Internationalization and the Changing Paradigm of Higher Education in the GCC Countries

Julie Vardhan

Abstract

The present study has been undertaken to examine the growth trajectory of the higher education (HE) sector across all the countries in the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) region, the transition toward internationalization, quality initiatives undertaken, and movement toward regional integration. The study aims to provide a review for the shifting paradigm through concepts of internationalization in the literature review and to probe on the themes facing the GCC in their adoption to internationalization. The study is based on secondary data, mainly of the websites of 167 universities/higher education institutions (HEIs) of GCC, which were analyzed for their adaptation to internationalization. The results show the various perspectives of internationalization with the suggestion on regional integration. It is hoped the study would provide the HEIs and the policy makers with a strong foundation on their internationalization efforts.

Keywords

internationalization, higher education, GCC, regional integration, HEIs

Introduction

Studies on internationalization of higher education (HE) have been vast, as the subject is of prime interest to policy makers, educationists, and leaders. This is because economic performance is affected by the growing cross-border flows of knowledge, knowledge workers, and students (American Council on Education [ACE], 2009; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD], 2004; NAFSA, 2010, cited in Hawawini, 2011; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2009). Studies based specifically on the internationalization in the HE sector have been performed in numerous regions of the world: Alamri (2011) in Saudi Arabia, Liu and Dai (2012) and Chen and Huang (2013) in China, Jowi (2009) in Africa, Ogachi (2009) in East Africa, Ghasempoor, Liaghatdar, and Jafari (2011) in Iran, Mahani and Molki (2011) in UAE, and Mitra (2010) in India, which shows the importance given by researchers and reflects the respective nation’s keenness to internationalize. Most of the studies on internationalization dwell on the effect that the internationalization process may have on the institutions, the models used by higher education institutions (HEIs) and the impact they have, and the governance mechanism of the HEIs. A review of literature on the concurrent themes in the internationalization, however, shows no integration of themes in the process in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. This study therefore considers it of high importance to review the HE sector and raise awareness of the internationalization perspectives prevalent here.

Although universities have been international since ancient times, globalization has brought in new contextual environments for the universities to operate in, and increasingly, the universities the world over are trying to internationalize their operations (Ahmed & Rao, 2011). Although scholars such as Knight (2004) consider internationalization and globalization to be different, other scholars consider that the processes influence each other so much that the two can be used interchangeably (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011, in Beck, 2012; Jowi, 2009). As each of the concepts is complex and multi-dimensional, for the purpose of our study, internationalization will be assumed to mean the process of integrating international components into the HE system of a country, a resultant of globalization.

HE in the GCC region goes back to about 1,400 years ago with the advent of Islam, beginning in Saudi Arabia, with Mecca and Medina being the centers of knowledge as well as
Table 1. Broad Views on Internationalization.

| Broad views | Theories | Contributing authors | Perspective |
|-------------|----------|----------------------|-------------|
| Processes   | Modes    | GATS (World Trade Organization, 2000), OECD (2004), Buckner (2011) | Concerned with program mobility, student, institution, and then academic mobility as the different modes Neoliberal, Quality Assurance, and Imported Internationalization |
|             | Models   | Hawawini (2011)      | (a) The import model, (b) the export model, (c) the academic joint-venture model, (d) the partnership model, and (e) the foreign-campus model. |
|             | Mobility models | Mitra (2010), Jones and Lau (2010), Sharafuddin and Allani (2012) | Franchising, double or joint degrees, articulation models, and distance education; blended learning |
| Outcomes    | Form of colonialism | Altbach, cited in Donn and Al Manthri (2010), Altbach (2004) cited in Ahmed and Rao (2011) | HE considered an internationally traded commodity with academic institutions selling a "skill set" |
|             | Cultural imperialism | Chinnammai (2005), Grieco and Holmes (1999) cited in Al-Semary, Al-Khaja, and Hamidou (2012) | Forming global citizens, but according to some, highly dominated by western influences over the developed world |
|             | Public commodity | Alfantookh and Bakry (2008) | Should become an international right–global access to HE and the global mobility in HE |
| Rationale   | Knight (1997), Qiang (2003) cited in Ghasempoor, Liaghatdar, and Jafari (2011) | The political, the academic, the cultural/social, and the economic |
| Governance  | Glonacal Marginson and Rhoades (2002) cited in Horta (2009) | Intersections, interactions, and mutual determinations of global, national, and local level in the HE |
|             | Governance theory | Enders (2004) | State and non-state actors should participate equally in the governance of HE unlike the hierarchical model |
|             | Institutional theory | Scott’s (1995) cited in Wilkins and Huisman (2012) | Regulative, normative, and the cultural-cognitive pillar |

