

Recontextualizing internationalization of higher education institutions in South Korea through the lens of the knowledge–policy–power interface

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to critically investigate the past hype of internationalization of higher education institutions (HEIs) and its complex international, national and local processes under the influence of globalization.

Design/methodology/approach – In particular, the authors employed the knowledge–policy–power interface framework through a scoping review in order to reexamine the political dynamics among international, national and local higher education actors in driving the internationalization of HEIs in the context of South Korea between the 1990s and the 2020s. The perspective taken by this research brings much-needed nuance to the analysis by focusing on the complex dynamics of external factors and key actors and their responses in the process of internationalization.

Findings – This research found three characteristic dynamics of internationalization of Korean HEIs: uncritical acceptance of external pressures for internationalization; unbalanced formal and informal participation at the national level and different ways HEIs absorb change. In short, this research discussed how the powerful government, which has been stirred by external forces, shaped the limited knowledge discourse on internationalization while triggering power games among various HEIs. The research highlights that the characteristics of HEIs and the voices of all stakeholders should be better accounted for so that internationalization can proceed in diverse ways from the ground up to enhance and assure educational quality.

Research limitations/implications – The research limits itself by analyzing the political dynamics in driving the internationalization of HEIs in the context of South Korea only through scoping review. However, the attempt to disentangle the underlying political dynamics through its original framework is worthy unlike previous more traditional models that cast policy-making as a uniform cycle proceeding rationally through the policy process regardless of the issue.

Practical implications – These findings enable a better analysis of the key dynamics of how HEI internationalization policies in Korea were understood, planned and implemented. Without examining the political dynamics among various factors as well as the responses of significant actors to HEI internationalization, the current challenges and remaining tasks in translating higher education policy into practice cannot be thoroughly assessed.



Social implications – Most importantly, the multilayered political dynamics that come together to shape the content and directions of policies in a certain national context should be taken into account in the process of policy-making. Such recontextualization would provide a better understanding of the underlying dynamics that lead to certain consequences of and challenges in translating higher education policy into practice, especially for those who face the challenge of balancing between state-driven policies and ever-diversifying needs and demands of HEIs.

Originality/value – As there is a lack of understanding of the critical context of the knowledge–policy–power interface despite the significant influence of political dynamics in the process of internationalization, this research reexamined the internationalization of HEIs in Korea by providing a better understanding of the political dynamics between knowledge and power that influence the directions and contents of policy dialogues and documents.

Keywords Higher education, Globalization, Internationalization, Global and national policy dynamics, Knowledge–policy–power interface, South Korea

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The past 30 years of the discourse on globalization and regionalization of economies and societies combined with the requirements of the knowledge economy accelerated the need to force higher education institutions (HEIs) to take more strategic approaches for policy reforms related to internationalization of HEIs in numerous countries (Altbach, 2004; Cho, 2016a; De Wit, 2020; Knight, 2004; Mok, 2003; Ng, 2012; Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2015). The policy reforms of internationalization of HEIs are particularly attributed to neoliberalism, which is evident in the government exerting a strong control over HEIs by allocating funding through evaluation mechanisms (Chang, 2015). But the impact of internationalization on HEIs are not uniform as pressure for higher education reforms derive from expectations and demands of different stakeholders in society (Mok, 2003). In the process of policy formulation there are a variety of complex forces that affect how policies are conceived, designed and implemented (Jones, Jones, Shaxson, & Walker, 2013). However, such multilayered political dynamics – at both international and national levels – have been under-researched in previous studies despite the vast literature and active discussions in the field of HEI internationalization.

In this context, South Korea (hereinafter Korea) is also known to have gone through notable education reforms to internationalize HEIs, influenced by and actively adopting various factors arising from the rapidly changing postindustrialized and knowledge-based society. In particular, a significant amount of literature argues that internationalization policies and programs of Korean HEIs were driven by the government without much consideration of the characteristics and situations of individual HEI in Korea (Byun & Kim, 2011; Cho, 2016a; Shin, 2011a). Undeniably, Korea has intensively focused on measuring and assessing internationalization by quantitative indicators to meet the government's standards of internationalization such as increasing the numbers of foreign students and scholars and establishing various programs and English-speaking classes. Such internationalization of HEIs in Korea has been controversial and many questions are still being raised (Ko, Wei, & Moon, 2019).

