

CHAPTER

1

HIGHER EDUCATION WITHOUT WALLS

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of higher education has undergone significant changes over the past few decades, catalyzed by advances in technology, shifts in societal needs, and a growing demand for more flexible learning environments. The concept of "Higher Education Without Walls" reflects this evolving dynamic, particularly in the case of Samsun University, where the physical boundaries between the university and learners are steadily diminishing. The rise of online education, virtual classrooms, and open-access resources primarily drives this shift, transcending the traditional campus model. As we enter the twenty-first century, the future of higher education without walls offers both challenges and opportunities. In this chapter, we explore the forces driving this transformation, drawing purposefully on Samsun University as a case; its implications for the future of learning; and the strategies that institutions and learners can adopt to succeed within this emerging paradigm.

1.2 WHAT IS THE UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS FRAMEWORK?

The concept of a "University without Walls" has transformed from a

metaphor into a concrete framework for modern education. This shift represents a significant change in how academic institutions engage with their communities. The model was first tested in 1971 at the University of Massachusetts, laying the foundation for what is now a globally recognized approach (Goldschmid, 1976). This early adoption highlights a pioneering spirit in educational reform, addressing the barriers of time and location that have historically limited academic collaboration.

Suchikova and Tsybuliak (2023) examine how this framework allows universities, faculties, and students to connect more effectively, fostering a dynamic learning environment that transcends traditional boundaries. Dallmann (2021) places this ongoing development within a historical context, noting that the evolution of the "University without Walls" concept has been progressing globally for over five decades. This long trajectory speaks to the enduring relevance and adaptability of educational models that prioritize accessibility and collaboration in an increasingly interconnected world. Additionally, a report from the European University Association (2021), titled *Universities without Walls: A Vision for 2030*, emphasizes that the success of future universities depends on their willingness to remain open and actively engaged with the broader society. This insight underscores the necessity for universities to adapt to changing societal needs while maintaining their commitment to core educational values. To conclude, these perspectives illustrate the significance of the "University without Walls" concept as a crucial response to contemporary educational challenges, promoting inclusivity and engagement within the academic landscape.

1.3 WHAT IS INTERNATIONALIZATION?

Internationalization is a dynamic and strategic initiative undertaken by universities to broaden their educational, research, and community service activities on a worldwide scale, actively engaging with a diverse range of cultures and societies. This comprehensive process encompasses various programs, such as student and faculty exchanges that facilitate

immersive cultural experiences, as well as international collaborations that promote knowledge sharing and innovation. Furthermore, universities establish research initiatives aimed at addressing urgent global challenges, such as climate change, public health, and social justice. By fostering a global perspective, universities not only provide educational opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds but also forge meaningful international research partnerships that enrich the academic community and contribute to a more interconnected world.

According to Altbach and Knight (2007), globalization and internationalization are related but have different meanings. Globalization refers to economic and academic changes happening in the twenty-first century. In contrast, internationalization is about the strategies that schools use to engage with the global environment. Schools pursue internationalization to gain competitive advantages, improve knowledge and language skills, and enhance education with global views. Common efforts include opening branch campuses, forming partnerships across borders, and providing programs in English. Quality assurance is essential for international higher education and a comprehensive study by De Wit and Hunter (2015) for the European Parliament provides a thorough understanding of the internationalization of higher education in the European context. Drawing on two surveys, an in-depth analysis of digital learning, and ten national reports from Europe alongside seven from outside the region, this research delivers robust conclusions and targeted recommendations for the future of internationalization in higher education across Europe. It emphasizes that internationalization involves engaging in global rankings and competitions, which are essential for driving institutions to elevate their standards and innovate their educational offerings.

1.4 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN "UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS" AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

There exists a significant connection between the concepts of the "university without walls" and internationalization, as both initiatives

strive to transcend conventional boundaries and promote the global exchange of knowledge. The "university without walls" model effectively dismantles both physical and cognitive limitations, enabling universities to engage not only with local communities but also with audiences on a global scale. By leveraging digital platforms and employing hybrid learning methodologies, institutions can broaden access for international students and foster global collaborations. Furthermore, fundamental values such as sustainability, global awareness, and social responsibility are essential components inherent to both approaches.

