

## Internationalisation Strategy of Ibrahim Cecen University of Agri (ICUA)

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**Abstract:** Ibrahim Cecen University of Agri (ICUA) wishes to strengthen its position as a leading and visible international university. The ambition is that global collaboration becomes a natural element of all the university's core activities. A strong international involvement is fundamental to realizing the university's goals for research, talent development, education, consultancy services and knowledge transfer for the future strategy to 2020. Globalization has clearly made its mark on research and university education. International mobility among researchers and students has increased significantly in recent decades. Similarly, a growing part of research takes place in networks that extend across national borders. Close interaction with a wide range of players internationally has therefore become a basic requirement for exchanging talent, developing new knowledge and maintaining high quality standards. ICUA has done many Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreements with leading universities in the world in 2010 to 2013. In this study, it is aimed to give some information about internationalization process of Ibrahim Cecen University of Agri (ICUA) that has been trying to realize exchanging staff and students successfully with other universities in the world by modifying its teaching programs to provide graduates an advantage and to achieve high quality education standards.

**Key words:** Agri Ibrahim Cecen University, ICUA, internationalization strategy, HEI, MOU

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### INTRODUCTION

It is known that universities and knowledge have become very important in the contemporary world (Altbach, 2003; Knight, 2002; Larsen *et al.*, 2002). Current labour market requires graduate students with foreign language and intercultural skills being able to interact in a global environment. Therefore, institutions have been placing more importance on internationalization with global knowledge and technology so far. There is also an interconnected network and global awareness to view job opportunities globally. Internationalization with different levels of higher education (Harari, 1978) requires many researches (Drilhon, 1993) and includes different dimensions (Lowbeer, 1978; Harari, 1989; Hughes, 1995).

In definition of internationalization there are different perspectives and various approaches (Knight and de Wit, 1995) such as international contributions on curricula, literature in foreign languages. Moreover, teacher and student exchanges (Svensson, 1994) the multiple activities programs and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchanges and technical cooperation (Arum and van Dewater, 1992), mobility of academic personnel (Welch, 1997; Welch and Denman, 1997) and foreign language education (Kokhuis, 1992) have been considered main factors for internationalization. In general, it is expressed as academic

and extracurricular activities, i.e., development and innovation of curricular; scholar, exchange of student and faculty; area studies; technological assistance; intercultural training; education of international students and initiatives of joint researches (Knight and de Wit, 1995).

Internationalization is defined as the whole range of processes by which Higher Education Institutes (HEI) becomes less national and more internationally oriented (The European Association of International Education) (EAIE, 1992). Many globally known organizations with different specific goals and natures have been promoting internationalization with many kinds of programs and policies (Anni, 1993; Milhouse, 1994; Qiang, 2003). In Turkey, universities have offered different opportunities to its students and environments since they differ from many aspects such as size, quality, characteristics of students and staff, branches, etc. (Kale, 2013). Universities in Western part of Turkey are generally established in the past and therefore older and bigger than the others found in the other parts of Turkey. There are some foundation universities also. Usually, the new ones have been struggling with the lack of sources but ICUA has been getting support from a private foundation namely IC foundation in addition to the governmental support. That support gives an advantage to compete with Western universities with respect to privileges

offered to members of the university. But, it is still important to account for the size and the geographic location of the universities in terms of internationalization process and strategies.

Upward mobility often requires a capacity to catch opportunities at a certain place and time as well as determination to overcome various social, economic and political obstacles (Oleksiyenko, 2013). There are some studies related to globalization of universities and dissemination programs of internationalization strategies of universities in Europe and in the world (Yang, 2002; Altbach, 2004; Anonymous, 2013). To the knowledge, there has been no publications in this field therefore, it will be first report about an Eastern University of Turkey.

#### **INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY OF IBRAHIM CECEN UNIVERSITY OF AGRİ**

In Turkey, The Higher Education Law with 2547 number is declared to bind all of the universities to The Council of Higher Education (UAK) in 1981. According to this law, universities composed of different educational units such as colleges that give education for 4-7 years (i.e., College of Pharmacy, College of Engineering, etc.) Vocational Schools of Higher Education that give career training for 2 years and institutes that give postgraduate education (for instance, Institute of Natural Sciences, Institute of Social Science, etc.). Number of institutions have been increased relatively in recent years. It was 27 in 1982, became 76 in 2002 and 168 in 2012 (Kale, 2013) showing 221% increase in last decade. As a principal there is minimum one university in each city in Turkey. Therefore, as a small city with 100,000 inhabitants, Agri has one university namely Ibrahim Cecen University of Agri.

