



# Strategic model of internationalization of Ecuadorian HEIs: The case of the University of Guayaquil

Modelo estratégico de internacionalización de las ies ecuatorianas: Caso Universidad De Guayaquil

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## ABSTRACT

With the last institutional evaluations carried out by the Council for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Control Body) to which the Universities and Polytechnic Schools of Ecuador, it was possible to standardize behind a series of indicators the quality and trajectory of the institution of higher education; which leads Ecuadorian education to move to the next level, being internationalization the way to consolidate research, teaching and extension, in order not to lose its space in the competitive global market. Discussions on internationalization have revolutionized and have become a new challenge for Ecuadorian universities, so they are forced to adopt certain policies formulated by national and international organizations, inducing them to go through specific evaluations (career) or institutions, framing as an objective to identify and

program internationalization processes that universities in neighboring countries have executed, and that according to the procedure of these foreign higher education institutions are related to the Institutional Development Plan (PEDI) and the Institutional Plan of Internationalization, which deserves attention in this research, which for this purpose will be taken as a reference to the impacts on the University of Guayaquil-UG.

## RESUMEN

Con las últimas evaluaciones institucionales realizadas por el Consejo de Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (Órgano de Control) a las que las Universidades y Escuelas Politécnicas del Ecuador, se logró estandarizar detrás de una serie de indicadores la calidad y trayectoria de la institución de educación superior; lo que conlleva a la educación ecuatoriana a pasar al siguiente nivel, siendo la internacionalización el camino para consolidar la investigación, la docencia y la extensión, con el objetivo de no perder su espacio frente al mercado mundial competitivo. Las discusiones sobre la internacionalización ha revolucionado y se ha convertido en un nuevo desafío para las universidades ecuatorianas, por lo que se ven obligadas a adoptar determinadas políticas formuladas por organismos nacionales e internacionales, induciéndolas a pasar por evaluaciones específicas (carrera) o instituciones, enmarcando como objetivo identificar y programar procesos de internacionalización que universidades de países vecinos han ejecutado, y que de acuerdo al proceder de dichas instituciones de educación superior extranjeras están relacionadas con el Plan de Desarrollo Institucional (PEDI) y el Plan Institucional de Internacionalización del cual merece atención esta investigación que para el efecto se tomará como referencia los impactos en la Universidad de Guayaquil-UG.

## Keywords / Plabras clave

internationalization, research, higher education, Universidad de Guayaquil, higher education, Universidad de Guayaquil

internacionalización, investigación, educación superior, Universidad de Guayaquil

## Introduction

At a global level, the term internationalization in higher education (Bravo 2019) reflects one of the ways in which a country responds to the impact of globalization, but with the particularity of respecting the individuality of each nation; focusing on recognizing that the international dimension is an important component of the mission and main functions of the university, therefore, it should be included as one of the elements that are analyzed in the quality review process. (Bernasconi et al. 2020) It then analyzes the quality of policies, procedures and specific internationalization programs, related to student mobility, faculty exchange, research and knowledge transfer, foreign language proficiency, handling of technological tools and technical assistance, among others; finally, it refers to the internationalization of quality assurance procedures, which are generally defined at the national level. (Boadi 2015).

With the consequent development of new concepts based on Knight and De Wit (1999) proposed a typology to understand the areas of emphasis that internationalization has had and according to what they have found in different investigations, four approaches were identified, as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1.** *Typology to understand the areas of emphasis and focus of the researchers.*

Approach	Description
<b>Activity</b>	Categories and types of activities used to describe internationalization, such as: curriculum, student/faculty/exchange, technical assistance, international students
<b>Competition</b>	Development of new skills, attitudes and values in students, teachers and administrative staff. As the emphasis on educational outcomes grows, there is an increasing interest in identifying and defining global/international competencies.
<b>Ethos</b>	Emphasis on creating a campus climate and culture that promotes and supports

	international and intercultural initiatives.
<b>Process</b>	Integration of an international or intercultural dimension in teaching, research and service through a combination of a wide range of activities, policies and procedures.

Source: Own translation. Taken from Knight and De wit (1999, pp14-15).

Knight (1994) in his research states that the internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international / intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution the following concept of internationalization; HEIs that focus on this concept should understand that the integration of the international and intercultural dimension should be a key part of the institution's programs, policies and procedures, and not a marginal aspect); making it clear that the internationalization of higher education is not only a response to the demands of globalization and countries, but also responds to the needs of interaction and interrelation of the different cultural and ethnic groups within a country.