1.5 THE ROLE OF FLEXIBILITY AND RESILIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The concept of the "university without walls" embodies a spirit of flexibility and resilience, vital in overcoming the challenges of declining enrollment and technological disruption. This model empowers universities to transcend traditional campus boundaries and engage with a diverse and expansive audience.

We witness the fact that undergraduate and graduate enrollment is declining sharply worldwide, especially in Western countries like the United States. For example, in the U.S., undergraduate enrollment dropped from 18.1 million in 2010-11 to 15 million in 2021, with a projected 10% decline in high school graduates by 2035. While these numbers focus on the U.S., similar trends are happening in other countries, too.

Even in Türkiye, where university enrollment rates are high, we can expect a significant drop in the near future. In the 2020-2021 period, the total number of students was 8,240,997, while in the 2024-2025 period, this number decreased to 6,835,115. This means there has been a decline of 1,405,882 students. In other words, the student population has experienced a decrease of approximately 17.06%. In light of this reality, universities need to explore innovative strategies to maintain stable enrollment numbers. The "university without walls" model offers a viable solution by enabling institutions to extend their reach beyond

traditional physical campuses. This approach can attract international students through online and hybrid learning opportunities, ensuring relevancy in a rapidly changing educational landscape. With many universities facing an 18% decline in net tuition revenue, adopting the "university without walls" strategy allows them to offer flexible, cost-effective programs that appeal to both local and international learners. By delivering high-quality education without the financial strain of maintaining physical infrastructure, these institutions can enhance their resilience in the face of financial challenges.

1.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE AND HYBRID LEARNING

The "university without walls" approach is built on the foundation of digitalization and hybrid learning, making it a central strategy for modern internationalization efforts. By removing the physical limitations of traditional campuses, this model allows universities to engage with students across the world, making education accessible to all.

By fall 2022, over 50% of U.S. students had enrolled in at least one online course. This dramatic shift reflects the core principle of a "university without walls"—providing education without the constraint of physical presence. Universities can now attract international students who may not be able to relocate, offering flexible learning through platforms like Coursera and edX. These digital platforms allow institutions to maintain their internationalization goals despite declining domestic enrollments. Aharony and Bar-Ilan (2016) identified, for example, several perceived advantages of Coursera and MOOCs, highlighting that students appreciate these courses for their potential to enhance English proficiency, provide practical and applicable knowledge, and offer repeated access to lecture materials. Furthermore, online learning environments have been recognized for their ability to support personal development and skill acquisition. In this context, scholars have emphasized that such platforms can promote self-directed, self-regulated, and lifelong learning practices (Saks & Leijen, 2014).

The "university without walls" model therefore facilitates cross-border collaborations, enabling institutions to connect with international partners. For example, during the pandemic, universities used hybrid models to ensure education continuity globally. This approach, which blends in-person and online learning, aligns perfectly with the idea of breaking down physical barriers, ensuring that international students can access the same education as their on-campus peers.

1.7 CURRICULUM REFORM TO ADDRESS GLOBAL CHALLENGES

The "university without walls" concept is about more than just digital access; it aims to change educational content to address global challenges. This flexible approach allows universities to redesign their curriculums to focus on solving issues and attract students from diverse backgrounds. Foreign-language enrolments have fallen by 30%, while the demand for STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields is growing. Universities that adopt the "university without walls" model can create interdisciplinary programs that focus on global issues like AI, sustainability, and ethics. By breaking traditional curriculum barriers, these universities can offer courses that interest both local and international students, making education more relevant worldwide. The "university without barricades" framework helps develop global skills by giving students real-world problem-solving opportunities, regardless of their location. For instance, universities can organize international research collaborations on climate science or AI ethics through a hybrid or fully digital approach, fostering genuine global education.