In the era of rising call for HEIs to improve their quality to be more sustainable for the preceding decades, it is significant to reexamine how and why Korea's HEIs were driven toward internationalization, and, aside from influences of knowledge-based society and globalization based on neoliberalism, what has been the strongest policy driver of higher education in the past 30 years. It is especially critical to examine the underlying dynamics; the perceived internationalization of HEIs by each stakeholder, the power relations in policy-making, and the voices of different actors as such dynamics come together to shape HEI policies in a certain national context (Jones *et al.*, 2013).

In this regard, this research aims to critically recontextualize the process of internationalization of Korean HEIs with a particular focus on the political dynamics entangled in the process. By doing so, this research is expected to provide a better understanding of the interactive dynamics among different stakeholders that lead to certain consequences of and challenges to internationalizing Korean HEIs. Without examining the political dynamics among various factors as well as the responses of significant actors to HEI internationalization, the current challenges and remaining tasks in translating higher education policy into practice cannot be thoroughly assessed (Fischer & Green, 2018).

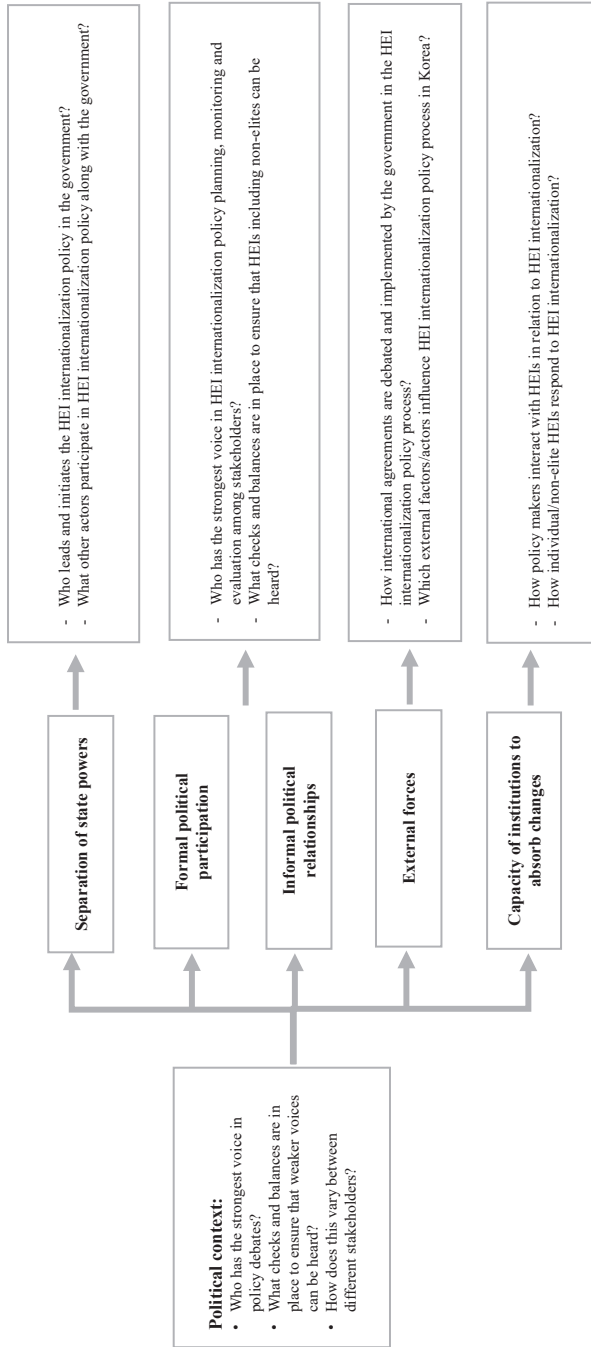
Methodology

This research employed the knowledge, policy and power interface developed by Jones *et al.* (2013), and specifically the analytical framework on political context, to examine the political dynamics in the process of internationalization of Korean HEIs (see Figure 1). Unlike previous more traditional models that cast policy-making as a uniform cycle proceeding rationally through the policy process regardless of the issue, this framework attempts to disentangle the underlying political dynamics by analyzing five key variables (separation of state powers, formal political participation, informal political relationships, external forces and capacity of institutions to absorb change) and deals more explicitly with how policy-making and implementation emerge from the multilayered international and domestic interactions between knowledge and power (Hong, 2018; Jones *et al.*, 2013).

