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Internationalization Process of Polish Universities. Perspective on Entering Central Asia Region: Evidence from Kazakhstan

Abstract

The article focuses on the process of internationalization of higher education with a special focus on student mobility. Poland in near future will be facing unfavorable demographic changes, which will also affect higher education. Growing competition between countries in attracting new students from abroad is one of the challenges for Poland. One of the most promising markets from the perspective of Poland is Kazakhstan. This country is developing dynamically, investing in human resources which translates into increasing mobility of students. In 2017 less the 700 student from Kazakhstan were studying in Poland, the numbers indicates that there is a lot of space to grow in this area. The authors conducted a survey among Kazakh students regarding their preferences as to the choice of studies abroad. The results indicate the most interesting destinations for students from Kazakhstan and what they expect from studying abroad.

Key words:

Poland, Kazakhstan, Mobility, Internationalization, Higher education

Introduction

The internationalization of higher education is becoming an objective process in the world market formation of educational services. The main reasons for the internationalization of universities are maintaining reputation and competitiveness with other educational institutions, attracting professors and students, attracting funding, and external influential factors (e.g. the state and accreditation agencies). In the European Higher Education Area, internationalization is a key element in achieving the objectives of the Bologna Declaration, the Lisbon Strategy and the Turin Convention that lead to the creation of a competitive knowledge-based society. Modern trends appeared because of expanding education beyond national boundaries by creating new types of educational services providers, education technologies, programs and qualifications.

The shift of focus from the global competition of universities to the competition of educational programs, and the new competitive educational model based on close cooperation with business and industry are becoming key aspects of higher education development. In the educational market, there is a growing need to develop and implement double-degree and joint programs with foreign universities in order to increase the capitalization of the graduates.

1. Literature Review

The internationalization of higher education is one of the greatest challenges facing Polish universities. Global competition and negative demographic changes will in the coming years increasingly affect the functioning of these institutions, forcing them to take decisive actions aimed at attracting new students.

Internationalization in the 90s was understood as [Popowska 2016, p. 134] international education, today also such terms as: transnational education, education without borders, and cross-border education are used. J. Knight [2015, p. 2] defines internationalization as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. The internationalization process can be considered in macroeconomic as well as microeconomic categories [Pluta-Olearnik 2012, p. 42]. J. Rymarczyk defines internationalization as the process of moving from national development through international to global [1996, pp. 18–19].

A. Szromnik [2014, pp. 38–39] proposes that the development of higher education institutions, in the context of access to foreign resources, should be considered

from ten levels: Intellectual, marketing, territorial, infrastructural, didactic, scientific, organizational, HR, functional and research. Each of these areas allows analysis, diagnosis and quantification [Wierzbicki 2012]. This lets to determine the directions of development and the dynamics of changes taking place at universities.

Ranking of Perspektywy in the assessment of internationalization draws attention to: study programs in a foreign language, studying in a foreign language, foreign students, academic teachers from abroad, student exchange (in / out), multiculturalism of the student community. Economic, educational, political, cultural, family and career factors influence the students' desire to study abroad. Students noted several factors that motivate them to participate in study abroad programs. According to research, the reasons vary from professional to personal, including:

• the desire to use study abroad as a stepping stone to obtain work in the international market and build a career [Emanoil 1999],

• the opportunity to gain internship programs experience of hosting university, which can promote further international career [Mazzarol & Soutar 2002],

• study in another country and university, and create an international network [Park 2009].

Studies also showed that there are tangible barriers that force students to conclude that it will be difficult for them to study abroad. Significant barriers include language differences, finance, time, work commitments, family obligations, and the lack of connection between studying abroad and obtaining professional knowledge and skills [Marcum 2001]. Researchers T. Henthorne, M. Miller and T. Hudson noted that the cost of programs and language barriers are important factors for students to make decisions about studying abroad [Henthorne, Miller & Hudson 2001].

Although international student mobility has always been one of the key aspects of the internationalization of higher education, it has changed both in scope and in the variety of approaches. The number of students receiving higher education outside their own country increased from 0.8 million in 1975 to 3.7 million in 2009 [OECD 2018], and by 2020 this figure would increase to 4.5 million [UNESCO 2016]. Since the government and other institutions are increasingly admit the benefits of attracting international students, more and more participants appear in the international educational market.