Knight and de Wit (1999) state that institutions have various reasons that motivate their internationalization, but these should not be part of the concept, which should be articulated with the primary and universal functions of a higher education institution (teaching, research and extension). They state that "it is difficult to find a definition of internationalization that is appropriate and sensitive to higher education systems in a wide variety of countries and cultures"; however, from their research they identified four mutually complementary motives or reasons that explain the inclusion of the international dimension in higher education: 1) political, 2) economic, 3) academic and 4) social.

With respect to academic reasons, studies and research affirm that one of the main reasons for the internationalization of higher education is the achievement of international academic standards for teaching and research; in the face of which, the authors warn of the concern that exists for the uniformity and homogeneity that may arise from the excessive application of international norms(Ortega, Garces, and Ruíz, 2021).

The term internationalization of higher education in the 21st century is used not only by higher education institutions, but also by governments, non-governmental organizations, UNESCO, the World Bank, the OECD, among others.(Vol, María, and Zuluaga 2021). Almost all higher education institutions refer to their international dimension in their mission statements and in the formulation of their profiles. On the other hand, internationalization is embedded in a national value system, which, in the face of growing competition, implies that it is better to study at home. Finally, internationalization also reflects the international inequality that exists between nations and regions of the world because about three-quarters of global mobility is vertical.(Iii 2019)

Vicent-Lacrin (2011) has proposed a tentative typology of approaches to interpret internationalization policies, generating results from using this typology for the analysis of the internationalization of higher education allow concluding that "not all countries have an explicit policy for the internationalization of their higher education programs, quite the contrary.

From the internationalization policy approach (Rios-Campos et al. 2022) These in turn disaggregate highly skilled migration, profit generation and capacity building, which, embodied in objectives, internationalization, mechanisms, focus, migration, policies, long-term benefits, which gives way to cross-border higher education with three scenarios that depend on the development of the internationalization of higher education, illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Scenarios that depend on the development of the Internationalization of HEIs*

<b>Scenario 1</b>	<b>Scenario 2</b>	<b>Scenario 3</b>
<b>Sustained and diversified internationalization. The process of internationalization of higher education continues. Diversity of higher education systems HEIs in English and Asian-speaking countries that are</b>	<b>Convergence towards a liberal model</b> Higher education is understood as a service industry for commercial exchange. Competition for foreign students who can pay the market price is fierce and difficult.	<b>The triumph of the (old) emerging economies</b> Emerging economies are already "developed" and their education systems are highly competitive in quality and price.

**concerned with revenue generation will sell their higher education programs according to international market expectations: acquiring franchises, establishing campuses abroad, and offering private institutional management services abroad. Higher education will become a service industry in these countries, mainly in English-speaking countries. HEIs in continental Europe and Japan seek to recruit international students with incentives such as subsidies for domestic and international students. Countries that do not have the resources or interest to compete internationally with educational services will maintain an open attitude to promote academic and cultural exchanges. Almost all countries have national education quality assurance systems**

HEIs are free to set the prices of their services. Cross-border higher education continues to increase significantly because developing countries have not been able to meet local demand and see in this type of education a way to stimulate the level of national higher education and improve its quality. The concept of cross-border education has gained recognition in affluent countries. A large number of service providers, including private companies, have entered the cross-border higher education market through partnerships with traditional universities. Private investment for both the supply and demand of higher education has increased and public resources have decreased. This will generate a heated debate on access to higher education in a context in which scholarships and subsidies are insufficient to guarantee access for the least favored students. HEIs will experience financial difficulties due to the difficulty of recruiting enough students to guarantee

Most local HEIs and educational service providers established partnerships with international HEIs and companies to develop their own expertise. Local HEIs established flexible yet strict accreditation and quality assurance regulations to guarantee the objective of ensuring a minimum level of quality and consistency between local and cross-border educational programs. This will improve the quality of education in these countries and allow them to retain a greater number of students who have completed their studies abroad and attract students from other developing countries. An example of this will be India, which will become the number one exporter of educational services and a host country for foreign students.

**and play a key role in coordinating the international mobility of students and highly qualified personnel.**

**The recognition of qualifications and diplomas remains a relatively complex process, examined on a case-by-case basis, with the exception of professions such as medicine and engineering, which have international terms of reference.**

their economic sustainability due to the high competition and supply in the market.