With particular attention to the political context of Korean HEI internationalization, the authors raised detailed questions for each key variable of the original framework to analyze who has the strongest voice in policy debates, what checks and balances are in place to ensure that weaker voices can be heard and how these factors vary among different stakeholders. In order to map the political contexts of HEI internationalization through the lens of the given analytical framework, the authors adopted a scoping review method that provided effective ways of pooling critical amount of past literature for such analysis (see Figure 2). First of all, a large number of pertinent academic journals were searched based on the Social Sciences Citation Index and the Korea Citation Index. The following keywords were included to search through academic journals and government reports published between 1990 and 2020: internationalization, globalization, higher education and South Korea. These keywords were specified criteria to include and exclude documents for analysis. After screening the literature for relevance by title and abstract, 87 documents met the criteria for inclusion. The authors then reviewed the full-text version of these studies and divided the documents into three categories based on more specific research themes related to the political dynamics of internationalization process in Korean HEIs. The categorized themes are “global trends and external forces at the international level”, “internationalization policies and initiatives of Korean HEIs at the national level”, and “current status of internationalization programs at Korean HEIs at the university level”. Finally, 22, 30 and 35 documents were selected to analyze the international, national and university levels, respectively.

The developmental history of internationalization of Korea’s higher education

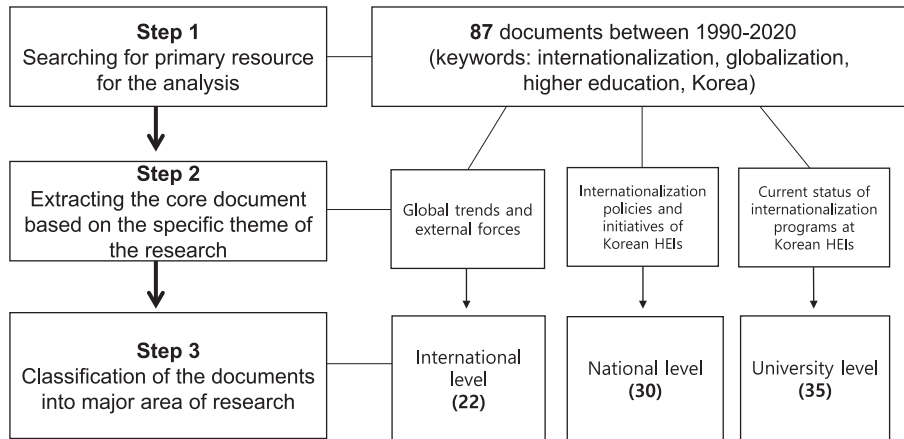
The internationalization of HEIs became a major priority for the Korean government since the 1990s. Particularly, the May 31 Education Reform [1] in 1995 driven by President Kim Young-sam included a quick and strategic approach toward globalization and is recognized as a critical turning point for internationalization of HEIs (Green, 2015; Kim, 2005). Therefore, the researchers re-organized the overall policy direction of HEI internationalization in Korea into five periods based on the main initiatives since the 1990s: deregulation to open the higher education market (1993–1997), expansion of HEI internationalization (1998–2002), more



Note(s): The original analytical framework examining the political context of knowledge, policy and power interface developed by Jones *et al.* (2013) was here modified by the authors

Figure 1. Analytical framework for the political context of the knowledge–policy–power interface

Figure 2.
Scoping review process
for research analysis



assertive policy initiatives to open up HEIs (2003–2007), the peak of HEI internationalization policy (2008–2013) and the period of challenges and transitions in HEI internationalization (see [Appendix](#)).

Initiatives in the first period (1993–1997) mainly focused on deregulation to open up the higher education market by enacting the Basic Plan for Opening Higher Education in response to the upcoming World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiation. In this period, deregulation was particularly emphasized by the government to enhance HEIs' international competitiveness by expanding government scholarships for international students, increasing students exchange programs and developing collaborative curricula with foreign universities (Kim, Hong, Kim, Rhee, & Yoon, 2013; Lee & Lee, 2020). In the second period (1998–2002), the government further deregulated the policies in order to increase student mobility as well as program and provider mobility between HEIs [2]. During this period, the government permitted foreign HEIs to set up branch campuses in Korea, which was the first official government policy to directly open up the Korean higher education market to other countries.

While in the 1990s, Korea tried to gain access to the world's resources under the pressure of globalization, in the 2000s, it attempted to carve out a new space to promote its prestige on the global stage by developing internationalization policies (Palmer & Cho, 2012). In this respect, more international students were invited through the Study Korea Project, and curriculum exchange programs with foreign universities increased in the third period (2003–2007). Moreover, the government started to work with private companies to support international students with their job search in Korea after graduation. In the fourth period (2008–2013), the internationalization policies reached its peak. The government started to promote Korea as an education hub through the Incheon Global Campus (IGC) (Ko *et al.*, 2019) and drafted a roadmap of key tasks toward internationalization, such as customizing curriculum development for international students, supporting international students with job search and offering more information on studying in Korea to attract outstanding international students (Lee, 2016). However, since the fifth period (2014–present), HEI internationalization initiatives are facing challenges of quality assurance. Due to limited policies and systems to support increasing international students at the institutional level, internationalization is undergoing a period of transition (Kim & Lee, 2019; Kim & Lee, 2017; Seo, 2020). In order to support universities through these challenges, the Ministry of Education (MOE) implemented the International Education Quality Assurance System