According to D. Zweig, Ch. Chen and S. Rosen, students, who are going to study abroad, believe that it will add the value to them as professionals [Zweig, Changgui & Rosen 2004]. As the studies of M. Kelo, U. Teichler and B. Waechter [2006] showed, students expect that foreign education will give them great opportunities for career growth and the advantages in finding work on their return to their country of origin. B. Waechter and F. Maiworm [2005] found that personal development and lack of opportunities in their home country encourage students to study abroad.

Macready and Tucker identified the following key motivations for studying abroad: learning cultural heritage, living abroad experience, willingness to travel, the best academic offers, and professional advancement. D. Kavakas [2013] and P. Emanoil [1999] supplemented a number of factors that affect the academic mobility of students: geographic proximity, climate and environmental conditions, safety status, advice from relatives and friends, opportunities for immigration, scholarships, and living and transportation costs.

T. Mazzarol and G. Soutar [2002] noted that students go through three stages in the decision-making process; the first step is to stay in the country or go abroad. The important role here plays push factors in their home country. When the decision to go abroad is made, the second step is to choose the country of study. At this stage, various pull factors affect the attractiveness of one country more than other. Pull factors, such as university profile and proposed courses or programs, also, play crucial role at the final stage of decision-making on choosing a university. The authors concluded that the most important factors influencing the students' choice are the desire to improve their life experience and level of well-being; the level of security of the country; prestige of the country; costs that will need to be spent on education; convenience in issuing a visa and the opportunity to find a good job after graduation.

H. Bernunger and G. Mattsson [2008], as a result of their research, found that the primary motivating factors for short-term studies in foreign universities are personal development, improvement of language skills, and the acquisition of an international component in the field of their specialization. The model and questionnaire developed by H. Bernunger and G. Mattsson [2008] were adapted and used in this study.

From the perspective of Poland, the possibilities of attracting foreign students are used to a very limited extent [Sagan 2011, pp. 378–340], which indicates a large untapped potential for growth in this area. The largest internal and external barriers in acquiring foreign students are [Sagan 2011]: Personnel and linguistic barrier (mainly among administration employees), financial, university bureaucracy and internal conflicts, lack of attractive incentive systems for lecturers on English-language courses, lack of government scholarship system for foreigners, problems with nostrification of diplomas from selected countries, visa problems created by Polish diplomatic missions, unfavorable public procurement legislation, high costs of promotion abroad. On the other hand, sources of competitive advantage should be sought in [Sagan 2011]: a very high level of higher education in Poland, a high level of competences of Polish professors, an attractive and developed Erasmus program.

Poland is currently below the average in terms of internationalization of studies with the index of 4.88% [Study in Poland 2017] with the OECD average of 8.38% [OECD 2018]. Over a half of foreign students in Poland are Ukrainians [Study in Poland 2017], the second largest group are students from Belarus.

The latest Study in Poland report [Study in Poland 2017] underlines the importance of Kazakhstan as one of the most promising country in the near future. At present, 674 students from this country are studying in Poland, which places Kazakhstan in the 16th position and constitutes 1% of foreign students in Poland. Kazakhs usually study in Poland in the Mazowieckie Voivodship (210 people), Podkarpackie (154) and Małopolskie (81). The profile of the most-chosen universities indicates that the Kazakhs are the most interested in studies in management and economics (University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, Vistula Academy of Finance and Business in Warsaw, Lazarski University in Warsaw).

The study conducted in Kazakhstan allowed the authors to specify the key elements from the point of view of the Kazakhs taken into account when making decisions about studying abroad.

2. Methodology

The introduction of the Bologna process was an incentive for the international mobility of students in Kazakhstan. Currently, outgoing academic mobility is the main component of the strategy of internationalization in Kazakhstan. In 2015, 48,875 students studied in foreign universities [UNESCO 2016]. The main host countries are the Russian Federation (35106), UK (1725), and the USA (1884). International student mobility extensively depends on external financing such as Erasmus Mundus, Ernst Mach, Mitsubishi, etc., students' self-funding, and financing of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

International academic mobility program is an important component of internationalization and allow preparing competitive students for the global labor market and improving the institutional reputation and competitiveness of the university. As international practice shows, employers now give priority to graduates who have an international experience. In 2004, more than 2 million students participated in academic mobility programs and according to researchers' forecasts, by 2025, the number will reach 8 million.

Despite the fact that there is an extensive literature on the motivations of students in decision-making process to study abroad, there is a practically no research in Kazakhstan about how Kazakhstan students make choices and what factors influence them. Whereas, identification of key determinants is important for the development and implementation of higher education policies, which are aimed at increasing and improving academic mobility of students.