Almost all countries have national quality assurance mechanisms and diploma and qualification recognition systems.

There are more and more international qualifications

(certifications) and HEIs will seek to obtain these certifications to avoid doubts about the quality of their services and will try to enter the rankings of accredited universities.

Most countries consider their higher education sector to be an export sector and, through trade agreements, have established binding commitments for access to educational services. There is a growing tension between traditional not-for-profit and for-profit cross-border education offerings.

The World Trade Organization will have to act in cases of trade disputes related to educational services. Subsidies from public funds could distort competition in the education services market.

This may cause problems for the financing of HEIs in developed

countries, since there will be a decrease in the number of foreign students and, therefore, a decrease in the income of HEIs, and governments will have to provide public resources for their financing.

Developed countries will face an aging population and will need skilled migration.

They will devise strategies to keep the brightest foreign students in their countries through scholarship programs and the granting of residency upon graduation.

Mobility among OECD countries will continue and elite Western universities will be attractive to international students who can afford to pay expensive tuition fees. HEIs will be highly selective and will limit their cross-border activities to

receiving the  
brightest students  
and academics.

Source: taken from Vincent-Lacrin (2011).

For (Macazana; Romero. et al. 2021) internationalization is conceptualized as one of the current trends in higher education, and is linked to scientific and technical development, supported by information and communication technologies, a view that points to the "global society" and the "knowledge society", proposing a general procedure for the management of the internationalization of higher education, based on the need to socialize and motivate teachers and authorities on the importance of internationalization for the achievement of quality of substantive and support processes (LOES 2018)It is also a key element in the achievement of university excellence, emphasizing that internationalization is the way for higher education institutions to open up to the world.

The Internationalization Process from the point of view of the Governmental Control Bodies in Ecuador.

In Ecuador, the internationalization process is part of the Institutional Evaluation Process carried out by the current CACES.(CEAACES 2015)where in its 2015 final report it details "The performance of the International Relations Area of the Planning Unit is framed in the first instance in Objective 12 of the National Plan for Good Living 2013-2017, which states: "Guarantee sovereignty and peace, deepen the strategic insertion in the world and Latin American integration".

Likewise, CACES defines as policies aligned with the management of international relations: a) Deepen solidarity and complementary integration processes with Latin America and the Caribbean. b) Promote the construction of a new democratic multilateralism, based on solidarity, sovereign and peaceful relations among the States. c) Consolidate a sovereign management of international cooperation, in line with the transformation of the productive matrix and the strengthening of South-South cooperation.

Article 174, paragraph q, of the Organic Law of Higher Education (LOES 2018), provides as one of the functions of CEAACES", and that in the first instance participated with peer evaluators in the external evaluation processes to be carried out by the Ministry of National Education of Colombia in order to "Promote the participation of

academic peers in the processes of evaluation, accreditation and quality assurance of higher education".

Five years later, CACES to achieve the knowledge of the state of a university or polytechnic school this is analyzed through the 20 standards defined in the evaluation model, which are the essential conditions that institutions must have to be part of the higher education system, the external evaluation for accreditation purposes of universities and polytechnic schools contributes from the external evaluation to internal improvement processes driven by the institutions themselves. (CEAACES 2015) This makes evident the necessary articulation between the accreditation process and the internal processes of self-evaluation that higher education institutions carry out on a permanent basis, and it is here where HEIs already identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Hence, the external evaluation process for accreditation purposes has the following purposes: a) To provide elements to universities and polytechnic schools for their continuous improvement; b) To know the state of the Higher Education System (SES) to enable adjustments in public policy; and, c) To guarantee to society the basic quality conditions of HEIs in which students are educated, and from the 2019 evaluation model in the Research component in its dimensions of planning, execution and results. (CACES-SIIES 2019).

According to the First Transitory Provision of the Organic Reformatory Law of the Organic Law of Higher Education approved on August 2, 2018 (LOR LOES 2018) (LOES 2018), CACES is responsible for prioritizing "the adequacy of the institutional evaluation model", i.e. the preliminary model of institutional evaluation 2018 that was approved by the Council for Evaluation Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (CEAACES), on August 10, 2017, through Resolution N. 235-CEAACES-SE-21-2017. The adequacy refers to adjust said model to the new approaches and precepts of the reformed LOES.

