BACKGROUND PAPER:

STUDENT MOBILITY

I. INTRODUCTION

In a globalized knowledge-based society, interdependence of the international community increased as each country exerts greater leverage over the others. This interdependence changed the volatility of the global society and the ways to promote social resilience in response to these changes. The barriers reduced within global society enabled increased flow of capitals and information and further, provided greater opportunities for cross-border movement of students. In a response to the changing global environment, higher education plays a critical role considering the increasing complexity of knowledge consumptions and productions. At the same time, however, higher education is a part of globalization process with extension of networks based on communications, information, knowledge, and culture.

Globalization can be defined as “the broad economic, technological, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education” (Altbach, 2007). Yet, the relationship between higher education and globalization is rather complex as higher education is both a “response to” and a “scene for” globalization (OECD, 2009). There are different understandings of the definition of globalization depending on the social context, and it also delivers various implications in education. According to Varghese (2009), Globalization implies higher education becoming “a designed activity to introduce an international and multicultural outlook to suit the requirements of a global labor market centered on knowledge production.” This phenomenon of market-oriented convergence of higher education correlates to the direction of internationalization of higher education.

1 Prepared by KEDI (July 2012).
Commonly, internationalization at the national/sector/institutional levels is defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003). In greater latitude of its implications in education, internationalization embodies the policy and practice of educational systems in responding to a changing global environment, promoting commercial benefits, knowledge and language exchange and obtainment, and globalized school curriculum. Branch campuses, collaborations between and among countries, and joint degrees or programs have been settled down for the practice of internationalization in which further monitoring and quality assurance are critical.

The pattern of student mobility closely correlates to globalization and internationalization of higher education. International student mobility has dramatically increased along with technological advancement and the integration of global educational market. Also, the increasing diversity in ethnic and cultural compositions of society requires each generation to develop capacity to understand diversity and multiculturalism. As student mobility is regarded as a crucial component of higher education, academics attempt to analyze the current status of international student flow while the governments and higher educational institutions are making efforts to enhance the international student mobility. This paper will provide a brief review of the development of student mobility, focusing on the increasing student mobility of Asia-Pacific region. Also it will present the recent trends as well as major factors of international student mobility. Further, possible implications for education policy to reinforce the positive aspects of student mobility in Asia-Pacific region will be presented.

2. BACKGROUND

According to the OECD data, international student mobility is rising considerably over the last three decades than total international migration. This differential becomes increasingly marked in recent years. International student mobility, for example, grew by 52% over the period 1998-2004, compared to a growth of 13% for world migration, and the number of students who study overseas is estimated to reach 8 million by 2020. In addition, the number of Asian international students who study abroad dramatically increased. In fact, approximately 45% of the total of international students in the OECD countries and 52% of the non-OECD countries are from the
Asia-Pacific region. Numbers of the Chinese students studying abroad, for example, is 17% of all international students in Australia, 15% in the U.K., and 11% in the U.S., which is followed by large number of students from India, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Thailand (Kell & Vogal, 2010).

This increase of student mobility from the Asian region has several reasons. Historically, from the eighteenth century, international student mobility was associated with colonial periods in the Asian countries (Rizvi, 2011). Many of the countries in Asia were either subject to colonial rule by European or are integral part of the influence of the United States after the World War II. In the post-colonial period, mostly referred as to the Cold War Era, the vestige of the colonial period strongly influenced the Asian students from the former British Empire such as India, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka going to the United Kingdom, or to Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Also, students from Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, the countries influenced by the United States, have correspondingly chosen to study in the U.S. (Kell & Vogal, 2010).

In addition, Marginson and Sawer (2005) explain that the growth of student mobility from Asian countries is due to a combination of economic growth and the rise of middle class with aspirations for higher education as well as limited local capacity in higher education. In many of the Asian countries, the capacity of higher education system could not absorb the needs of the students and the increased demands for higher education. Although some private institutions with growing capacity attract students, the number of higher education institutions and its capacity is still in short to meet the increased demand. As a result, the universities, mostly of the western countries, such as ones in Europe, North America, and Australia, attract many of the Asian students who have high aspirations for their education. This also triggers international student mobility and counts as a significant factor for promoting student mobility in the Asia-Pacific region (Marginson & Sawer 2005).