Source. Author’s compilation.
Note. GATS = The General Agreement on Trade in Services; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development; HE = higher education; MNC = multi-national corporation; HEI = higher education institutions.

Religion (Saleh, 1986). The last few decades, however, have seen a tremendous growth, both in the number of institutions and number of students in the GCC region. It is surprising, therefore, that little research on internationalization of HE either through comparative data, case studies, or institutional experiments has been conducted in this region. The author considers it important to investigate the changing paradigm of the HE sector in the GCC, not just for advancement of knowledge but also for institutions and policy makers to align their strategies according to the internationalization practices and trends.

The present study has been undertaken to examine the growth trajectory of the HE sector across all the countries in the GCC region, the transition toward internationalization, quality initiatives undertaken, and movement toward regional integration. The study aims to provide a contextual analysis and theoretical basis for the shifting paradigm as the implications are important for GCC internationalization efforts.

Review of Literature on Internationalization of HE

The literature describing trends and explaining aspects of HE internationalization has been diverse. Internationalization of HE has been defined as “The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p. 11). This definition is considered to be most comprehensive, as apart from the modalities, the definition also integrates an intercultural and international dimension into all areas of the university functioning. It particularly considers internationalization to be in response to globalization, although scholars such as Brandenburg and de Wit (2011) do not find any marked difference as they consider both concepts to be interconnected. By considering this definition of HE internationalization, the broad themes underlying the concept are now explored.

A brief review of literature reveals three recurring themes around which studies have been conducted—one is about the process of internationalization (Hawawini, 2011; Mitra, 2010; OECD, 2004), the other is regarding the outcomes (Altbach, 2004; Ghasempoor et al., 2011; Knight, 2004, 2008), and the third is about governance (Enders, 2004; Horta, 2009). This review follows the framework of process, outcomes, and governance to better understand the context of internationalization in HE, the characteristics of which have been summarized in the Table 1.
Process in Internationalization of HE

Since The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) has recognized education as one of the services in the year 2000, it has acted as an impetus for both HEIs and countries to trade internationally in HE. The process of internationalization includes the various modes, modalities, and models to internationalize. For instance, the different modes in which trade in education is allowed under GATS are Program mobility, Student mobility, Institution mobility, and Academic mobility (OECD, 2004, cited in Tilak, 2011). Ahmed and Rao (2011) go on to explain that the HE sector’s international market foray is also similar to the “classical” sequence of multinational corporation (MNC) business entry: exporting, licensing and franchising, joint ventures, and wholly owned subsidiaries. They even employ strategic alliances and turnkey projects. In this aspect, the sector undertakes the different stages of internationalization as any international business would. The choice usually depends on the resource investments, management control, and risk/return attributes (Cateora & Graham, 2009). Each firm would decide on the choice among exporting, licensing, or joint venture based on firm-specific and market-specific factors that influence control, return, risk, and resources (Dunning, 1988). Specific to the HE sector, there are studies that describe the mobility pattern in accordance with GATS or consider few “models” in HE. Hawawini (2011) mentions these five models: (a) the import model, (b) the export model, (c) the academic joint-venture model, (d) the partnership model, and (e) the foreign-campus model. These models are very similar to the international entry modes as mentioned by Dunning, and the institutions select the one they find most suitable for their international expansion. Another study by Mitra (2010) mentions franchising, double or joint degrees, articulation models, and distance education. Apart from the growing distance education model through which a large populace even in remote areas could be reached, a new approach is the blended learning. Sharafuddin and Allani (2012) and Jones and Lau (2010), while analyzing the system adopted by the Arab Open University in Kuwait, mention the advantage of combining the e-learning with the traditional learning method to promote learning outcomes. A growing trend is also that of collaboration and joint programs, as mentioned by Chen and Huang (2013) whose study on the development of internationalization of HE in China finds that apart from student mobility, there are a number of joint programs and international cooperation and collaboration among HEIs and other universities and international organizations.