These judgments on the part of Ecuadorian public agencies, lead Higher Education Institutions IES to sustain in continuous improvement and project into the future considering the successes and failures of the past so that potential professionals, technicians and technologists put into practice that conglomerate of learning being of significant contribution to the productive and competitive development that companies and organizations demand for

competitiveness and globalization. In addition to knowing the needs and trends of the environment, people and the environment, the use of foresight is a tool that influences the expected expectations.

The public Higher Education Institutions that adopt the criterion of internationalization (CACES 2019) must cross some obstacles that are directly related to public policies, the allocated budget, taboos and diverse and different paradigms between dominations, students and teachers; that due to their interests do not allow to correctly raise the hypotheses that will correctly lead to the correct routes that the universities must follow. Hence the importance of a Strategic Plan for Institutional Development with objectives that are sufficiently measurable in the short and medium term so that in the long term these objectives will show a proportional growth with comparable goals. (CACES 2020).

This leads to formulate a projected mapping of internationalization in the University of Guayaquil (Guayaquil 2016) and how behind its indicators and academic mobility processes that supported by public policies and governmental and institutional programs, will be the catapult to demonstrate that internationalization is the path for the consolidation of research, teaching and extension with first world universities, and thus sustain itself in the competitive market overcoming the demands of the evaluating agencies (Ortega, Garces, and Ruíz 2021).

## Materials and Methods

The scientific methodology used to develop this research was historical-critical, using Bardin's (2013) content analysis as an instrument. First, we sought to delimit the paths to follow in the research, defining the procedures; and for this purpose, an inventory of the academic productions that work on this topic is exposed in order to help in the development of the theoretical framework. In addition, the profile of the research groups in which the University of Guayaquil enhances its scientific production and lines of research was verified. (CACES 2020). Following this, it will be analyzed how the internationalization policies given by the control bodies and landed in the UG's own documents such as the POA, PEDI and educational model allows aligning teaching, research and linkage with society as a

strategic model of internationalization of higher education for the IES of study. (CEAACES 2015).

This research was developed under a prospective approach, using Réigner's Abaco methodology as a starting point. (Godet 2010) where, based on a strategic diagnosis and consultation, it is possible to question expert researchers and professional teachers in order to propose paths to follow; and for this purpose a focus group was set up, in which the research community is presented with policies, legal arguments and development of actions in favor of academic mobility, exchange and collaboration between students, teachers and technicians, between local, national and international universities.

Dr. François Réigner, promoter and creator of this original method called "Abaco de Réigner" of consulting experts and obtaining answers in real time from a color scale; its purpose is to reduce uncertainty, to confront the point of view of a group with that of others at the same time, to become aware in its different scales considering the perceptions of all the members of an analysis group.

This method (Durance and Godet 2010) provides a diversity of response options for each topic or variable, thus avoiding the limitations of yes or no answers, limiting the possibilities of considering the nuances or perspectives with which a topic or event should be considered; it also allows estimating the behavior of a group of factors and determining the intensity of a present problem.(Martelo, Villabona, and Jiménez-Pitre 2017)It also makes it possible to estimate the behavior of a group of factors and to determine the intensity of a present problem; and for its implementation it is executed in phases:

#### Phase 1: Collecting expert opinion

Initially, it is convenient to "define as precisely as possible the problem to be studied, which will be approached with care and broken down into elements or items. These items will be the statements extending the field of discussion on the evolution of the past and/or future; in this first phase the experts participate in each statement using the colored scale made available to them and defined by each researcher for this purpose.

### Phase 2: Data processing

In this phase, the responses are processed in the form of a matrix, where the items defining the problem are represented in rows and the experts participating in the study in columns; this information makes visible the position of each of the experts on the problem.

### Phase 3: Discussion of results

Finally, the debate and/or the explanation of the vote can begin, the procedure is open and everyone can, at any time, change the color and justify their change of opinion.

The Réigner abacus can be applied when it is desired to know the attitude of a group of experts with respect to a particular situation or topic where actors and experts participate, prioritizing the importance of the problems of a particular sector or community; highlighting the applications of this method in: a) estimating the behavior of a group of factors and b) determining the intensity of a problem in the present. The options of the method, to reveal the opinions of a group in relation to a given situation, are based on the international convention adopted for the colors of the traffic light, that is: green (pass), yellow (caution) and red (stop); intermediate colors and shades such as white (blank vote) and black (abstention) are included. The Réigner abacus as a method has its advantages and disadvantages as detailed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *Advantages and disadvantages of applying the Réigner Abacus Method*