In the questionnaire, which tests importance of factors that motivate students to study abroad in academic mobility program and select the study destination, partic-

ipated 103 respondents: 55 participants of academic mobility program and 48 who wish to participate in academic mobility program. The questionnaire was divided into several sections: general information on the respondent, the source of funding (actual/desired), main countries for studying, the important decision making factors to study abroad (8 factors) and to choose a country of study (11 factors).

Table 1. General information about respondents

Category		%
Gender	Male	24.31
	Female	76.69
Age	18–19	35.92
	20–21	58.25
	22+	5.83
Degree level	Bachelor	96.11
	Master	3.89
Sources of funding (AM members only)	Funded by Ministry of Education and Science of RK	25.45
	Funded by Erasmus+ programmes	5.45
	Funded by international agencies	3.63
	Self- funding	58.20
	Others	7.27
* 92% of Non- AM students would prefer financing through various grant programs. The remaining 8% at their own expenses		

Source: own elaboration.

The basic age category of students refers to 20–21 years and it is 58.25%, almost 77% of all respondents are women, and 96.11% are studying at the bachelor degree. As it can be seen from Table 1, students who have already participated in academic mobility programs indicated as sources of funding: the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan – 25.45%, Erasmus + program – 5.45%, grant programs of international agencies (Mitsubishi, Ernst Mach, etc.) – 3.63%,, self-funding – 58.20%. The majority of students (92%), who have not yet participated in academic mobility programs, but would like to study in a foreign university for one semester or academic year, noted that they prefer financing from state and international grant funds.

Table 2. Selection of regions and countries to study

Regions where respondents studied or would prefer to study		
Region	% of students studied abroad	% of wishing to study abroad
Western and Central Europe (Germany, Netherlands, France, etc.)	12.72	54.16
Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic)	54.57	14.60
South-East Asia (South Korea, Japan, China)	12.72	12.50
Russian Federation	10.9	14.58
USA	9.09	4.16

Source: own elaboration.

More than half of the students who have already taken part in academic mobility programs chose the countries of Eastern Europe (54.57%), equal numbers scored for Western/Central Europe (12.72) and South-East Asia (12.72%), The Russian Federation (10.9%) and the United States (9.09%). Students who wish or plan to study abroad within academic mobility program determined the following ranking of regions and countries: Western/Central Europe is a priority (54.16%), Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation scored almost equal (14.60% and 14.58%), and South-East Asia (12.50%) and the USA (4.16%) were less preferable.

3. Reliability analysis

During the analysis of factors, Cronbach alpha value was calculated to check the internal consistency and reliability of the scale. The database consists of 19 elements, which divided into two sections. The alpha coefficient for the first section, which includes 8 elements, was a value of 0.8446, and for the second section of 11 elements, a value was 0.7457. It should be noted that a reliability coefficient, which is "acceptable" for social science research, is 0.70 and above. In this regard, both sections meet this requirement; therefore, have a relatively high level of consistency and reliability.

4. Application functionality

Table 3 presents the results of calculations by using the Student's one-sample test method for revealing the decision-making factors to study abroad and to choose the destination of study. Respondents assessed the importance of each factor on the following scale: 1– very important; 2 – quite important; 3 – quite unimportant; 4 – very unimportant. Based on the dimension of the scale, the value "3" was taken as the test value for the Student's test.

Table 3. Motivation factors

Code	Factor	Mean	Standard deviation
Section 1: The importance of factors in the decision to study abroad			
x1	It was important to improve my language skills	1.776699	1.0472376
x2	It was important to experience another culture	1.941748	1.0555664
x3	It was important to experience another student life in another country	2.048544	0.9739614
x4	It was important for future work possibilities in my country	1.825243	0.9844595
x5	It was an important for personal experience	1.485437	0.9888008
x6	It was important to get an international impression in my studies	1.757282	1.0142709
x7	It was important with recommendation from other students	3.087379 *	0.8414133
x8	It was important with recommendations from teachers	2.990291 *	0.9234966
Section 2: Importance of factors in choosing the country and university			
x9	It was important with the climate as a deciding factor	2.912621 *	0.9193646
x10	It was important with recommendations from family and relatives	2.912621 *	0.8867964
x11	It was important with recommendations from friends	3.038835	0.8847546
x12	It was important with the culture in the country	2.495146	1.0182047
x13	It was an important with closeness to my country	3.223301	0.9993335

x14	It was important with prior experiences in the country	3.320388	1.0118280
x15	It was important that family/friends lived in that country	3.378641	0.9913004
x16	It was important with low transport cost to the country	3.038835 *	1.0748673
x17	It was important with low expenses in the country	2.650485	1.1607024
x18	It was important with high education level in the country	1.922330	1.0449629
x19	It was important with a low crime rate in the country	2.213592	0.9037014
* Factors that do not have statistically significant differences from the test value of 3			

Source: own elaboration.

