

# Higher Education In Search Of Competitive Advantage: Globalization, Technology And E-Learning

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**Abstract:** Technology, globalization, and electronic learning make the business of higher education more complicated and competitive each day. Innovation and change in global university instruction require inventive technology in response to a knowledge economy where students are engaged in rapid innovative technology adaptation required by a constantly changing world. In contrast, instruction has historically been contained on campus, using face-to-face instruction. But, as the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century unfolds, significant changes are being undertaken in global universities to accommodate the needs of more students, different students, and challenged students by using e-learning. Global university instruction has failed to keep up with the latest in technological and pedagogical innovations during the past twenty years. As a result transformative learning technology has forced most of the global higher education community to examine if not implement technological applications for instruction and delivery, often categorized as e-learning.

**Keywords:** Global higher education, globalization, technology, accountability, change, e-learning

## I. INTRODUCTION

Global higher education institutions recognize that innovation in teaching and learning is absolutely essential, but not without numerous challenges (Altbach & Reisburg, 2018). Today's students have grown up with technology in their everyday lives--computers, cell phones, online games, and social media. Therefore, they expect some technology in everything they do and often combine full-time employment with part-time study: the so-called earner-learner students (Bourn, 2018). Ethical, educational, and financial considerations demand quality instruction for students who will be employable in increasingly competitive global markets (Lemoine, Jenkins, & Richardson, 2017). New organizational structures and systems to promote quality learning are needed to assist in moving from face-to-face to online instruction and promoting e-learning (Natarajan, 2015). Managing changes in moving university instruction to an online environment have proven more difficult than planned. The global university e-learning instruction system must meet new standards of quality coupled with concerns for access demanded by an increasingly technological and diverse society (Macleod & Kefallonitis, 2017).

## II. GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Changes in global university instruction are being propelled by two economic forces: 1. marketing to potential new students, and 2. competition to recruit, admit and retain those same students (Bagley & Portnoi, 2014). Market forces are driving much of global higher education. Calls for

accountability and adaptability are predominating around the globe. The admission, retention and preparation of students have become the catch words of the past five years (Di Stasio, Bol, & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, chaos and ambiguity) describes the chaotic, turbulent, and rapidly changing new normal world including global higher education environments (Jongbloed, 2015). Global higher education leaders and administrators are buffeted by this rapidly changing environment and are constantly searching for methods and means for obtaining competitive advantage for their institutions (Kallio, Kaillio, & Grossi). In this new normal, global higher education institutions are operated by cities, religions, states, countries, non-profit organizations, for-profit businesses, universities, and all in the virtual world (Kemp, 2016). As a result, global higher education today faces its greatest combinations of challenges: economic uncertainty, accountability and globalization overlaid by emerging technologies that are daunting to learn and intimidating to administer (McCowan, 2018). Global higher education institutions are also attempting to develop the capacity to adapt and modify to the new models of knowledge and information, teaching and learning (Marginson, 2017). Global universities confront the need to incorporate emerging technologies that enable the technically savvy student body to interact in new ways with content and with each other (Qureshi & Nair, 2015). This confluence of factors requires the academy to rethink and restructure, both what and how they teach and research, and

how they intersect with society (Oberoi, Halsall, Snowden, & Caldwell, 2018).

### III. IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION

Standards of quality for global higher education are demanded by an increasingly technological and diverse society, both locally and globally (Zhao, 2015). The critical aspect for higher education is not the demand for more, but the realization that creativity and innovation is unequivocally essential to make progress toward meeting accountability standards, particularly in relation to e-learning. The real demand for quality often comes from students engaged in traditional universities trying to obtain the necessary degree for upward social and economic mobility (Altmann, Ebersberger, Mossenlechner, & Wieser, 2018). In addition, the recent decline in public financial support for global higher education is having a significant impact on the sector as a whole (Altbach, 2016). As the cost of higher education rises and as governments break with their long-standing commitments to underwriting this cost, global higher education must explore opportunities and consider new ways of increasing access and growing additional learning and revenue opportunities, such as e-learning, while remaining personal and affordable (Feigenbaum & Iqani, 2015). The key question for global higher education is how to increase student enrollment with less government support in a time of growing cost and increased expectations (Heck & Mu, 2016). As one attempt to answer the question, global higher education institutions are swiftly leaving traditional brick and mortar physical spaces and venturing into a virtual mélange of educational models used in the global digital economy; specifically online and e-learning models which are creating increased access to higher education, new student markets, and expanded revenue opportunities for global higher education institutions (Marshall, 2018). Globally, universities are being forced to reconsider their missions and goals. Society no longer grants privilege and financial commitment to higher education. Many perceive that those receiving the most from higher education institutions should pay for the privilege, which has caused dramatic increases in tuition and fees (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016). As a result, higher education has also experienced a new demand for financial and productivity accountability as students, parents, taxpayers and politicians increasingly ask where the benefits of higher education are and where are tax dollars going (Mense, Lemoine, Garretson, & Richardson, 2018). Consequently, global higher education must find ways to be more productive at a lower cost with increased rewards, resulting in e-learning becoming the solution of choice for a global, technological marketplace (Wihlborg & Juusola, 2018).