(IEQAS) since 2011 to manage and evaluate how Korea's host universities are maintaining their quality. Yet, the policies and initiatives thus far have been mainly driven by the government, and Korean HEIs have been struggling to adapt to frequent alterations and reorganizations mandated by government policies, while also seeking to be more autonomous in their response to the global market (Cho & Palmer, 2013).

Analysis of political dynamics in HEI internationalization in Korea based on the knowledge-policy-power interface

Through a scoping review of 87 documents at international, national and university levels, this research found the following distinctive features regarding Korea's political context in the process of HEI internationalization.

Uncritical acceptance of external pressures for internationalization

In order to understand the political dynamics of HEI internationalization in Korea, external pressures such as international agreements that facilitate the internationalization of HEIs need to be examined. According to our critical review on the literature, the single most powerful global instrument that drives internationalization of HEIs is identified as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATSs), a WTO treaty in 1995 that resulted from the Uruguay Round negotiations (Huang, 2007; Ng, 2012). This particular international agreement is often recognized as based on neoliberal principles which resulted in the marketization of HEIs at national levels. Since the agreement on GATs, individual HEIs were forced to enhance their competitiveness in order to survive in the inevitably globalizing era. Thus, internationalization of HEIs is acknowledged to have been very much driven by economic factors as a response to the globalization (Huang, 2007).

In this circumstance, it is questionable if these external forces have steered the internationalization process in a positive direction. GATSs are considered "an effort by multinational corporations and some government agencies in the rich countries to integrate higher education into the legal structures of world trade through WTO" (Altbach, 2004, p. 5). In this respect, GATSs have been the key actor with the most power to push forward internationalization (the knowledge component in the knowledge-policy-power interface), and such external power has changed forms of collaboration among HEIs across borders to force new types of higher education systems led by neoliberal principles. Indeed, most initiatives under the name of internationalization, such as establishing branch campuses and franchised degree programs, were uncritically adopted especially in the developing and middle-income countries, while many developed countries accepted international students for the purpose of earning profits through tuition fees (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Undeniably, many HEIs in the Asia-Pacific countries have been forced to follow these global practices and ideologies without developing their own unique system.

Many researchers argue that Korean HEIs have also been driven by neoliberal policies and market-driven strategies of the WTO/GATSs, which, despite some benefits, brought risks and threats such as commodification and commercialization (Cho, 2016b; Kim, 2011; Lee, 2004b; Yu & Song, 2006). For example, the Korean government carried out domestic education reforms and proclaimed "university innovation movement" as the main strategy for Korea to develop into an "advanced" nation in the global society. According to the education reform plan in 1995, the government stated the importance of university innovation as follows:

The 21st century is the age of informatization and internationalization. The key to national survival strategy in the 21st century is the question of who will become the creative leader of new knowledge, technology, and culture. [. . .]. In order to overcome today's crisis in Korean universities, a university

innovation movement must arise from within the university. (President Advisory Committee for Education, 1996, p. 35)

Additionally, the Korean government has emphasized three key neoliberal principles as its policy drivers: deregulation, competition and marketization. Since then, economic rationales have become dominant in the Korean government's HEI internationalization policies (Byun & Kim, 2011). However, there has not been enough consideration on different ways to perceive internationalization nor on specific plans to minimize the damages that can be caused by letting external influences commodify HEIs into a trade item (Kim, 2011). Unarguably, the Korean government has recognized the internationalization of HEI as a way to promote its prestige of the nation and strengthen its competitiveness in the global market (Cho, 2016b). Thus, it has started to adopt standards set by global rankings to evaluate to what extent each HEIs are following global norms on internationalization (Shin, 2011a). Competition among HEIs has pushed the institutions toward rigorous reforms for internationalization, especially by increasing the number of English medium instruction (EMI) programs and international lecturers and students (Cho, 2016b). This is also clearly stated in the May 31 Education Reform. In 1995, the government announced that "universities have to increase foreign students, and establish the organization dedicated to foreign students when necessary. Also government will provide financial support in the case of a university with a large number of foreign students" (May 31 Education Reform Plan, 1995, p. 42).