An interesting articulation of the internationalization of HE was made by Beck (2012) conceptualizing it as an “eduscapes,” which is about the flow of ideas, programs, activities, and research across national boundaries, but this flow is also influenced or intercepted with other “scapes.” These scapes have been described as “ethnoscpes (the movement of people), mediascapes (how ideas about education are formed and influenced by the media), finanscapes (the movement of money in personal lives, as well as nationally and internationally) and eduscapes (the manufacturing of ‘ideas’ about education)” (Appadurai, 1990, in Beck, 2012, p. 142). According to Beck (2012), the eduscapes could be driven by either the finanscapes or ethnoscpes or a combination of these scapes.

Outcomes of Internationalization of HE

Although the growing importance of internationalization of HE and its impacts on HE systems is dynamic in evolution, it is becoming more evident that the rationales that drive the process vary from region to region, country to country, or even between institutions that are themselves also evolving (Knight, 2008). The main outcome of the internationalization process seems to be at the national level, as countries would be interested in developing their human capital, or developing knowledge workers for contributing to their economy. Ghasempoor et al. (2011) list out the four rationales for internationalization: the political, the academic, the cultural/social, and the economic. The national or political rationale is implied through the studies of Knight (2004) and Ogachi (2009) and is also related to ideological influences a country may have. The academic rationale is for achieving international standards for the institution, usually undertaken by the institutions to ensure high-quality global standards. The economic rationale is considered to be a direct response to the market forces aimed at developing revenue for the university while also developing human capital. However, there are numerous studies that consider the cultural dimension or rationale to be the most important issue. Al-Semary, Al-Khaja, and Hamidou (2012), for instance, in their study describe the concern of some authors (Grieco & Holmes, 1999) who consider internationalization to be a modern version of cultural imperialism with the western culture dominating and influencing the rest of the world and propose a cultural network model with “Multidisciplinary Education.” Altbach (2004) and Ahmed and Rao (2011) consider universities to be the new age MNCs with the same motive for expansion—to gain more market and earn more profit. Some scholars known for promoting internationalization have expressed caution over this business and commercial approach in internationalization (Beck, 2012; Knight, 2011), mentioning it may affect the knowledge creation and dissemination:

Universities are seen to be forced into the market place in ways that are reshaping them in their purposes and in the knowledge they create and disseminate. (Dixon, 2006, p. 320)

Some of the studies do provide an alternative way for nations and institutions to counter the commoditization of education: for instance, the study by Alfantookh and Bakry (2008) that suggest that HE should become a public commodity with rights, access, and mobility for everyone internationally. Whatever the outcome considered by the institutions and the nation for the internationalization of its HE sector, one thing for certain is that it helps in the advancement of knowledge and
learning, which is the primary goal of all HEIs, alongside the economic and cultural rationale.

**Governance of Internationalized HEIs**

The third theme of internationalization was found to be that of governance issues. The governance theory (Enders, 2004) postulates that both state and non-state actors should participate equally in the governance of HE unlike the hierarchical model. HE, which was considered to be the domain of the state, is increasingly opening to participation from private players. A study by Conner and Rabovsky (2011) corroborates the fact that as state governments have faced increasing pressures to fund competing programs, and have endured difficult recessions that saw dramatic declines in state revenues, they are increasingly finding it difficult to maintain support levels for public institutions of higher learning. Another study on the internationalization of HE in China by Liu and Dai (2012) considers three concrete issues: the internationalization of curricula and teaching, of management, and of communication. Whereas the perspective on the internationalization of curriculum views the issue from the international background of faculties, curriculum, and use of foreign language, the internationalization of university management discusses about the internal and external operating mechanisms. As internationalization occurs at all levels of the university, exchange and collaboration also occur at all levels. Three areas of exchange and cooperation are identified as academic research, collaborative education and exchange of teachers and students (Liu & Dai, 2012). This can also be termed as *glomacal* that consists of intersections, interactions, and mutual determinations of global, national, and local level in the HE (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002, cited in Horta, 2009). Other studies that consider the local and the global tendencies to be blurred with each being interdependent on the other are Robertson (1992, 1997, in Beck, 2012) and Edwards and Usher (2000). Summarizing these views, Beck (2012) mentions the porousness of the boundaries between local and global, and the stretching of relationships with the international study itself being a good example of how global trends supersede and become local. The governance pattern may be inferred to be more influenced by internationalization if the countries and institutions are more flexible to the effects and benefits of internationalization. However, most of the economies have developed their governance mechanism for both public and private universities to maintain standard and academic quality.

