An Emerging Market Perspective on the Internationalisation of Business Schools

This reflection on internationalisation is provided by **Wafah El Garah, Piet Naude** and **Michael Osbaldeston** who have gained significant experience in emerging market contexts, strengthened by participating in the EFMD Deans Across Frontiers (EDAF) programme which deliberately focuses on developing countries in, for example, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Many schools from these regions are committed to internationalisation but face both barriers and opportunities not always appreciated by those from economies where resources and infrastructure are more readily available

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Recent developments in internationalisation

The internationalisation of higher education has achieved greater prominence in recent years due to a combination of factors:

The issues faced by employers are increasingly global. Companies and NGOs are being progressively organised internationally with a global focus. Students have increasingly been taking an international perspective when deciding where to study, often deliberately choosing to go abroad to widen their learning experience. Emerging market schools often operate in contexts where global issues such as climate change, geopolitics, poverty, inequality and radicalisation are present in concentrated form.

In business schools, strategies for internationalisation have generally focused on structural issues such as international research and publications, student and faculty diversity, international partners and networks, and international corporate connections.

Yet there is a strong argument for rebalancing attention towards processes that are more outcome-related, with greater focus on the development of international relevance and impact.

So, what is meant by 'internationalisation' in a management education context, and how best can it be assessed, is an increasingly complex question.

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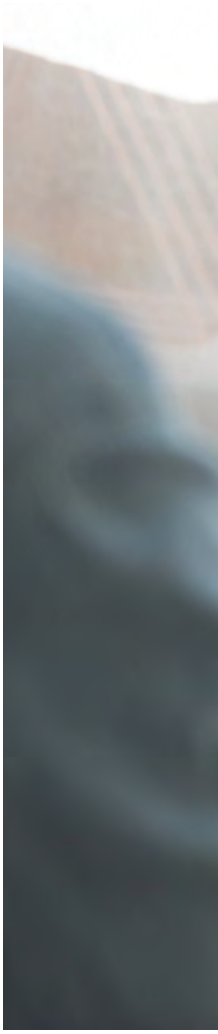


What is understood by "internationalisation"?

Internationalisation has generally been perceived as being reflected in the mix of nationalities among students and faculty, together with advisory board members, partner schools and recruiting organisations.

While a school's cultural diversity, measured by nationality, is important, a much deeper understanding of internationalisation results from an assessment of how a school has adapted its education and research to an increasingly global managerial world; how a school responds to unexpected international shocks such as the global pandemic; and how a school has incorporated recent developments in information technology (see below) into its learning methodologies.

Deeper evidence of the degree of internationalisation can be reflected in research that explores international challenges, education that embraces an international curriculum and is accessible across the world, and exposure that encourages international mobility and employment. The growth of joint programmes, the dissemination of online learning, the establishment of satellite campuses, increasing institutional collaboration and partnerships, and the emergence of cross-cultural mergers and other forms of restructuring are all part of this complex and multi-faceted concept.

The EFMD guiding model for internationalisation

To assist academic leaders in understanding the degree of internationalisation of a business school, the EFMD Quality Services has developed a model which encourages thinking beyond nationality mix, incorporates recognition of the local (emerging market) context and is founded on a deep respect for diversity, including cultural and education system differences. It integrates a wide range of international measures, grouped into four broad categories:

- **Policy** issues influencing the development of the whole school (e.g., strategy, reputation, governance)
- **Content** aspects of the learning and development process (e.g., curriculum, learning resources, research and development, skills and competencies, languages)
- **Context** issues resulting from the background experience of the various stakeholders (e.g., faculty, visiting professors, students, exchanges, alumni, professional staff)
- Elements of the wider **Network** in which the school participates (e.g., executive education, clients, recruiters, partners, alliances, satellite campuses, joint programmes, franchising)

This model has been adopted by EFMD Quality Services to underpin the international element of all its quality assessment (EQUIS and EFMD Programme Accreditation) and development systems (EFMD Deans Across Frontiers).

While this more inclusive interpretation of internationalisation has been generally welcomed by member schools across the world, there continue to be pressures to further refine standards, incorporate new areas of assessment and anticipate developments in global management education; none more so than in the context of the current turbulent business environment and the rapid development of schools in emerging economies.

Opportunities that technology brings for schools in emerging markets

Information technology has proven to be a driving force for internationalisation. It is an effective tool to support and coordinate international activities, especially for schools in emerging markets.

Business schools across the globe are leveraging information technology to enhance their internationalisation through reaching out to students, faculty, and researchers internationally. Although the integration of IT in higher education in developing countries has been slow, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated its adoption especially in teaching and learning. The forced shift to remote learning by the pandemic has presented several challenges to schools in these countries, such as inadequate IT infrastructure. It has also provided opportunities for new connections and digital partnerships both locally and internationally.

