifications driven by the natural evolution of the term, the emergence of other terms, political, economic, and other factors. While in the late 1980s, internationalisation was commonly defined at the institutional level only, currently it envelops both institutional and national levels, bringing about intercultural, international, and global dimensions.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are a lot of definitions of the term in literature, there are some key words that are being repeated in the most widespread ones. The key words I have highlighted in the definitions are "process" and "intentional" as internationalisation, besides being quite fashionable, generating income, and boosting the ranking of the HEI, is the conscious decision of the institution, its intention and commitment. Internationalisation is a process and just like any other process, it undergoes changes reflecting geopolitical, purely political, economic and other alterations.

Having a definition and a framework against which I would be conducting my analysis was one of the objectives I have been pursuing while reading and trying to scrutinise the versions suggested by different authors and out of many definitions, the one elaborated by Knight (2004) has been chosen as a working definition of internationalisation I have been referring to in this paper. Her definition implies that internationalisation is an ongoing process which is often viewed as a tri-part model of education-input, process, output. She also touches upon intercultural, international and global dimensions underlining the importance of integrating those into policies and programmes to ensure they remain central and not marginal elements. Finally, she mentions the *purpose, function* and *delivery* to indicate that those dimensions should not only be an inseparable part of all policies and documents, but need to be reflected in the overall role and objectives the HEI has for a country/region (purpose), teaching/training, research and scholarly activities, and service to the society at large (function), and courses and academic programmes (delivery). The thing that we trace in all expert reports is the presence or absence of corresponding procedures and regulations which are meant to set the right path for internationalisation, yet, what we cannot see is their impact on purpose, function and delivery.

Initially, when answering the first core question (What are the main obstacles to the internationalisation of Armenian HEIs?), factors mentioned as not contributing to internationalisation in the "Comparative Analysis on System Problems in Armenian HEI's" (ANQA, 2018) seemed to be the answer. Yet, further analysis evidenced that besides ineffective foreign language teaching, lack of programmes taught in a foreign language, jointly implemented/double diploma awarding academic programmes, there are far more serious issues at state and institutional levels. After the scrutiny of ANQA expert reports, it became evident that many universities in Armenia do not seem to have any clear vision on internationalisation and in some cases, there are no documents guiding internationalisation processes. The analysis of the RA legal framework revealed that at the state level the existing laws, by-laws and regulations (except for the draft law on "On Higher Education and Science") do not stipulate any directions or priorities the HEIs could follow to guide their international operations. Hence, having no clear definition of what internationalisation is and not having any priorities and/or directions at the state level, the only document the HEIs adhere to is the ANQA manual where criterion IX refers to external relations and internationalisation. It is more than natural that all HEIs that have undergone institutional accreditation perceive internationalisation the same way-the way criterion IX stipulates. Though much talked about, internationalisation is non-existent on paper, it is not considered a priority at the state level, it does not have any definition that could be used to compare HEIs' operations against, consequently, internationalisation has almost no chance to develop, and even if it does, its development will be quite chaotic and arbitrary.

Based on what has been discussed above, it is clear that all HEIs perceive internationalisation almost the same way because the only official document that exists is the ANQA manual. There is not enough evidence to ascertain that HEIs are not undertaking any other operations that could go beyond what criterion IX requires, yet, the analyses of existing published documents revealed an identical picture.

Another finding was that Armenian HEIs do not seem to have set rationales driving internationalisation to compare their operations against. This might seem obvious in the light of HEIs and the state not having any directions and priorities as far as internationalisation is concerned. In almost all cases internationalisation documents that have been elaborated by HEIs merely mention the goals that need to be achieved without fully analysing the rationale behind each goal and what outcomes the realisation of these goals can engender. For example, when referring to "Integration into European Higher Education Area" as one of the goals of internationalisation, which a lot of HEIs mention, it is impossible to trace the rationale/s behind this goal because nothing is stated either explicitly or implicitly. It is obvious that the rationales can vary here, from *social/cultural* at both institutional and national levels aiming at boosting national cultural identity, intercultural understanding to *economic*-becoming competitive, *academic*-extending academic horizons, building status, etc. However, it seems that HEIs have not meticulously contemplated over the rationales that can drive internationalisation and act as a beacon for their operations. After all, the *purpose, functioning, and delivery*, in the sense mentioned by Knight, are dependent on the rationale that the HEI opts for.

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