**Methodology of the Study**

The present study has been undertaken to analyze the various theories and schools of thought present in the literature of HE and its internationalization. The different, at times contrasting viewpoints, on internationalization in the HE show that it is a much debated and researched topic in the academia. The present study, however, is not about arguing for one proposition over the other or advocating another model on outcomes, governance, and stages, but to suggest the impact of internationalization in the GCC countries. Given the objective of this research to review the phenomenon of internationalization, this study uses secondary data for analysis, through a content analysis of the websites of the universities. When the data are to be used as evidence for a phenomenon under investigation, secondary data analysis would be appropriate (Irwin, 2013). The content analysis process follows the stages as elaborated in the studies of Smka and Koeszegi (2007) and Vaitkevicius and Kazokiene (2013) with ample modification because the unit of analysis for the study is implicit in the websites of the universities. The stages mentioned in these studies are as follows:

- a. Data sourcing
- b. Transcription
- c. Data unitization
- d. Categorization
- e. Coding

**Sample Size and Data Collection**

Content analysis is a very detailed and time-consuming process, and this places restrictions on the size of the final sample (Harris & Attour, 2003, in Sicilia, Pérez, & Heffernan, 2008). However, as the objective of the study is the HE sector in the GCC region, the study drew the sample from the official websites of the Ministry of Higher Education in each of the six countries. Furthermore, a total of 167 university websites from which data could be found were accessed for gathering information; their distribution is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Distribution of Sample Universities.**

| Country          | Ministry of education                          | No. of university websites accessed |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Saudi Arabia     | Ministry of Higher Education                   | 53                                 |
| UAE              | Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research | 46                                 |
| Bahrain          | Ministry of Education                          | 18                                 |
| Qatar            | Ministry of Higher Education                   | 11                                 |
| Oman             | Ministry of Higher Education                   | 11                                 |
| Kuwait           | Ministry of Higher Education                   | 6                                  |
| Oman             | Ministry of Higher Education                   | 167                                |

**Procedure**

Hwang, McMillan, and Lee (2003) in their study mention the complexity of website content analysis, much more than the traditional media because of interconnectedness of individual pages and presence of information or units of analysis in a number of pages. However, the websites are the most powerful tool for accessing information, hence this study chose the websites for analysing the internationalization efforts in
the universities. The analysis of the 167 websites was restricted to the English version of these websites as English is the international language most predominantly used. Corresponding to the third stage, requiring unitization was also modified considerably as internationalization was implicit through the website content. The various words, phrases, and texts that were used for the unitization purpose in the website were found to be “international,” “global,” “international partnerships,” “international collaboration,” “worldrenowned faculty,” and “diverse students, multicultural.” The period for accessing and unitization of the websites were from August 2010 to December 2012.

**Coding Scheme**

The present study is about the changing paradigm of the HEIs due to internationalization; therefore, the only category considered for the various unitization were the words or phrases mentioned earlier that were indicative of the “internationalization phenomenon” and were coded as 1 to denote the HEI being international. This scheme is based on the observation of Hwang et al. (2003) in Sicilia et al. (2008) that researchers generally need to develop their own coding scheme for analyzing content.

The next section outlines the demographics that would further help in understanding the sector perspective in the GCC region, which is then followed by the observations of the content analysis done on the HEI websites of the GCC countries.