A beneficial example of curriculum change is the Expanded Student Engagement Project (ESE) at the University of Toronto (U of T). This project, as noted by Brugmann et al. (2023), has created three inventories to enhance student knowledge about sustainability and encourage participation in sustainability initiatives. The sustainability course inventory is especially significant because it is based on the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach aligns U of T's courses with global standards and shows how local curricula can relate to international sustainability goals.

The sustainability course inventory indicates strong support for sustainability, highlighting 2022 unique courses, particularly in SDG 13 (Climate Action), while showing less focus on SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). The community-engaged learning inventory and co-curricular opportunities further demonstrate U of T's comprehensive approach to sustainability, featuring 154 community-engaged learning courses and 67 sustainability-focused student groups. These inventories help create an engaged culture within the university, leading to a meaningful impact on sustainable practices both locally and globally.

By integrating these initiatives into U of T's course management system and developing a new sustainability pathways program, the ESE demonstrates that local curriculum changes can support global sustainability efforts. This prepares students to tackle urgent challenges. In summary, even though these efforts are based in a specific local context, they have the potential to significantly influence global sustainability outcomes. This underscores the connection between local actions and global goals in higher education (Brugmann et al., 2023).

1.8 AI'S ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

AI plays a crucial role in enhancing the "university without walls" model, as it allows for personalized, adaptive learning experiences that cater to the diverse needs of international students. A recent study was carried out by Egunjobi and Adeyeye (2024); they investigated the transformative role of augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) in the field of education, emphasizing their capacity to enhance learning experiences. AR facilitates the creation of immersive environments that render abstract concepts more accessible, while AI personalizes the educational process by assessing student performance

and delivering tailored materials and feedback. Collectively, these technologies empower educators to cultivate dynamic and inclusive learning environments that address diverse student needs. This chapter presents several successful case studies, including virtual laboratories and AI-based tutoring systems, and underscores AI's capability to automate administrative functions. However, the authors acknowledge that challenges such as privacy concerns and the digital divide may impede widespread adoption. Despite these obstacles, AR and AI are poised to significantly influence the future trajectory of education. This emerging impact is already visible in institutions that proactively integrate AI into their teaching and outreach efforts. A strong example of this in practice is the Samsun University AI Summer School, designed specifically for high school students. Applicants were evaluated based on their CVs, statements of purpose, and reference letters provided by their school principals. From more than 300 applicants, 50 students were selected to participate in the 2025 summer program, where they received free AI training delivered by university faculty and developed their own AI-driven projects. Through this initiative, Samsun University has positioned itself as a pioneer in AI education, fostering early talent and raising public awareness of artificial intelligence far beyond the traditional boundaries of the university.

AI-driven platforms play a vital role in realizing the concept of a "university without walls," providing international students with personalized learning experiences that effectively address language and cultural barriers. As domestic college enrollment rates decline, the support of AI in internationalization becomes essential, allowing students from across the globe to engage meaningfully with academic content, regardless of their geographical location. This enhanced "university without walls" model also optimizes key processes such as admissions and visa applications for international students. By adopting AI to automate these procedures, universities can increase their international student enrollment, which is increasingly crucial amidst the financial and demographic challenges many institutions face.

1.9 PHYGITAL CAMPUSES: BLENDING PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL LEARNING

The "university without walls" model extends the idea of blending physical and digital learning into a seamless experience that supports both local and international students. This model ensures that education is no longer confined by physical campuses.

Global Access and Flexibility: The rapid growth of online learning (with more than 50% of students now taking at least one online course) exemplifies the "university without walls" concept. By offering flexible learning environments that combine the best of in-person and online education, universities can cater to international students who may prefer to begin their studies online before transitioning to on-campus learning. This flexibility is vital for attracting students from regions where relocating for education may be difficult.