As a result, during the mid-2000s, many universities started to provide courses in English. As the number of foreign professors and students increased, universities uncritically competed to raise the number of English lectures. One of the top universities in Korea at that time provided 936 English lecture out of 2,444 lectures in total [3].

As such, the external power has pressured the Korean government to adopt internationalization policies, and the external norms and standards were uncritically accepted and implemented in Korean HEIs. In this process, key HEI stakeholders from the government failed to properly understand international trends on openness in the higher education market in the 1990s (Lee, 2004b). It was only later when most HEIs realized that the global norms and regulations of the WTO/GATS were unscrupulously adopted by none other than their own state (Shin, 2007). But by then, these new strands of neoliberal principles from external forces became essential parts of HEI policy reforms in the following decades.

Unbalanced formal and informal participation at the national level

In the process of internationalization of Korean HEIs, formal and informal participation among stakeholders at the national level has been unbalanced. The main actors in the process of internationalization of Korean HEIs at the national level can be categorized into five groups: i) the government (MOE), ii) the national institute (Korean Education Development Institute or KEDI), iii) the sub-body of MOE (National Institute for International Education or NIIED), iv) the university council (Korean Council for University Education or KCUE) and v) the individual HEIs. Despite distinctive roles of each actor, this research has continuously found that above all other actors the MOE has the most power to shape the process of HEI internationalization.

To begin, the MOE is placed on top of the system to plan, monitor and evaluate internationalization policies. This enables the MOE to have the strongest voice in HEI internationalization policy-making process at the national level. In order for HEIs to gain more autonomy, the government announced "deregulation of higher education institutions as one of its top three priority policy plans" (while the other two priorities were to raise the education budget and national competitiveness) (President Advisory Committee for Education, 1996, p. 31). However, despite its emphasis on applying deregulation policies to allow individual HEIs to vigorously promote internationalization (Kim *et al.*, 2013;

Kim & Lee, 2006; Lee & Lee, 2020; Park & Song, 2013), the main initiatives the government pursued show that the ministry in fact reregulated these institutions through marketing and competition mechanism. This is well-described in the 5.31 Education Reform Plan:

Autonomy of university education should be pursued while strengthening university evaluation and providing financial support according to the evaluation result. Universities are also encouraged to conduct self-evaluation. Based on evaluation results from the universities and other institutions, universities are then subsidized. (President Advisory Committee for Education, 1995, p. 40)

Through successive presidential administrations, the MOE continuously instituted evaluation criteria and subsidized institutions based on HEIs' performance, while the voices of HEIs were not taken into account (Cho & Palmer, 2013; Choi & Kim, 2007; Gao, 2015; Green, 2015; Jang, 2017; Shin, 2011a). Such indirect control mechanisms served to consolidate more power for the MOE to exert even stronger pressures on HEIs (King, 2007; Shin & Harman, 2009). Given such "decentralized centralization system" of government involvement (Henkel, 1997, p. 137), HEIs were forced to meet the indicators set by the government by increasing international students, program/curriculum exchange, EMI programs and research capacity to gain international recognition in the higher education market.

Second, the KEDI, which is recognized as the representative institute of higher education policy research, participated to support the MOE in the internationalization process at the national level. According to close examination of the institute's policy papers, the KEDI has focused on issues such as transformation in the global knowledge society; examples of advanced countries and their HEIs' response to internationalization; the current state of Korean HEIs on internationalization and policy directions for Korean HEIs (Choi & Kim, 2007; Kim *et al.*, 2013; Lee, 2003; Park *et al.*, 2009; Rhee, 2004). These research studies are well aligned with the government's policy focus and especially provide best practices by other advanced countries and HEIs for benchmarking (Park & Song, 2013). Thus, the inevitable role of KEDI as a government affiliated organization has been to underpin the government's internationalization policies for systematic initiation and implementation.

While policies are researched and initiated at the government and national institutional level, the NIIED as a sub-body of MOE has complemented the drive at the national level. With its main mission to promote the "internationalization of Korean education" [4], the NIIED has grown to be the main operator of various government programs serving the purpose of its establishment (Krechetnikov & Pestereva, 2017; Lee, 2004a). Among them, the Korean Government Scholarship Program (KGSP) is the most prominent and broad-scale scholarship program offered by the government through the NIIED. The scholarship program has resulted in unprecedented growth in the number of international students throughout Korean HEIs (MOE Statistics, 2020). The NIIED's role has become even more significant to the government's policy as the MOE announced in 2015 its goal to invite 200,000 international students by 2023 mainly through its scholarships programs (MOE, 2015). However, the institution's role is limited as an implementer of MOE policies rather than an initiator with its own independent voice. It also does not function as an intermediary to complement perspectives of diverse HEIs.