It can be seen from the table that the two factors of the first section (x7 and x8) and the three factors from the second section (x9, x10, x16) do not have statistically significant differences from the test value of 3 (p > .05). These factors, as well as factors with a mean less than 3, are considered as the least important for respondents.

According to the results of the first section of Table 3, there were identified five the most important factors that motivate students to study in foreign universities (Table 4). The selection is based on values of a mean. All factors have p < .05 according to the Student's test. The most important factor in the scale is the factor with the lowest mean.

Table 4. The key factors of decision to study abroad

Code	Factor	Mean	Standard deviation
x5	It was an important for personal experience	1.485437	0.9888008
x6	It was important to get an international impression in my studies	1.757282	1.0142709
x1	It was important to improve my language skills	1.776699	1.0472376
x4	It was important for future work possibilities in my country	1.825243	0.9844595
x2	It was important to experience another culture	1.941748	1.0555664

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents identified the five most important factors out of the eight proposed factors. "It was an important for personal experience" was the most important motivating factor with a mean of 1.48. The next most important factor was "It was important to get an international impression in my studies" with a mean of 1.75. In the third position was "It was important to improve my language skills" with a mean of 1.77. "It was important for future work possibilities in my country" also proved to be one of the most important factors with a mean of 1.82. "It was important to experience another culture" closes the five most important factors. The mean was 1.94.

Picture 1. Importance factors mean

MEAN FACTOR

It was an important personal experience	1,48
It was important to get an international impression in my studies	1,75
It was important to improve my language skills	1,77
It was important for future work possibilities in my country	1,82
It was important to experience another culture	1,94
It was important to experience another student life in another country	2,04
It was important with recommendations from teachers	2,99
It was important with recommendation from other students	3,08

Source: own elaboration.

The evident representation of results of the first part of table 3 is shown on the diagram 1. Here we see that the least important factors according to respondents are "It was important according to the recommendation of teachers" (average 2.99) and "It was important according to the recommendation of other students" (average 3.08).

According to the results of the second section of Table 3, four most important factors can be identified in choosing the destination of study (Table 5). The selection is based on values of a mean. All factors have $p < .05$ according to the Student's test. The most important factor in the scale is the factor with the lowest mean.
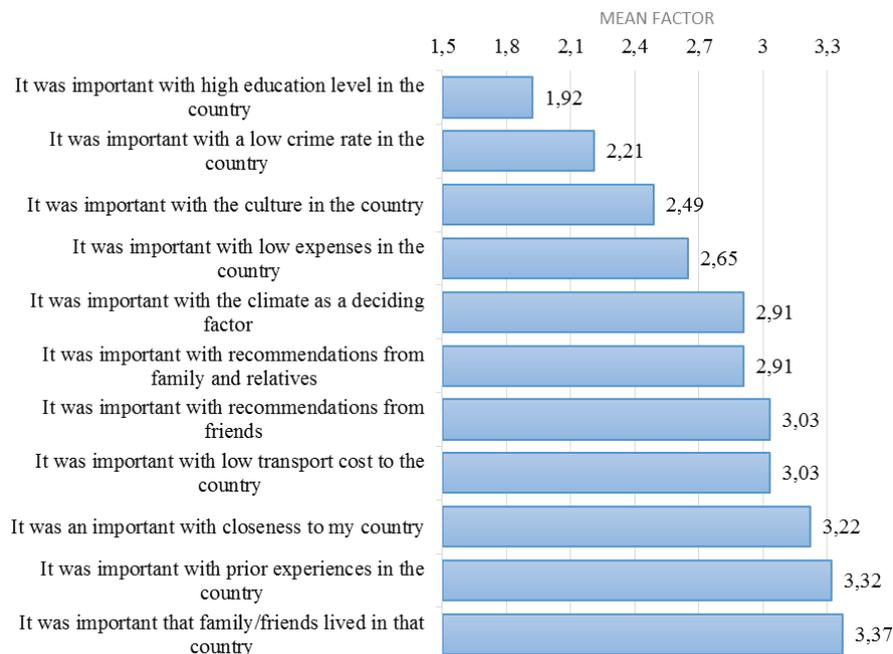
Table 5. The key factors in choosing the country of study

Code	Factor	Mean	Standard deviation
x18	It was important with high education level in the country	1.922330	1.0449629
x19	It was important with a low crime rate in the country	2.213592	0.9037014
x12	It was important with the culture in the country	2.495146	1.0182047
x17	It was important with low expenses in the country	2.650485	1.1607024

Source: own elaboration.