Internationalization of HEI has been getting much more attention nowadays than the past with the improved teaching techniques, common languages and many job opportunities in different countries. Usually, scholars were choosing the European Universities with the aim of national development. Moreover, some programs have aimed to promote mutual understanding and encourage collaboration among higher education institutions. Fulbright Scholars in the United States and the Erasmus Mundus in Europe has been playing important roles in global internationalization. Special attention has been given on student mobility, international research collaboration and education with the rapid globalization.

Internationalization strategy of ICUA is based on course; research; learning and teaching and institutional development plans. It includes implementation, internationalization of research strategy,

internationalization of the curriculum and studying foreign languages. ICUA has standard Erasmus Charter and realized a lot of ERASMUS staff and student exchanges with many universities in the European Union and candidate countries. In Erasmus activities, ICUA encourages its staff members being active in planning and decision making at all levels of the university including faculty, centre and divisional operational plans.

On the other hand, knowing and living different cultures mutually through its teaching, research and service functions with the ultimate aim of achieving mutual understanding across cultural borders means internationalization for an education organization or university. It can be meaning a dialogue with those in other countries for a national higher education system. As it is mentioned above internationalization is often associated with cultural integration and conflicts in non-Western countries. In Turkey, for example, respecting cultural values have been added. Sometimes internationalization referred many of the processes named as “westernization,” “modernization” and “liberalization” (Gerbert, 1993; Lincicome, 1993).

As in the past, university co-operation still play a leading role in dissemination of progressive ideas of European universities (Merkurev and Troyan, 1994). Today, many non-European universities have also been continuously increasing the international content of their programs (Houwers, 1994). For this reason, Ibrahim Cecen University of Agri (ICUA) has done >20 memorandums of understanding agreements (Fig. 1). However, assuming its researchers are volunteer to make joint projects with the other scientists or research at the other universities is not always true. There should be a center for that people for sharing ideas and coming together. It will provide much more meaningful in realizing the mean purpose.

ICUA try to give an impression to the people that “the best that has been thought and said” in a society. It aims to be a respected and among the leading ones in the world and to train researchers and educators that are the best in their fields and equipped with free thinking and power of scientific inquiry and thinking.

The university as forward looking university, realizes that it faces new demands and strives to meet the challenges of 21st century by offering a top class education, developing research opportunities, enhancing its material-technical base and resources. The university’s main directions, principles, values and reforms are carried out dynamically in a systematic, coordinated manner and have placed ICUA on a development path leading towards a common world and European higher education area.



Fig. 1: Erasmus and MOU agreements of ICUA considering countries in the world

By making the university more demand-driven for both the domestic and international markets and better understanding how intellectual property can be utilized as an income source (e.g., the commercialization of research activities and publications) the university hopes to create new products and services that will contribute to its sustainability and independence.

The development of internationally recognized accreditation standards and MSc and certification programs, ICUA hopes to attract more international students as well as to allow Turkish students to benefit from increased opportunities to study abroad. This also speaks to the development of Western-thinking leaders in the country as well as the wider region by making the university more demand-driven for both the domestic and international markets and with the development of internationally recognized accreditation standards and programs.

Relocation of people is getting higher year by year by advanced transportation and communication techniques in a globalizing world. As a result of continuous migration, in terms of employability, getting an opportunity to receive a standardized quality education has been carrying special importance for all of the people in all countries. Therefore, it has been aimed to provide a standardized education and internationalized university in countries by preparing much more compatible and high quality course programs and realizing some of the structural changing studies in order to ensure the quality of the education.

It is advised that European Union countries to adjust new degree structures and other kinds of harmonization that are part of the Bologna and related initiatives. In 2001, Turkey joined the Bologna process and the transformation of the Turkish educational space began. Major novelties were introduced in ICUA. In 2010, the university started to change education accreditation system and trying to successfully pass the institutional accreditation for the period of 2007 to 2012. New specialties have established at the university and new rules for administrative and academic registration was enforced.

Officially introduced new instruction structure at the university was transferring evaluation scores from classical credit system to ECTS to integrate in the European educational environment. However, there are many factors that effects the internationalization process of the ICUA such as governmental strategies, geographical site, age, repetition of the professors, laws, support for projects, internships, etc. For example for supporting joint research projects, Turkey established a national research council which has mutual agreements with many countries. By this way, the government promotes or forces researches to find international partners and submit their projects via this organization.

The YOK law supports institutes to make independent agreements or mutual exchange of programs even education faculties and vocational schools which have fixed courses to be given strictly. The YOK

also forces all of the universities to involve Bologna process which is mainly based on the internationalization of the universities with intensive language knowledge. In this case the lingua franca is English. Countries that use English gets much more benefit since there is increasingly widespread use of that language for science and scholarship. This may shows how globalization is affecting higher education in developing countries. It seems that these countries will experience the bulk of higher education expansion in the coming decades.