Lastly, to ensure that the voices of all individual actors are heard, the KCUE has the potential to play a significant role specifically for four-year universities in terms of university internationalization. The KCUE is a consultative body founded in 1982 for all four-year universities in Korea, both public and private, with the main mission to serve "as a mechanism to facilitate government-university dialogue and inter-university cooperation. . . to contribute to the improvement of universities' global competitiveness" [5].

As the KCUE recognized the country needed more autonomy over "government led university regulation", it is mandated to support policy development, represent university interests and promote cooperation among universities and HEIs around the world.

(KCUE, 2015). The KCUE indeed collects and represents voices of universities in Korea through research, collaborative discussions and policy suggestions for the National Assembly. However, upon close examination, the council in effect functions more like a sub-body of the MOE than as an autonomous institution. Our analysis reveals that the KCUE publications limit discussions to self-evaluation and how they should be further internationalized according to the government framework. Furthermore, the KCUE is partly commissioned by the MOE to implement key policies, such as student selection for university admission, university evaluation and accreditation, and university information disclosure service operation (KCUE, 2015). Most importantly, the KCUE is in charge of evaluating its own university members through University Accreditation, which is a quality assurance evaluation system “to publicly evaluate whether universities satisfy basic requirements as educational institutions”. As with the other actors, the KCUE has hardly been independent at the national level; it has not functioned to collect and represent university interests nor promoted cooperation among universities as a significant player in a well-balanced power structure.

Based on our review, it can be said that the unbalanced power relations at the national level has left many voices unheard despite the system of checks and balances in place. Although government officials assert that they have continued to ensure autonomy (Shin, Kim, & Park 2007), the main actors participating in internationalization have been staunchly dedicated to the MOE’s policies demanding that HEIs meet government requirements. Unless the actors driving the policy-making process are engaged in wider dialogue, they will not be able to develop policies based on richer evidence, and their options imposed by one power actor will be rather limited in scope (Jones *et al.*, 2013).

Different ways HEIs absorb change

In the process of higher education internationalization, actors at the university level have also been responding to the government’s drive for international recognition, principally by reorganizing their plans, strategies and divisions for internationalization (Lee, 2008), then focusing on meeting the quantitative requirements. Although HEIs seem to be heading toward a similar direction according to the government’s framework, there are performance gaps among HEIs leading to unequal results. These diversified responses from HEIs become more evident when indicators are applied to assess institutional performance under the name of internationalization.

Various instruments to assess internationalization were developed in the West for the purposes of self-evaluation, comparison (benchmarking), accreditation and ranking in the past two decades (Gao, 2015). As measuring became a crucial concern of all HEIs, Asian countries have also started to adopt indicators despite rising debates on their relevance for the Asian context (Shin & Harman, 2009; Teicher, 2008). In the case of Korea, a former member of the National Assembly and Head Minister of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (currently the MoE) urged to internationalize HEIs by increasing more foreign faculty, students, EMI classes and internationally recognized publications since the initial internationalization policy in the 1990s (NewsWire, 2005). Thus, the Korean government mapped out its policy strategies and indicators to manage the rising pressure to improve the international rankings of Korean HEIs especially through university evaluation. Ever since these policy strategies and indicators were set by the MOE, they became a powerful driving force for internationalization and HEIs inevitably began to alter themselves to fit into these specific criteria and has been evaluated and subsidized accordingly (Byun & Kim, 2011; Kim, 2011) [6]. Despite university evaluation reforms through successive presidential administrations, the internationalization came to be perceived as a quantitatively measurable outcome mainly focusing on (1) positions on

international ranking tables, (2) international research collaboration and productivity, (3) the number of international students and faculty, and (4) the quantity of EMI programs (Green, 2015).

However, with such apparent criteria, HEIs are too easily ranked based on simplistic indicators, and only a few are able to make it to the ranking tables, resulting in different responses from HEIs to absorb change. These indicators leave out the majority of the HEIs which eventually results in them receiving less support from the government. HEIs with better reputation and sufficient resources are more capable of implementing internationalization programs. For example, private HEIs located in the Seoul Metropolitan Region and academically specialized universities can more adequately meet the quantitative requirements and acquire resulting incentives (Byun, Jon, & Kim, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, many regional public HEIs struggle merely to borrow the best practices on internationalization and tend to take a more defensive approach to the policies. Private HEIs in rural regions have even more limitations as they are lacking in resource to accomplish internationalization (Byun *et al.*, 2013). In this context, universities claim that the MOE's university evaluation process "create overheated competition among universities and leave them underfunded, while undermining their autonomy" (Bahk, 2021). During one of the most recent protests among HEIs, the Chairperson of the Korean Association for Professional University College Education (KCCE) mentioned that "it is very unfortunate that there was no evaluation of the universities' autonomous quality control and efforts according to the characteristics of each region and major" (Bahk, 2021). In this respect, evaluating all HEIs in a standardized criteria and subsidizing accordingly continues to be an ongoing controversy as it leaves out many other HEIs.