Finally, the increased number of students studying abroad can also be explained through globalization. The concept of globalization not only deals with student mobility but also with languages, academic cultures, political issues, economics, and various other issues that relate to global society. In a knowledge and information based society, higher education institutions are one of the primary subjects of globalization. In fact, higher education institutions are “being foundational to knowledge, the take-up of technologies, cross-border association and sustaining complex communities” (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Universities have profiled their institutions in the international market and recruited international students. There are research
3. RECENT TRENDS IN STUDENT MOBILITY

After mid-1980s, the increasing pattern of cross-border movement of students became a major factor of social change. Records show that for the last decade, the international student flow reached an annual average of 4.8% increase. The number of international students in 2009, for example, recorded a total of 3.7 million globally showing an increase of 6% over the previous year, which is four times greater compared to 800,000 in 1975 (SERI, 2010; OECD at a Glance, 2011).

The major pattern is that the flow of international students is a dominant flow from developing countries to developed countries. According to OECD (2011), the most preferred destination countries for international students are Australia, Canada, France, Germany, UK, and the U.S., and more than half of the students studying abroad are in these countries. Especially with the increased importance of English as a lingua franca, the U.S. and UK continuously rank the two top host countries. The top five countries with high proportion of international students in student body are Australia (21.5%), UK (15.3%), Austria (15.1%), Switzerland (14.9%), and New Zealand (14.6%) (Kahanec & Renata, 2011).

It is also found that Egypt, South Africa, and Singapore have shown a continual growth of student mobility since 2000, emerging as a major hub in their regions for international education (de Wit, Agarwal, Said, Sehoole, & Sirozi, 2008). Of the many reasons, two reasons stand out. First, it can be explained that the impact of globalization is influencing not only the traditionally major host countries and universities, but also the emerging ones. Second, the cost of education is likely to affect the students' aspiration to destination countries. Some indicate that the relatively high cost of education in US and UK may be one of the reasons of the decline in the flow of students to such countries (Varghese, 2008).

On another note, it is discovered that more than 70% of foreign students registers for the majors of business administration, engineering, and computer. This indicates that international education is active in particular courses.
4. FACTORS OF STUDENT MOBILITY

There are several major factors that affect international student mobility: 1) English communication level, 2) tuition fee, 3) educational quality and 4) openness and equal opportunity. Also, 5) multiculturalism (i.e. diversity) cannot be overlooked as a factor.

1. **English communication level:** As of 2008 the five major English speaking countries, U.S., U.K., Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, are the most attractive countries for international students retaining 42% of world international students (OECD, 2011). Because of the advantage of English language as a lingua franca, European countries are increasing lectures in English to attract foreign students as well.

2. **Cost of Education:** Recently, the flow of students to UK and US has declined, and instead, Ireland, New Zealand, and especially Australia have become favorite destinations for students from China, India, and other Asian countries (Varghese, 2008). Free tuition fee for international students policy (e.g. Germany and France) have attracted many foreign students, and this may imply that tuition fee is one of the decisive factors for international students to select abroad educational institutions (SERI, 2009; DeVoretz, 2006; Naidoo, 2007; Lowel and Khadka, 2011).

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2 Source: UOE and UNESCO Institute for Statistics.
3. **Education Quality**: The quality of education that students receive, including the reputation of the higher education institution is also a factor in international student mobility. This also includes the recognition of the institution’s degree at students’ home as well as the international labour market (Bourke, 1997; Park, 2009; OECD, 2011).

4. **Openness and Equal Opportunity**: Recently, Australia and Canada faced a temporal decrease of foreign student enrollment after the change of immigration policy. However, these two countries succeed recruiting international students by advantaging local degrees and educational experiences in assessing immigration application files.

5. **Multiculturalism**: Acquiring linguistic competency and cultural familiarity in a multi-cultural environment is another consideration. Based on a study by Li and Bray (2006), the students from mainland China studying in Hong Kong and Macau highly valued the social and cultural experience (Varghese, 2008). Many countries are in efforts to promote respects for cultural diversity. Australia, for example, has successfully established policies, programs, and parameters related to multiculturalism based on the common principle that “diversity is both dynamic and enriching, and something from all should benefit” (Welch, 2010).