**Review of HE Sector in GCC**

**Demographics of GCC**

Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) was established in 1981 by the leaders of the United Arab Emirates, The State of Bahrain, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, The Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar, and The State of Kuwait. The basic objective of the Cooperation Council is to effect cooperation, integration, and coordination among member states, with education being one of the fields. The HE sector in the GCC has been trying to keep up with the changes in the globalized world, with the changes being at times radical and continuous, with each member country advocating and implementing policies to advance growth of the sector. However, the Council countries, such as other countries in the world, face a body of challenges imposed by new developments in the international scene, which can be summarized in globalization, advanced technology, media openness, knowledge and information explosion, and economic and cultural coalitions (Supreme Council Resolution on Education, 2002). As the population (from 43 to 46 million in the period 2009-2011) and economy (from US$21,000 to US$30,000 in the period 2009-2011; according to the GCC Statistics, 2011) of the region grew, the HE sector too witnessed a changing pattern. According to reports by Alpen Capital (2010), the total students in GCC region is expected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 1.8% during 2010 to 2020 to reach 11.3 million in 2020 from 9.5 million in 2010 (Nazzal, 2012). Number of tertiary students is expected to grow at a highest CAGR of 5.5%. The share of tertiary education students is expected to rise from 11% in 2010 to 15% in 2020 in the overall education sector.

**HE: Changing Paradigm Due to Internationalization**

With the growing GDP and per capita in the region, the governments are realizing the importance of developing human capital for the economic growth to be sustainable. There are several reasons for this: changing demographics, the increased number of secondary school pass-outs, wish for continual learning, and the growth of the information technology (Mitra, 2010). A set of 167 university websites of GCC were studied for an understanding of their objectives and effort for internationalization. Among these, the year of establishment for 145 universities was found. These were then tabulated to understand the growth trend of the universities in the region and are depicted in Figure 1. Umm Al-Qura University established in Mecca in 1949 is the first university in Saudi Arabia and also GCC to be established although King Saud University established in 1957 is considered to be the first HE provider as we know it today. Although most of the GCC countries had one or two public universities, estab-

![Figure1. Growth of Universities in the GCC. Source: Compiled from University websites.](image-url)
**Process of Internationalization in GCC**

A look at the processes of internationalization in the GCC reveals the several modes, modalities, and models prevalent in the region. Citing Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), Ogachi (2009) outlines four categories of countries in the internationalization process. The first category are the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, considered the “major players” as they have some of the best universities and are English speaking so students from all over the world seek them. The second category is that of countries such as Germany and France, which attract students from neighboring countries and countries with socio-cultural or historical ties. The third category is the evolving countries of Japan, Canada, and New Zealand, which have started attracting between 75,000 and 115,000 overseas students per year. The last category is the “emerging contenders” that includes Malaysia, Singapore, and China. These countries have realized the importance of global education and are spending resources toward developing “world-class” HE to effectively compete in the global student market. The countries of the GCC from this description would fall in the fourth category. Moreover, a large population of the student community is also moving to the first or second categories of countries seeking HE. For example, according to a report published at the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education, Saudi Arabia is ranked by UNESCO as the fourth country on the movement of the students around the world; Saudi Arabia ranked behind China (421,000 students), India (153,300 students), and South Korea (105,300 students), being ahead of Japan and the United States in student movement around the world (Alamri, 2011).

Through the content analysis of the websites, it was ascertained if the university was a public university or a private university, a public university being sponsored by the Federal government of the respective countries. This was further checked on the Ministry of Education websites of the countries as they have a list of public universities and the accredited private universities.

The second step in our content analysis was to find the “international” aspect of the universities, which was done through the following words or phrases considered as our unitization: “international,” “global,” “international partnerships,” “international collaboration,” “world-renowned faculty,” and “diverse students, multicultural.” The findings have been tabulated in Table 3.

As mentioned earlier, although it is difficult to ascertain the main rationale for internationalizing, what is for certain is that most of the GCC countries have public and private institutions that are increasingly getting accreditations or partnerships with international universities so that their courses are more acceptable internationally. Moreover, international universities establishing their campuses are also considerable in number in many of these countries. Among the 167 universities and HEIs reviewed for the present study, the number of private universities/institutions was 103. Among these private universities, as many as 70 have either partnerships/collaborations with an international university or are branch campuses of international universities.