Moreover, the studies analyzed in the research constantly mention that dramatic increase in the aggregate performance of HEIs are concentrated on only a few HEIs. Such outcomes repeatedly show up in the rankings of top universities. For example, the increase in the number of international students, who have been mainly from China, is evident predominantly in private HEIs (MOE Statistics, 2020) [7]. While recruitment of international faculty members also increased in several HEIs, the total percentage of international faculty in all HEIs did not increase, and even this figure is distorted as it includes language instructors (Green, 2015). Moreover, much of the publications in journals listed in the Science Citation Index were only from top-ranking universities (refer to NRF, 2020). Shin (2011) elaborates that the heavy emphasis on the quantity of scholarly achievements was at the expense of quality. Last but not least, despite the importance of EMI programs to attract international students and to deter domestic students from going abroad, there is a well-known quality gap of EMI programs among HEIs due to the students' lack of language proficiency, shortage of English-speaking professors, poor quality of instruction, unavailable support systems and excessive faculty workload (Byun & Kim, 2011; Kim, 2019; Yang, 2001).

Because HEIs are the main implementers of internationalization, different characteristics and settings of HEIs, not just the policy contexts, can result in diverse consequences (Knight, 2004; Burnett & Huisman, 2010). In Korea's highly centralized higher education system, the powerful control mechanism of evaluations based on financial incentives have resulted in advantaging certain HEIs over others due to unequal institutional capacity. Although there have been policy changes in university reform and evaluation through successive presidential administrations, the indirect control mechanisms remain [8]. Thus, it can be implied that in the process of such complex political dynamics, all the directions are given top-down, while not much is heard from or considered of diverse individual HEIs. In such circumstances, it is solely up to the HEIs to meet the requirements, eventually widening the gap between the few outstanding HEIs and the rest.

Implications and conclusion

This paper provides an analysis of the dynamics within Korea's political context that drove the internationalization of HEIs under the influence of globalization by employing the knowledge–policy–power interface framework. The perspective taken by this research brings much-needed nuance to the analysis by focusing on the complex dynamics of external factors, and key actors and their responses in the process of internationalization. By recontextualizing the political context in Korea's HEI internationalization based on this framework, this research found key characteristics that shape the dynamics of power, policy and knowledge in the process: uncritical acceptance of external pressures for the internationalization of higher education; unbalanced formal and informal participation at national level and different ways HEIs absorb change.

Ever since the education reform in Korea was influenced by the external forces such as GATSs, internationalization has been pushed by economic factors at the national level, and in the marketization of higher education, HEIs were demanded to enhance their competitiveness and adopt global standards (Shin, 2007). Looking closely into the power dynamics of the actors in this process, it has been found that the unbalanced power relation between the government and other stakeholders left many voices unheard and forced all actors to follow the government's preferences. Although direct governmental involvement seems to have decreased, indirect mechanisms such as funding and outcome-based evaluations have replaced direct control as even more powerful controlling mechanisms (King, 2007; Shin & Harman, 2009). Thus, funding allocation based on quantitative measurements became the aims and the tool, as well as a strong driving force behind HEI internationalization, but it has also raised considerable questions on issues in quality (Byun & Kim, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2006; Palmer & Cho, 2012; Shin, 2011a).

The focus on quantitative accomplishments limited the scope of institutional performance at the cost of diversity and quality (Shin & Harman, 2009; Teichler, 2008). Overemphasis on indicators and rankings left HEIs competing among themselves to enhance their international status and attract more international students and scholars (Mergner, 2011) while sacrificing institutional diversity. Such mechanisms enabled only a few HEIs to actively contribute in the process of internationalization while leaving out majority of the HEIs. Moreover, as international student mobility increases, many challenges are surfacing due to limited policy and administrative support for international students, lack of language proficiency and cultural understanding of students and lecturers and increasing drop-out rates and illegal stays (Jang, 2017; Kim, 2011; Kim, 2019; Kim & Lee, 2017). Unless government policies fully integrate various voices to be heard by all stakeholders and consider characteristics and contexts of each HEI, further progress cannot be expected (Shin, 2011b; Van Damme, 2001).