In the part "Importance of factors in choosing the country of study", the respondents assessed 11 motivating factors. "It was important with high education level in the country" was the most important factor in choosing a country with a mean of 1.92. The second important factor was the "It was important with a low crime rate in the country" with a mean of 2.21. Next comes the "It was important with the culture in the country" with a mean of 2.49. The last significant factor in choosing a country was "It was important with low expenses in the country" with a mean of 2.65.

Picture 2. Importance of factors in choosing the country of study

MEAN FACTOR

It was important with high education level in the country	1,92
It was important with a low crime rate in the country	2,21
It was important with the culture in the country	2,49
It was important with low expenses in the country	2,65
It was important with the climate as a deciding factor	2,91
It was important with recommendations from family and relatives	2,91
It was important with recommendations from friends	3,03
It was important with low transport cost to the country	3,03
It was an important with closeness to my country	3,22
It was important with prior experiences in the country	3,32
It was important that family/friends lived in that country	3,37

Source: own elaboration.

The evident representation of results of the second part of table 3 is shown on diagram 2. The least important factors according to respondents are: "It was important with closeness to my country" (3.22), "It was important with prior experiences in the country" (3.32) and "It was important that family/friends lived in that country" (3.37).

Conclusion

Academic mobility of students is an important component of the internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan and it appears in governmental programs and concepts. Result-oriented teaching and academic mobility are aimed at developing the competencies that learners would need for adapting to the changing labor market. Academic mobility program promotes the integration of Kazakhstan's education in the international educational area, improvement of the quality of education, comparability and recognition of Kazakhstan's educational programs with the programs

of foreign universities, and enhancement the internationalization of higher and post-graduate education. From the point of view of interviewed students, the key factors that motivate students to study in foreign universities within the academic mobility program are personal experience and development, international experience in the specialty/future profession, improvement of language skills, job opportunities in their country after return, and experience of living in another culture. The results are correlated with the findings of P. Emanoil [1999], J. Marcum [2001], T. Mazzarol and G. Soutar [2002], M. Kelo, U. Teichler and B. Waechter [2006] and B. Rivza and U. Teichler [2007], T. Henthorne, M. Miller and T. Hudson [2001], and others. In this study, the issue studied by B. Waechter and F. Maiworm [2005] about the lack of opportunities in the home country as a motivating factor for studying abroad was not considered. In this regard, it is advisable to conduct research and analysis in Kazakhstani universities on quality assurance within the framework of the main directions of internationalization: internationalization abroad and internationalization at home.

Financing the academic mobility program in Kazakhstan is carried out by the expense of the state budget, extra-budgetary funds of the university, grants of international organizations, as well as personal funding of students. From the results of this study, it can be seen that students who took part in academic mobility programs mainly used their own money (58.20%) and the state budget allocated by the Ministry of Education and Science (25.45%). At the same time, 92% of students who are only planning to take part in academic mobility programs have indicated that it is preferable to get funding from state and international grant agencies. The cost that will need to be spent on studying abroad is one of the key matters. Experience shows that many students cannot afford studying through academic mobility program in foreign universities because of the low solvency of the family. The issue of barriers and limitations in the implementation of international academic mobility is also relevant in studying internationalization trends of the country.

In the regards of choosing a country of study, more than half of the students, who have already participated in academic mobility programs, indicated the countries of Eastern Europe, and equal numbers of students selected Western/Central Europe and South-East Asia. The least number of students picked the Russian Federation (10.9%) and the United States (9.09%). Most students, who only plan to study abroad as part of academic mobility program, preferred Western and Central Europe. Countries in Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia and the Russian Federation scored almost the same percentage, while the US was less preferable country. Respondents identified four important factors while choosing a country for academic mobility program: high level of education in the country, low crime rate in the country, the country's culture, and low expenses within

the country. As academic literature also reflects, economic, educational, political, cultural, family and career factors influence the students, desire to study abroad.

The results, which were obtained within this empirical study, can be taken into account in the development and implementation of academic mobility programs at the national and institutional levels.

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