These countries have different stages of international collaborations with the majority of the source countries being the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, and India. These universities variously represent the modes and mobility stages of internationalization, for example, while Saudi Arabia with such large number of students going abroad is in the student’s mobility stage, there are also a large number of students coming to its shore particularly for Islamic studies—thus showing both import and export. UAE and Qatar are examples of countries that are at the forefront of the “branch campus model” that alludes to “institution mobility” according to GATS. Oman and Kuwait would be likely examples of the partnership model, with the universities developing programs affiliated to some foreign

| Countries    | No. of public universities/HEIs | No. of private universities/HEIs | International partner countries for universities—branch campus/affiliations |
|--------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| UAE          | 3                               | 45                               | Indian 10, The United Kingdom 9, The United States 5, Australian 2, French 2, Canadian 1, Iranian 1 |
| Saudi Arabia | 47                              | 8                                | The United States 3, Canada 1, The United Kingdom 1, Germany 1, Netherlands 1, Australia 1 |
| Oman         | 7                               | 14                               | The United Kingdom 6, The United States 2, The United States 2, Australia 1, Netherlands 1, The United Kingdom 1, The United States 7, The United Kingdom 2, Canadian 1, French 1, Netherlands 1, The United Kingdom 3, The United States 3, Ireland 1 |
| Kuwait       | 2                               | 6                                | The United States 2, Australia 1, Netherlands 1, The United Kingdom 1, The United Kingdom 1, The United States 7, The United Kingdom 2, Canadian 1, French 1, Netherlands 1, The United Kingdom 3, The United States 3 |
| Qatar        | 2                               | 12                               | The United Kingdom 6, The United States 2, The United States 2, Australia 1, Netherlands 1, The United Kingdom 1, The United States 7, The United Kingdom 2, Canadian 1, French 1, Netherlands 1, The United Kingdom 3, The United States 3 |
| Bahrain      | 4                               | 18                               | The United Kingdom 6, The United States 2, The United States 2, Australia 1, Netherlands 1, The United Kingdom 1, The United States 7, The United Kingdom 2, Canadian 1, French 1, Netherlands 1, The United Kingdom 3, The United States 3 |

Source: Compiled from university websites.
Note. GCC = Gulf Cooperation Council; HEIs = higher education institutions.
universities, and Bahrain follows the “twinning model” where the students study for a part of the program in the host country and another in the home country.

**Rationale for Internationalization**

Although a study by Al-Yousif (2008) on the interaction between human capital and economic growth paints a mixed picture, the results vary according to countries. Moreover, the causality between education and economic growth is a bidirectional one, refuting the existing literature showing causality from human capital to economic growth. Policy makers are hence focusing on developing the HE sector, investing in developing hubs, increasingly seeking participation from the private sector and moving toward internationalization.

One of the reasons for the growing demand for the private universities and international partnership/collaboration is the growing population and the growing economy, although the expansion and internationalization of HEIs should not be alluded to the “youth bulge” (Buckner, 2011, p. 22) but also explicit policy changes on the part of governments to expand university enrollments. Despite some areas of concern, as building large-scale massification and commoditization of education, and the concern about national values getting eroded (Raven, 2011), most of the Gulf policy makers are promoting internationalization, hopefully balancing out the internationalization efforts with efforts to integrate the national and the local perspective, creating the “glonacal” determinants.

**Governance Issues**

Buckner’s (2011) analysis of the reforms initiated by the states is classified into three major groups: Neoliberal, Quality Assurance, and Imported Internationalization, based on the extent to which Arab States are privatizing the provision of HE at different levels and the types of private institutions being established. The neo-liberal reforms, according to the study, aims to expand the access of HE while offsetting costs to consumers and private sectors. This includes the establishment of private universities, and programs that run through “open learning” or “blended learning.” The Arab Open University in the GCC is an example of the open learning system. The second approach describes the initiative by the state to develop quality assurance programs for all the state and private universities. Increasingly, the countries of the GCC are reforming their curricula to make them in line with the needs of the modern world. Saudi Arabia, for instance, over the years is trying to increase the non-Islamic content, is adopting English as the language of instruction, and is using the American system of semester and credit hours recognizing the demands of the modern economy (Rugh, 2002). The third model of HE policies pursued in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region according to the study is that of Americanization, where the HE systems modernize by establishing extensive partnerships with foreign universities. A number of scholars have examined how these institutions are changing tertiary education in the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi (Middle East Institute 2010). Buckner (2011) argues that although the Gulf States are interested in founding a knowledge economy, the oil-rich countries are more interested in creating a global image by inviting world-renowned universities in their established hubs rather than directly initiating quality initiatives for state-run institutions. The examples of Qatar and UAE establishing the Education City, Dubai International Academic City, and Knowledge Village seem to be cases in point—these hubs host institutions like the Northwestern University, Carnegie Mellon University, University of Wollongong, Heriot Watt of Scotland, Paris Sorbonne, New York University, and Insead. Although the academic standards of these international universities are very high, Stasz, Eide, and Martorell (2007) cited in Buckner (2011) point that a very small percentage of students actually qualify and enroll and the large percentage of the student population in all the GCC regions enroll in the public universities. They posit that this third approach to internationalization is more to do with bringing prestige and international acclaim to the Gulf States. A similar view is proposed in the study by Al-Semary et al. (2012), which considers internationalization of HE to be the key theme for GCC countries that are anxious to promote education as a symbol of modernity to their population as well as to the foreign countries.