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Performs a quick and didactic analysis in the treatment of a problem.</b></li> <li>2. <b>It facilitates intercommunication, where debate as well as the exchange of ideas reach a consensus.</b></li> <li>3. <b>It is effective, simple and fast.</b></li> <li>4. <b>It gives the opportunity to those</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This method is not very well known, so it takes time to give an explanation of what it means.</li> <li>2. It reduces the protagonism of the leader i, favoring intensive work and the contribution of points of view by the members of the group.</li> <li>3. The Réigner abacus modifies the usual functioning of a group,</li> </ol>

**who diverge to express themselves and value their opinion.**

- 5. It can be used as a voting technique in combination with other techniques (e.g. Delphi Method).**
- 6. The presence of a leader who can influence the group disappears.**
- 7. It is opportune to detect group opinion.**
- 8. Promotes ideas or opinions through discussions, showing the results once defined.**
- 9. They allow those who diverge to express themselves and value their opinions.**
- 10. It is considered an excellent communication tool, seeking an exchange and debate between individuals.**

giving the opportunity to announce its color.

Source:(Martelo, Villabona, and Jiménez-Pitre 2017)

## Results

The present research work was achieved through a focus group directed to the Research area that included 32 teachers, 101 students inserted in FCI projects and 3 PhD researchers, considering as the universe of the University of Guayaquil a total of 133 people interviewed, establishing a balance between the faculties with the largest number of students versus the faculties of smaller magnitude. Two Research and Internationalization Managers were also included with the objective of knowing the development of the activities involved in these processes, but from different points of view, in order to institutionally promote improvement actions that lead to timely responses

and, in turn, to execute optimal processes, thus guaranteeing their quality.

A bank of questions was made with 45 different questions filtered into 10 key questions, in order to first filter the questions that would lead us to the 10 scenarios with 6 possibly viable routes required, which were considered to validate the results:

Are the actions or participation of the UG significant to enhance faculty and student mobility?

Do you consider that the current process for the approval of new institutional projects/programs aimed at internationalization can be optimized in terms of time and number of activities?

Do you consider that the process carried out by the University of Guayaquil to participate in international academic-research activities should be optimized in terms of time and requirements to be fulfilled?

Do you know of any experiences that students/teachers/researchers have had in the execution of new internationalization projects?

Do you know of any dissemination plan that is being applied in your Academic Unit regarding the execution of the projects involved in internationalization?

Do you believe that both students/teachers and researchers have sufficient training, courses or education to participate in internationalization programs/projects?

Do you think that the mobility carried out by the UG contributes to internationalization?

What do you think are the 3 main problems that arise when participating in an internationalization program/project promoted at the University of Guayaquil?

How could the participation of the University of Guayaquil in internationalization projects and/or programs around the world be improved?

What academic-technological-scientific tools do you think the University of Guayaquil should promote in its students/teachers and researchers?

From the 10 possible open questions, strategic questions were generated from the participants, which for this purpose were evaluated on a scale of very favorable, favorable, unfavorable, very unfavorable, neutral and no response, and from this group of questions/strategies a consensus zone was created using the Réigner Abacus methodology.

**Table 4. Réigner Abaco Survey**

Strategies for the University of Guayaquil to 2030	Very favorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	Very unfavorable	Neutral/did not answer
The current process for the approval of new institutional projects/programs aimed at internationalization can be optimized in terms of time and number of activities.	45				
The process carried out by the UG to participate in international academic-research activities must be optimized in terms of time and requirements to be fulfilled.					5
Learn about the experiences of students/teachers/researchers in the execution of new internationalization projects.					1
Dissemination plan that is being applied in your Academic Unit on the execution of the projects involved in internationalization.					1
Both students/teachers and researchers have sufficient training, courses or education to participate in internationalization programs/projects.					1
Mobility implemented by the UG contributes to internationalization					1
The 3 main problems encountered when participating in an internationalization program/project promoted at the UG.					0
The participation of the University of Guayaquil in internationalization projects and/or programs in the world could be improved.					0
Strengthen academic-technological-scientific tools that the UG should promote in its students/teachers and researchers.					0
Encourage new technical/technological and global trend careers.					0
The concept of a sustainable university is promoted, generating educational and environmental policies.					0
Alliances to complement and transfer technological and financial resources with the public-private sector will be valued.					0
Total					

ORIGIN: taken from the participants involved.