Schools in developing countries are increasingly using IT to overcome several obstacles that hinder internationalisation activities, such as the cost of student and faculty mobility, political conditions, health circumstances associated with visa restriction, and cultural and social issues, among others.

IT can enable internationalisation in different practical ways. For instance, virtual exchanges are becoming an acceptable teaching and learning practice where students of different backgrounds and geographic locations connect through information technology platforms and work together on academic projects supervised by their professors. Through virtual exchanges, learners can gain meaningful intercultural experience as well as learn how to use digital technology efficiently, which are skills required for employment in the 21st century.

Virtual visiting scholars is a recent trend in internationalisation that many schools are adopting today which aims at strengthening international collaborative research. Through international virtual visiting scholar programmes, professors from different universities can collaborate on research projects across borders using online collaboration tools without the need for costly and time-consuming travel.

Schools are increasingly open to creating these positions to help bring international expertise to their campuses, expand their resources, and further enrich their educational programmes. Additionally, schools in developed countries, as part of their social responsibility, can share their online faculty development workshops with online visiting faculty, hence contributing to their growth.

Virtual international guest speakers are also another recent initiative that schools are adopting to enhance the international learning dimension within the classroom. Inviting international speakers virtually helps deal with several difficulties inherent in arranging face-to-face guest speakers such as travel distance, availability and cost.

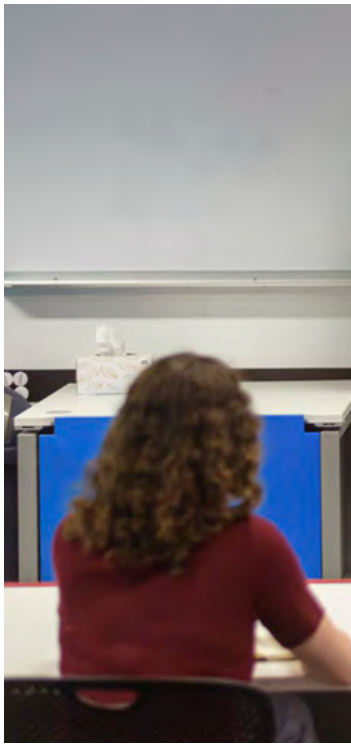
In today's global society, all business schools must prioritise developing global citizens. It is evident that the advances in information technology and digitalization provide a real opportunity for schools in emerging markets to connect, share resources across borders, and develop digital partnerships and ecosystems.

Ethical questions related to internationalisation in emerging markets

Internationalisation of management education for schools from emerging economies raises both “internal” and “external” ethical questions.

From an “internal” perspective, there is a moral obligation on schools to provide students with a good local grounding, but also – as stated above - with vital global perspectives on business and leadership.

This requires more than a well-sounding vision to be “globally recognised” or “internationally competitive.” Very specific objectives need to be set that are both taking contextual realities (visa restrictions, currency volatility, geographical isolation, social instability) into account and also striving to creatively transcend “barriers” to an international learning experience, such as the examples from technology cited above.



The latter may include investment in appropriate virtual learning technologies; short-term assignments for visiting international faculty; programme content that relishes context but also reorients globally; affordable exchange opportunities coupled with internationalisation-at-home experiences; and transnational research cooperation in the form of publications, position papers, and conferences.

Too few schools from the Global South realise that their apparent "difference" to developed economy schools is in fact an opportunity. Attractive combinations of academic, corporate and cultural activities lead to increasing interest from incoming student groups who are required to spend a portion of their studies in non-national territories.

From an "external" perspective, one may note three ethical issues:

First, the requirement for *contextual fairness* in assessing the internationalisation of emerging market schools. Schools – like for example those in the EFMD Deans Across Frontiers (EDAF) programme – often operate under trying geographical, financial, social, and (sometimes) political conditions. These often rule out any "easy" idea of activities normally associated with internationalisation. It makes no sense to judge a school negatively due to low incoming/outgoing student numbers if visa policies lie outside its control. As a case in point, incoming student groups from developed countries recently cancelled a visit to South Africa due to a limited Ebola outbreak in West Africa, about 4,500km away.

Second, the *social responsibility* of well-resourced schools from developed countries to deliberately pursue cooperation with schools from emerging economies. This co-operation should fulfil the norms of reciprocal respect for autonomy (especially in a power-asymmetry) in determining the agenda, and the norm of mutual benefit via increased interaction.

Third, the requirement to resist and *overcome a colonial mind-set* along the discriminatory axes of centre/periphery, universal/local, normative/deviation, intellectually superior/inferior and so forth. Working, for example, with EDAF schools, and operating ourselves for many years under challenging circumstances, we have persistently seen the error of under-estimation of local wisdom and the joy of fulfilling high internationalisation ambitions.

Enhancing multi-lateral management education

There are concerning signs of unilateral and nationalistic populism around the world, undermining the belief that multilateral relations can bring benefits to all. By enhancing the vision for truly inclusive internationalisation, business schools in fact contribute to a major social good on a global scale.

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