Phygital Learning: This hybrid model, central to the "university without walls" concept, allows students to participate in global academic communities regardless of location. For instance, international students who might face challenges attending traditional campuses can still engage in high-quality education through digital platforms while enjoying occasional in-person opportunities when feasible. However, when students are on campus to study, they should be well supported by their tutors or mentors since a recent study carried out by Atobatele, et al. (2024) revealed the importance of faculty engagement for the success of international students in higher education. As student populations become more diverse, the study highlights ways to help these students adjust academically, socially, and culturally. Faculty involvement in extracurricular activities fosters cross-cultural interactions and a sense of belonging, while mentorship programs provide personalized guidance. The review underscores the need for faculty training to effectively support diverse student groups, emphasizing that faculty engagement is vital for the academic success and well-being of international students.

1.10 SUSTAINABILITY AND GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

The "university without walls" approach presents a transformative opportunity for higher education institutions to embrace global responsibility, particularly in advancing sustainability. By moving away from traditional campus-based operations, universities can substantially reduce their environmental impact while promoting sustainable practices on a worldwide scale. In Brugmann et al. (2023), the authors emphasize the crucial role of the curriculum transformation process in promoting sustainability education. They argue that by redesigning curricula to align with sustainability principles and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), educational institutions can foster greater awareness and engagement among students. This transformation is essential for equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to address global sustainability challenges effectively.

This innovative model encourages the adoption of eco-friendly campus designs and the integration of sustainability into academic curricula. As international students increasingly prioritize environmental issues, this commitment to sustainability becomes a significant draw for them. Furthermore, universities can forge partnerships with international organizations to confront pressing global challenges, such as climate change, demonstrating their dedication to a more sustainable future.

Institutions can effectively lower their carbon footprints by minimizing the need for large physical campuses and instead opting for digital infrastructures. This not only aligns with their sustainability goals but also ensures that universities remain competitive in the evolving global education market, attracting environmentally conscious students from around the world and securing their position as leaders in the field.

1.11 IMPLICATIONS

The "university without walls" concept is a transformative vision that redefines the role of higher education in the twenty first century. As

universities face unprecedented challenges—such as declining domestic enrollments, financial pressures, and the need to stay globally competitive—this model offers a comprehensive solution by dismantling both physical and intellectual barriers that have traditionally defined higher education. It ushers in a new era where access to education is democratized, knowledge sharing is globalized, and learning is no longer confined by geographical boundaries or campus walls.

1.11.1 Financial Sustainability Through Global Reach

As financial pressures mount—exacerbated by declining tuition revenue and increasing operational costs—universities are forced to rethink their revenue models. The "university without walls" framework allows institutions to scale their educational offerings without the need for expansive physical infrastructure. By utilizing digital platforms like Coursera, edX, and FutureLearn, universities can offer degree programs, micro credentials, and short courses to students around the world. This model not only reduces the overhead costs associated with maintaining large campuses but also provides a new revenue stream through international enrollments.

Implication: By tapping into the global market of lifelong learners and professionals seeking flexible, online education, universities can diversify their revenue streams. This financial sustainability is crucial for maintaining academic programs, supporting research, and investing in faculty and infrastructure improvements in the long run.

1.11.2 Global Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

The "university without walls" concept transcends national borders, fostering deeper international collaboration between institutions, researchers, and students. Universities are no longer isolated entities; they become nodes in a global network of knowledge exchange. Through partnerships with international universities and research centers, institutions can engage in collaborative projects that address

pressing global challenges such as climate change, public health, and AI ethics.

Implication: Global collaboration expands the scope and impact of academic research, allowing universities to contribute to solutions for global problems. This also enhances the institution's reputation as a global thought leader, attracting international students, faculty, and funding from international organizations and governments.

For example, at Samsun University, the International Relations Office emphasizes the institution's internationalization strategy, which aims "to increase the scientific effectiveness and productivity of students and research staff in both national and international areas." The university participates in the Erasmus+ program and maintains bilateral agreements for student and staff mobility, enabling its community to engage in global exchanges.

1.11.3 AI and Digital Platforms: Personalizing Education

Artificial intelligence and digital platforms are integral components of the "university without walls" framework. AI enables universities to offer personalized learning experiences, adapting content to the needs of individual students, including those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This is especially critical for international students, who may require additional support in language, learning styles, or contextual understanding of course material.