The Réigner Abacus was used to evaluate each possible scenario with the participants involved, associating the traffic light colors green (very favorable), yellow (neutral) and red (very unfavorable), yellow (neutral) and red (very unfavorable), 2 light green (favorable) and pink (unfavorable) scenarios are involved, and 2 additional scenarios of non-response that include white (votes blank) and black (refuses to participate), the criteria of each participant is taken, considering that

for this analysis they were taken up to 3 times, with the results shown in Table 4.

**Table 5.** *Réigner's Abacus Results*

Route	Scenario	Responses (interviewees)											
R1	E1: The process carried out by the UG to participate in international academic-research activities must be optimized in terms of time and requirements for E2: students/teachers and researchers aiming for internationalization												
R2	E3: Students/teachers and researchers have sufficient training, courses or training that E4: lead to a sustainable university, generating educational and environmental policies.												
R3	E5: Students/teachers and researchers have sufficient training, courses or training that												



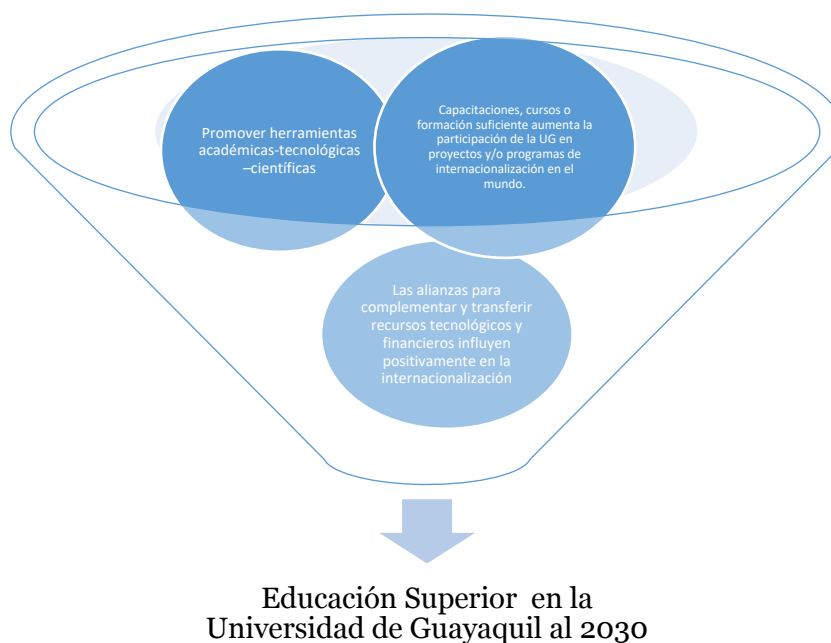
	internationalization projects and/or programs in the world.	
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Source: data collected from focus group

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As preliminary results that route 4 is the most successful, this implies that the strategy of having academic-technological-scientific tools that the University of Guayaquil promotes in its students, teachers and researchers has contributed to the experiences that they have in the execution of new internationalization projects. The results of route 6 should be analyzed as part of the medium-term objectives, since it indicates that both students/teachers and researchers have sufficient training, courses or formation to increase the participation of the University of Guayaquil in internationalization projects and/or programs in the world. Finally, it is evident that it is necessary to include Route 1 as a strategic axis, since the alliances to complement and transfer technological and financial resources are aimed at internationalization. These three routes are projected for the University of Guayaquil as the sure path to internationalization, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Strategic axes to be followed by the University of Guayaquil for Internationalization by 2030.



## Conclusions

Finally, deciding the optimal path that will lead the University of Guayaquil to internationalization is what should be reflected as an objective in its institutional strategic plan, which to ensure its scope from year to year must be measured and reliable; and that the mobility currently promoted by the institution to continue along the path of internationalization taking into account trends and projections.

It is recommended to remain predisposed and attentive to the new changes, technologies, transcendence, and innovations that the world forces to insert; for that it is of vital importance that each of the careers, academic units and all those who make up the University of Guayaquil are involved and participate in national and international calls, in academic and cultural exchanges, technological, environmental and social issues where programs and projects are exposed.

The linkage promoted by the University of Guayaquil is a key actor in the achievement that internationalization requires, since behind the social projects developed by the students of the University of Guayaquil, they recognize and identify research that will influence programs of national and international interest.

Hence, public control agencies in Ecuador should consider among their allocations an item that encourages and promotes the internationalization of HEIs in the world, and that by 2030 the University of Guayaquil through its teachers, students, researchers are being part of various international projects of global interest.

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