### IV. TECHNOLOGY

Technology makes the business of global higher education more complicated and competitive each day. Along with increasing global competitiveness, technology adds complexity and uncertainty to the organizational environment (Dennis, 2018). Increasing global interdependencies and the accelerating pace of change demand more flexible, adaptive, and agile global higher education organizations (Zhu, 2015). Effective utilization of technology decreases organizational vulnerability by reducing costs and enhancing adaptability and incorporating

accountability (Daniel, 2014). However, technology adoption and utilization come at a tremendous cost for acquisition and reducing the threat of obsolescence (Britsch, Manchovitz, Shen, & Turney, 2011). Higher education leaders have difficulty predicting how to control or use technologies that so profoundly influence and yet disrupt higher education. Quality assurance, or accountability in global higher education, is now tied to the necessity for higher education institutions both to attract students as well as to ensure students become completers (Dunkerly & Wonh, 2017). Increasing accessibility and increasing affordability while increasing personalization of learning is paramount for higher education institutions who wish to increase enrollment, retain students, graduate students who are prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, and strive for competitive advantage (Froumin & Lisyuthkin, 2018).

### V. THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Technology is transforming higher education by providing a global focus thereby intensifying the global interconnectedness. Technology has now become central to the global changes: reshaping social, economic and cultural life (McKenna, 2018). Technology has not created international universities, but all are impacted by the conceptual and realistic impact of globalism, both in terms of education (instruction) and resources (students) (Kumar, 2017). Higher education is a second-level participant in the creation of economic globalism, but it is essential to the creation, exchange and implementation of knowledge (Austin & Jonesm 2018). Knowledge and information are more highly prized and more highly globalized than ever before due to the impact of technology (Moodie, 2016). Additionally, technology is a necessary condition of doing business in higher education because information needs incessantly drive the demands for increased technological capabilities. While technology should be a contributor to increased efficiency for the global higher education institution, the complexity, costs, and utilization of technology are challenges. As information systems continue to grow exponentially, administrators in higher education feel constant pressure to overcome technology obsolescence, such that technology infusion in global higher education emphasizes innovations to provide technology-based learning (Thambusamy, Singh, & Ramly, 2019). Most global universities have made significant investments in educational technologies in an effort to increase e-learning instruction. Universities are currently in a position where there is inconsistent adoption of educational technology, some due to infrastructure and some due to inappropriate implementation and application (Lemoine, Hackett, & Richardson, 2016). In this technology-driven world of innovation, competitive advantage is short-lived due to the availability of the same technology to all universities. Information needs are incessantly driving the demands for increased capabilities and progressively more advanced technologies are being utilized in new sophisticated ways by higher education, often in efforts to attract and retain students through e-learning (Healy & Bordogna, 2014). Technology has the potential to transform the preparation and learning for students, but only if it triggers a substantial and sustained change in the responses of educators to the innovations possible with technology. However, to date, the use of technology has primarily been evolutionary and not revolutionary (Everhart & Seymour, 2017). The challenge is to design economically

efficient and educationally effective instructional programs that attract students and produce competent and capable graduates (Gerstein & Friedman, 2016). Technology should not be an end for global higher education; it should be the means to achieve the end. This requires educators to use technology as a learning tool, to assist the learner with the task of learning. This technology must transform the way students learn and the way professors teach and develop applications using technology to assist in e-learning (Flavin, 2016).

## VI. E-LEARNING

Global higher education was created by technology and the use of technology has created a new dynamic for learning, e-learning. Global and technological change impacts higher education, but research specific to teaching and learning provides greater direction into how the process of learning should best be conducted (Goldin & Katz, 2018). In particular, the development of e-learning offers promise in assisting administrators, faculty, and designers in creating effective learning environments. But, in this global society, students desire a degree, not an education, with their goals limited to the acquisition of skills needed for employment and maximizing income (Caspersen, Frolich, & Muller, 2017). Within this context, universities are being pushed to produce knowledgeable students that society and employers deem valuable, i.e., employability, not knowledge (Englund, Olofsson, & Price, 2017). Additionally, higher education institutions are being asked to graduate more students while concurrently increasing the standards of quality, simultaneously becoming more efficient, effective and productive organizations (Daniela, Strods, & Kalmina, 2019). Adoption of business practices by higher education institutions is transforming education where students become consumers and due to insufficient funding programs must increase revenue production to support educational programs and opportunities (Davis, 2017). Technology-mediated open and distance learning provides the dominant means by which 21st Century higher education is transmitted and received (Dogan, Ozan, & Ozarlan, 2016). Higher education in the past has most often been a passive experience for the learner in which knowledge is presented, hopefully absorbed, and the degree of retention assessed. However, e-learning is more than mere retention; it requires building skills that can be usefully applied (Wood, 2017). Concepts of quality in higher education vary between countries' institutions. But perceptions of quality are changing, and the growing emphasis on outcomes and standards heralds the possibility of more dramatic techniques for assessing and evaluating teaching within a global context (Kahn & Agnew, 2017). In the evolving global educational marketplace students are accustomed to getting what they need instantly (Goodman, Melkers, & Pallais, 2019).