As there is a lack of understanding of the critical context of the knowledge–policy–power interface despite the significant influence of political dynamics in the process of internationalization, this research reexamined the internationalization of HEIs in Korea by providing a better understanding of the political dynamics between knowledge and power that influence the directions and contents of policy dialogues and documents. In short, this research discussed how the powerful government, which has been stirred by external forces, shaped the limited knowledge discourse on internationalization while triggering power games among various HEIs. Thereby, the research highlights that the characteristics of HEIs and the voices of all stakeholders should be better accounted for so that internationalization can proceed in diverse ways from the ground up to eventually enhance and assure educational quality. Moreover, this analysis gives implications to countries that have followed global market principles to internationalize their HEIs, but now are questioning their ways for the upcoming era. Most importantly, the multilayered political dynamics that come together to shape the content and directions of policies in a certain national context should be

taken into account in the process of policy-making. Such recontextualization would provide a better understanding of the underlying dynamics that lead to certain consequences of and challenges in translating higher education policy into practice, especially for those who face the challenge of balancing between state-driven policies and ever-diversifying needs and demands of HEIs.

Notes

1. The 5.31 education reform was government-driven initiatives in order to respond to globalization and informatization in education system.
2. Knight divided the phase of internationalization of HEIs into student mobility, program and provider mobility, and education hub (Ko *et al.*, 2019).
3. Cited from news article (<https://www.segye.com/newsView/20110417002158>).
4. Refer to the NIIED official website.
5. cited from the official website of KCUE (english.kcue.or.kr)
6. Indicators listed in the report are: number of branch campuses abroad, number of international exchange programs, number of joint curricula, number of programs credited by international accreditation, number of EMI programs, number of international students, number of international faculty, number of different ethnicities of both students and faculty, number of international research centers, number of journal citations in international journals, number of international joint research, number of participating or hosting international forums.
7. According to MOE statistics on international students in Korea, 65,318 out of 153,695 international students (42%) are reported to have come from China. 84% of the international students are currently enrolled in Korean private HEIs.
8. Today, the Korean government provides a separate evaluation system to measure the internationalization of Korean HEIs to provide information and attract foreign students through the IEQAS.

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Appendix
Policy directions and main initiatives in the process of internationalization of Korean HEIs

Periods	Policy direction	Main initiatives
1993–1997	Deregulation to open the HE markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enacted Basic Plan for Opening Higher President Advisory Committee for Education (1996) - Expanded provision of government scholarships (1997) - Planned for expanding exchange programs with foreign universities (1997) - Allowed foreign institutions to establish private universities in Korea, and enacted regulations regarding joint management of Korean and foreign universities (1997) - Allowed for collaborative curriculums between Korean and foreign universities (1997)
1998–2002	Expanding internationalization of HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revised the regulation allowing Korean universities to hire international professors and teachers (1999) - Established NIIED for inviting international students to Korea (1999) - Joined the ASEM-DUO Fellowship (2000) - Permitted foreign HEIs to set up branch campuses in Korea (1998) - Established joint-operated universities between Korea and other countries (2002) - Deregulated requirements for establishing foreign universities in Korea (2002)
2003–2007	More assertive policy initiatives to open HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Established Study Korea Project (2004) - Expanded Global Korea Scholarship to attract more international students to Korea (2006) - Deregulated curriculum exchange and credit recognition with foreign universities (2006) - Decided to build an education hub in the Incheon Free Economic Zone (IFEZ) (2007)
2008–2013	Peak of HEIs internationalization policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraged invitation of distinguished international scholars through the World Class University Project (2008) - Held a ground-breaking ceremony of Incheon Global Campus (IGC) (2009) - Announced the measures to improve management and support of foreign student (2009) - Expanded Global Korea Scholarships (GSK) (2010) - Launched the Campus Asia program (2011) - Facilitated the expansion of Korean HEIs to other countries (2013) - Joined the Industrialized Countries Instrument Education Cooperation Programs (EU ICI-ECP) (2013) - Launched the Study Korea 2020 Project (2012)

(continued)

Periods	Policy direction	Main initiatives
2014–present	Facing challenges and transitions in the internationalization of HEIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planned to invite 200,000 international students to study in Korea by 2023 - Joined the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) program (2016) - Launched the International Education Quality Assurance System (IEQAS) (2015) - Facilitated preparation of regulations to enable Korean HEIs to establish campuses overseas (2016) - Planned to attract five more foreign universities in Korea (2017)

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