5. **IMPLICATIONS**

In a general sense, the economic effect of international student mobility is positively evaluated; therefore the governments and various educational institutions put in efforts to promote international student mobility. However, the questions of education quality, capacity, and support remain. Accordingly, student mobility in higher education should take a deep consideration in quality assurance such as regional qualifications frameworks, regional cooperation in quality assurance, recognition of qualifications, accreditation/credit transfer and cross-border educational provision.

As quality assurance has been a critical issue in higher education, more than half of countries over the world have created their own quality assurance mechanisms. This global trend can be described as follows:
1. By the rapid expansion of higher education system, there exist various types of educational provider such as public-private, cross-border and long-distance education institutions.

2. Globalization has resulted in unexpected outcome such as fraudulent academic credentials which include diploma mills, fly-by-night providers, and bogus institutions. As a result, there are demands for institutions with legitimate quality assurance method.

3. Because of the limited fiscal condition and the governmental priorities for basic education, the quality of public higher education institutions is considerably low. With the appropriate quality assurance mechanism, continuous improvement and assurance in quality are highly expected.

4. Quality assurance is closely linked to professional mobility and furthermore, regional and international integration. This raises the needs of an effective mechanism for the professional recognition of higher education credentials.

There are regional efforts to response to the issues of quality assurance and qualification framework. In particular, there have been active discussions within Southeast Asia region on the topics of credit transfer and quality assurance of higher education system and their functions as institutional foundation to promote exchange of students within the region. Institutions such as ASEAN University Network (AUN) and Southeast Asia Educational Minister Organization, Regional Innovation for Higher Education Development (SEAMEO RiHED) are involved.

Among the various projects conducted by the ASEAN+3 Platform include those to promote higher education cooperation and increase linkages between universities through the AUN (ASEAN Plus Three, 2012). Specifically, AUN has developed the ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS) to facilitate and promote the student mobility in ASEAN. ACTS requires transparency of the system and mutual trust as preconditions and emphasizes the internal and external quality assurance system for the quality assurance of academic degrees. For this purpose, AUN provides guideline for quality assurance of academic degrees.

UNESCO also has conducted various conventions on qualification recognitions of diplomas and degrees in higher education by regions since late-1970s, and also suggested UNESCO/OECD
Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education in response to the trends of internationalization of higher education.

Specifically, the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, was first adopted in 1983, in order to facilitate student mobility within the region. In 2011, the International Conference of States (ICS) examined and adopted amendments, and as of 2012, a total of 21 member states have ratified the convention (UNESCO/ICS, 2011).

Through these regional and international efforts, encouragement of positive effects of student mobility within the region is expected to enable diverse cultural understanding and promote positive aspects of globalization and internationalization.

There are also some concerns of student mobility. Brain drain is one of primary concerns of the given countries with outbound mobile students, mainly developing countries. Indeed, student mobility can be positively evaluated in the perspective of that these outbound mobile students learn advanced skills and receive high quality education through developed countries’ educational system. Yet, the problem remains as significant numbers of students do not return to their home countries.

6. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, review of the development student mobility, current trend, and major factors are reviewed. Based on this overview, there are several possible implications at the national government, institution and individual level as well as implications for education policy.

At the national government level, the efforts of governments can be positively viewed. For instance, the number of foreign student in Australia increased from 40,000 in 1989 to 500,000 in 2010. The Australian government officially allowed the custom of additional advantage of local education degree for immigration and employment. This governmental support on business sector had positive effects on foreign student recruitment as well.

Institutions also promoted foreign student recruitment by implementing recruitment office and provide language courses to foreign students. During the 1990s, many post-secondary
institutions in Australia organized administrative department to respond to foreign students’ needs and their employment. Although educational context such as educational quality is still controversial in international education, the importance of international affairs is increasing for those with concerns on the balance of institutional budget.

Lastly, at the individual level, it should be acknowledged that international student mobility contributes to understand and respect diverse cultures and enhance positive aspects of globalization and internationalization.
REFERENCES