## VII. ROLE OF E-LEARNING

Universities are using technology as one of the primary means for initiating and maintaining contact with a diverse student population looking for anywhere, anytime learning (Ng, & Nyland, 2016). Ubiquitous anytime, anywhere learning is attractive to adult learners who balance both home and career and to students who must work to afford higher education. Universities need to respond to remain competitive, but those innovations often cost millions of dollars (Tierney & Almeida, 2017). With online learning technology, students can determine the structure of their

learning process, choosing where, when, and how to learn (Rust, Beinrhaupt & Adams, 2017). Online learning reverses the roles and learning of the typical university with face-to-face classroom-learning paradigm and instead becomes a constructivist process with the student becoming the determinant factor in how to learn, and often what to learn (Ossiannilsson, 2018). The internet is an innovative medium for e-learning that can provide students with a low-cost, flexible option which can expand into global markets. Given the change in student populations, there is a greater need to find more creative, cost and time-effective ways to draw students to global institutions of higher learning (Vanve, Gaikwad, & Shelar, 2016). One such way of reaching a more diverse population is through the adoption and use of e-learning (Brown, 2006). The general mission of e-learning is to fully extend quality educational opportunities to a very diverse population of learners who either prefer or have a special need of alternative methods of delivery (Arkorful & Abaioo, 2015). E-learning programs generally have a more diverse student body which allows students to interact with students of all ages, from many different walks of life or in foreign countries (Van Nyhuis, 2018). Such diversity will enrich the learning process and be reflected in discussions, assignments and projects. The power of the Web is universal, and most students globally have access to the internet (Akpan & Akpan, 2017). The design of e-learning allows information to be accessed by everyone regardless of their location, expertise or demographic (Wadhwa, 2016). For this population, removing the walls of a classroom provides greater opportunities for learners to achieve their goals even while continuing to fulfill the demands of their everyday schedules (Garland, 2018). Global universities risk being left behind if they do not embrace the opportunities afforded them by technology (Ota, 2018). Universities may use site-based, synchronous activities, which are activities conducted in real time or at specified times such as videoconferencing and telecourses. Or they may employ asynchronous activities which do not require participation at the same time, such as online or e-learning (French & O'Leary, 2017). E-learning programs tend to be win-win for the student and for the institution (Jones & Skinner, 2014). Online classes cost the university less as classes are held in 'virtual' classrooms which do not require desks, chairs and building space. Additionally, students do not have costs generally associated with classes at a physical college such as parking and housing (Jacob & Gokbel, 2018). Well-designed e-learning programs provide timelines and goals for students and have good monitoring systems in place to ensure student success. E-learning has had a fundamental impact on the existing structure of higher education but not without limitations (Pathak, 2016). Instructors have to be more creative and more individualized in the delivery of instruction. Additionally, e-learning demands a greater maturity from the student than that of traditional learning, which may cause stress to the student and to the instructor (Kattoua, Al-Lozi, & Alrowwad, 2016). E-learning does not allow for spontaneous responses and limits the amount of social interaction found in traditional learning environments (Rege Colet, 2017). E-learning allows institutions and students to benefit from a global consumer base. E-learning now allows institutions of higher education to reach a more diverse student population and holds many advantages over traditional instruction and learning (Pavel, Fruth, & Neacsu,

20150. E-learning not only can reach more students, but it also can make education convenient.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

The road ahead for global higher education is filled with challenges, risks and uncertainties. However, global higher education is essential to the creation, exchange and implementation of knowledge in a global marketplace with many unintended consequences; therefore, global higher education must adapt or get left behind. The digital economy has transformed global higher education to the degree that learners can be engaged almost anywhere in the world at any time convenient to the student. Coupled with globalization, technology advancement, especially in the area of communication and computers, has changed the world, particularly the world of learning. This focus on the quality of learning, the effort to protect and advance knowledge and civilization may start when it becomes clear quality global higher education is more than a simple commodity and the price of a university education translates into much more than money. As a consequence, competitive advantage for global universities requires modification and adaptation.

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