Implication: The use of AI in education ensures that students, regardless of their location, receive tailored feedback and support, improving retention and success rates. This fosters inclusivity, enabling universities to provide high-quality education to students from underrepresented or marginalized communities globally.

In alignment with this vision of equity and accessibility, Samsun University integrated a compulsory artificial intelligence course into all undergraduate curricula in 2025, regardless of program, major, or academic discipline. This initiative ensures that every student—across engineering, humanities, health sciences, and social sciences—can

understand, utilize, and benefit from AI technologies equally. Through this step, the university aims to democratize AI literacy and equip all learners with the skills needed to thrive in an AI-driven academic and professional landscape.

1.11.4 Interdisciplinary Learning for Global Relevance

The "university without walls" model promotes learning across different fields. It breaks down traditional barriers between subjects to solve global challenges. By offering programs that integrate disciplines such as AI, sustainability, social justice, and business, universities can attract students who are motivated by a desire to contribute to global solutions.

Implication: This approach both prepares students for the jobs of the future and equips them with the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate a complex, interconnected world. Interdisciplinary learning fosters a generation of graduates who are not only career-ready but also equipped to tackle societal and global challenges, enhancing the institution's global appeal.

Reflecting this commitment to interdisciplinarity, Samsun University requires every student to take at least two courses outside their own program, selecting classes offered by other faculties or departments. This policy creates mixed and diverse classroom environments where students—and lecturers—interact with peers from different academic backgrounds. As a result, learners gain exposure to multiple perspectives, develop broader intellectual flexibility, and build networks that transcend disciplinary boundaries.

1.11.5 Sustainability and Social Responsibility

Incorporating sustainability into the "university without walls" model highlights the growing recognition that universities must take responsibility for their environmental and societal impacts. Universities that embrace eco-friendly practices and promote sustainability in their

curricula attract environmentally conscious students and faculty from across the globe. By focusing on global sustainability projects, universities contribute to a greener planet while enhancing their international reputation.

Implication: The emphasis on sustainability aligns universities with global movements towards reducing carbon footprints and addressing climate change. This not only positions them as leaders in sustainable education but also attracts international students who are driven by a passion for environmental activism and global stewardship.

In line with this philosophy, Samsun University offers courses covering all 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that students gain a broad understanding of global sustainability priorities. While each SDG may not be addressed in equal depth, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of every goal and encourages students to engage with sustainability from multiple angles. This holistic approach is made possible by the university's "University Without Walls" vision, which prioritizes openness, global awareness, and societal responsibility.

1.11.6 Global Citizenship and Ethical Leadership

At the core of the "university without walls" model lies the commitment to cultivating global citizens. This approach emphasizes an education that transcends mere technical and academic skills, promoting ethical leadership, cultural awareness, and a sense of responsibility toward the global community. While students are equipped for their careers, they are also encouraged to engage in critical thinking about their roles in society and how they can contribute to the greater good.

Implication: By producing graduates who are globally aware and socially responsible, universities can enhance their reputation as institutions that prepare future leaders. This attracts international students who are not only seeking a degree but also looking for an education that empowers them to make a difference in the world.

1.11.7 Inclusive and Accessible Education

The "university without walls" concept promotes the democratization of education, ensuring that students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and locations can access high-quality learning opportunities. By minimizing the necessity for physical attendance and providing flexible online options, universities are able to reach underserved populations, including those in rural areas, conflict zones, and low-income communities.

Implication: This model has the potential to reduce global education inequities, offering opportunities to students who may otherwise be excluded from higher education due to geographic or financial barriers. By expanding their reach, universities can play a pivotal role in improving global education access and equity.

1.12 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the concept of a "university without walls" offers an inspiring vision for the future of higher education. This approach ensures that institutions remain relevant and impactful in a rapidly changing world. By embracing flexibility, global collaboration, and sustainability, universities can effectively meet the needs of a diverse, global student population while tackling some of the world's most pressing challenges. Together, we can foster a more inclusive, innovative, and interconnected academic landscape. I look forward to the remarkable progress we will achieve as we continue on this journey.

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