If one assumes that every university has the same background and teaching opportunity with the same level of knowledge and experience of the professors and staffs then it could be so easy to make mutual activities. Therefore, it seems impossible in reality but one should find the best matched program or classes for a successful exchanging process. Sometimes, students get problems with the calculation of their GPA, since the local students get higher credits from the same class than the other students who take an exchange program such as Erasmus.

Another restriction is that there is an obligatory to take two consecutive high-stakes exams (Passing exam for higher education, YGS and student replacement exam, LYS) carried out countrywide to replace students into higher education programs. Usually, high scored students prefer the universities located in the central and Western parts of Turkey. Since, the education quality differs in the some parts of Turkey forcing students with different backgrounds to take the same exam coordinated from the same center (testing, selection and replacement center, OSYM) is against of justice of education. Since, a lot of good students go to developed universities other students have to go to other low ranked universities but in same subjects. This lowers the general quality of Turkish education and does not allow to get same opportunities for the students for their future careers. Therefore, it can be said that there is an indirectly inequality in getting of educational opportunities. There should be some other selective criteria such as money or distance from the center or grades in certain classes, etc. This exam is second main problem for the independence of universities. Therefore, ICUA involved Magna Charta Observatory to increase its quality indirectly by comparing its substructure and sharing knowledge and experience with the other distinguished universities in the world.

#### **OTHER FACTORS FOR THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF ICUA**

ICUA has pre-meetings in some US universities about dual and joint programs 2 years in Turkey and

2 years in US. However, the main obstacles are the background of students and language barrier. The other one is differences in class credits and names.

ICUA aims to join international networks by getting memberships, however it is rather young university therefore its members are also have a lot of researches to do for this purpose. Therefore, it is aimed to convince and promote them for intensive collaboration and maximum participation.

**Ethics and values:** Since, famous Turkish philosophers Mevlana Jalaladdini Rumi and Ebu Said Ebu'l Hayr say "Come, come again, whoever you are come again. No matter you are an infidel, fire-worshipper or pagan, yet again! the tekke is not a place of despair. So, come again! Even if you have broken your vow a thousand times" The ICUA does not discriminate against any individual or group of individuals on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, national origin, race and religion.

**Teaching and researching language:** Turkish is the official language of Turkey. Beyond Turkish boundaries, the language is widely spread in Azerbaijan, Iran, Germany, Turkmenistan, Armenia and Georgia as well as the other countries all over the World. It is important for foreign residents of Turkey to study the Turkish Language to communicate and integrate into the Turkish society. Sometimes they need to know Turkish for their professional activities. Regarding the students, Turkish is the researching language at Agri Ibrahim Cecen University that means it is necessary for the students to know the Turkish language to achieve their academic goals. There is a language center that provides language education to students. The instructors of the Turkish Second Language (TSL) center are also proficient in English and Russian languages.

**Research centers:** Agri Ibrahim Cecen University is getting to become one of the first leading scientific research center with its very modern research laboratories and good researchers in Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey. The research in this direction are still in progress. In the research process the priority was given to the examination of methodological and practical aspects of the international subjects such as biotechnology and biochemistry.

**International conferences:** ICUA is the main host of scholarly international conferences related Noah's Ark in Eastern Anatolia. The following are notable: International Symposia of Noah's Ark and Mount Agri I and II (in 2010, 2011 and 2013).

## CONCLUSION

Since, its establishment in 2008 in Agri city, ICUA try to play a role in international activities. ICUA with teaching and learning; research and research training; partnerships; management and resources will continue for internationalization for developing knowledge and talent and influencing the international development in research and higher education.

ICUA's international commitment for the period 2013 to 2020 will be centered on four main objectives mentioned earlier. These will be supported by a number of core activities that characterize the university's international involvement. The university will also focus on to make effective collaboration by bringing eminent professors for giving lectures and conferences.

IC University aims to be a top quality institution for research and teaching for this purpose it will try to provide a research environment for getting international research outputs and to establish strategic linkages in research and scholarship with international research institutions. It also try to provide a medium for its students with international perspectives and to research in an international, multicultural and multilingual environment.

Being an experienced university, ICUA will try to attract international undergraduate, postgraduate and higher degree research students to study at Agri. It also aims to provide a high-quality education and a satisfying campus and study experience to its students. It aims to develop a dynamic and vibrant research culture to attract top-quality staff from around the world. By this way, many international collaborations and exchanges of staff in research and scholarship will be realized.

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