An area of concern in the governance issues facing policy makers and governments in this region is how to ensure quality for institutions that may be state-owned, privately owned, or international institutions that have set their campus in these countries. Wilkins and Huisman (2012) cites the 2002 UNDP Arab Human Development Report that considered the poor quality of education in Arab countries as “the Achilles heel of education in the Arab world” and called for radical reform of the education system. Although since then, the landscape of HE has changed and as can be seen from the number of universities each country has and the reforms initiated, each of the countries has also developed agencies to ensure quality standards.

One of the ways to ensure quality standards throughout the regions as well as adapt to internationalization is through regional integration. According to some studies (Ogachi, 2009; Woldegiorgis, 2013), the regions engaging thus in cooperation are able “to improve the quality, relevance and accessibility, to facilitate transferability and comparability of degrees among nations and to facilitate the mobility and employability of students.” A step in the GCC has been taken toward regional integration with the development in 2007 of Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) that was established with World Bank support. A solution could be to start with the harmonization of HE as suggested by Woldegiorgis (2013) that is a process, not of standardization but articulation, both horizontal and vertical,
between programs and institutions among the HE systems of the region. The author feels that regional integration of the GCC in the HE sector will pave the way forward towards a more strategic decision in the internationalization process.

Conclusion, Limitation, and Future Research

A review of literature on internationalization in the HE shows three broad categories of theories—mainly related to the process, outcomes, and governance of internationalization. These theories are based in different contextual environments, with oftentimes strong and contrasting viewpoints of the authors. The present study has first summarized these theories on the basis of their categories of process, outcomes, and governance and attempted to see the applicability of these in the GCC region.

The first limitation of this study is regarding the method of content analysis, which can be constrained in its potential as it reports specific elements of a phenomenon (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). The website content analysis also is limited by the changing nature of the source of data, namely, the Internet. Pollach (2005) and Robbins and Stylianou (2003) in Sicilia et al. (2008) mention that the content and structure of the pages may change since the research was conducted. This limitation of the methodology making the result indicative in nature could be overcome through a longitudinal study in future (Robbins & Stylianou, 2003, in Sicilia et al., 2008). Future research could also be based on a comparative analysis between regions of the developed and emerging economies, and on finding the co-relation between the processes, outcomes, and governance.

The HE sector in GCC is at the forefront of creating a shift in the paradigm by advancing internationalization. The World Economic Forum for GCC considers education and innovation as one of the themes in developing the scenario analysis for 2025, and the way education policies are handled by the GCC governments will determine the regional innovation and knowledge-based economy (Davis & Hayashi, 2007). In spite of numerous challenges, there has been a considerable progress and recognition in the internationalization of HE process in a short span of time in the GCC region.

Our conclusions suggest the current trend of HE in GCC, that highlights that the region offers a tremendous potential for internationalization through the different outcomes, processes, and governance methods, which are present in varying degrees across the different countries of the region. It is hoped the study will provide a basis for future empirical research on these areas in this region and would help in furthering the internationalization efforts.

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**Author Biography**

Julie Vardhan is assistant professor in School of Business at Manipal University, Dubai currently pursuing her DBA from SMC University, Switzerland. Her research interests are in the areas of entrepreneurship, higher education, and international business.