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New paths to internationalisation in higher education Internationalisation at home and internationalisation of the curriculum

Abstract

Internationalisation became one of the key dimensions of higher education, therefore, its elements are inevitably present both in higher education as well as in research, i.e.: through teaching, higher education must prepare graduates for life and work in an increasingly global environment. This paper presents in more detail the concept of internationalisation of higher education with a focus on internationalisation at home and/or internationalisation of the curriculum, while laying down and specifying a definition of internationalisation of the curriculum for the Slovenian higher education environment. As a part of the review of the current state of the internationalisation of the curriculum in strategic documents of Slovenian higher education institutions we found that the internationalisation, in its broadest sense, is clearly addressed in the vision, mission, values and strategic documents of higher education institutions, while its substantial dimension in the education process remains weak within the meaning of internationalisation of the curriculum. Since the latter is directly associated with teaching and learning, one of the key recommendations to higher education institutions is to develop their teaching staff during their activities within the scope of internationalisation of teaching and learning.

Keywords: internationalisation of the curriculum, internationalisation at home, internationalisation of higher education, internationalized learning outcomes, higher education teaching and learning

Introduction

Internationalisation, diversity, sustainability and global citizenship constitute a set of key tools which can be used to empower students for facing the challenges of increased globalisation. Internationalisation has thus become one of the key dimensions of higher education. This is in turn reflected in the development of new and updated concepts, programmes, methods, forms of work, and approaches to work. There are two commonly recognised arguments why internationalisation of higher education is important (Qiang 2003). On one hand higher education needs to adequately prepare graduates for life and work in an increasingly global society by adding intercultural skills, relationships, and multilingualism among its learning outcomes, while research calls for joint effort, intensive international cooperation due to increasing specialisation and investments required in specific fields of research (ibid). This especially applies to small systems such as the Slovenian higher education research system.

Within the above-specified context, the paper aims to introduce the concept of internationalisation of higher education with an emphasis on the so-called *internationalisation at home* or *internationalisation of the curriculum*, which provide for the development of intercultural skills, and the attainment of learning outcomes with an international dimension by all students within the home (national) study environments, including the population of non-mobile students, through the integration of global, international and intercultural dimensions into the study process. The paper also delivers a brief overview of the status of internationalisation at home or internationalisation of the curriculum in the strategic documents of Slovenian HEIs, and a brief presentation of specific current institutional practices in the field of the above-specified concepts, while providing recommendations for further improvements of the relevant field.

Internationalisation of higher education

Internationalisation of higher education in this paper means the process of integration of the international, intercultural or global dimension in the aims, function and provision of higher education (Knight 2004, 9). In practice there are various institutional approaches towards internationalisation (Qiang 2003): approaches, in which internationalisation is merely and additional or side activity, as well as approaches, where internationalisation is fundamental for institutional survival and it is integrated in all aspects of institutional functions and operation. This dichotomy is present between institutions which approach to internationalisation in a sporadic and ad hoc manner through non-formal processes and structures, and the institutions with a highly developed internationalisation system with formalised and institutionalised procedures and structures to support internationalisation. Despite a general consensus regarding the benefits of internationalisation of higher education in the higher education and policy circles, the actual policies and practices within higher education systems and institutions significantly differ (Klemenčič and Flander 2013). The reasons for differences observed with Slovenian HEIs lie both in the administrative and financial barriers for internationalisation, as well as in the varying national and institutional perception of the role which ought to be played by internationalisation (Teichler 2002; van der Wende 2003; Flander 2012).

Internationalisation dimensions include international cooperation which is often described on institutional websites. International cooperation encompasses bilateral partnerships between the home and foreign institution within or outside of the scope of the Erasmus programme, which further comprise exchanges and mobility that consequently constitute a subgroup of international cooperation. Other forms of international cooperation include: participation in international research projects, attendance of international academic conferences, membership of international academic networks, etc. However, since a large majority of students and staff do not participate in mobility, we also need to address these non-mobile individuals and support their development of intercultural competences or the attainment of learning outcomes with an international dimension, as they represent the vast majority of the entire population, and this will also remain the case in the future.

Internationalisation, as defined in the introduction (according to Knight 2004), comprises various above-specified dimensions, of which the most important also include internationalisation of education and internationalisation of the curriculum, described in more detail hereunder.

Internationalisation of the curriculum and/or internationalisation at home

Various studies, evaluations and discussions on the internationalisation of higher education highlight positive impact of internationalisation in the field of quality improvements in higher education at the individual (students, staff) as well as at the broader institutional, national and international level (e.g. Teichler and Maiworm 1997; Bracht et al 2006; Pavlin 2009; Flander 2012; Klemenčič and Flander 2013; Klemenčič et al 2013). In their study Klemenčič and Flander (2013) emphasise the question of impact of international forms of cooperation (Erasmus programme), including mobility, on the internationalisation at home and/or internationalisation of the curriculum while also focusing on the provision of courses and higher education programmes in foreign language, and the question of strategic partnerships. In their study they further emphasise the significance of internationalisation at home by highlighting the key role of higher education teaching and other staff. (ibid.)

One of key questions related to internationalisation at home or internationalisation of the curriculum is how to support the development of non-mobile students' international knowledge and competences (Crowther et al 2000; Wächter 2003). The concept of internationalisation at home is thus extremely useful within a context, where internationalisation efforts have been traditionally focused on mobility processes (Beelen and Jones 2015a), although we need to be aware that the internationalisation at home does not depend on the mobile students and staff. Moreover, it will never be completely equivalent to the inbound mobility of students or teaching in a foreign language.

Initial definition of internationalisation at home emerged in 2001 and it was characterised by a lack of clarity (ibid.), since it mostly described what is not included in internationalisation at home, instead of specifying what it does include, i.e.: *any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student and staff mobility*. In his 2003 paper Qiang uses the then-current term “internationalisation of studies at home” and defines it as comprising internationalisation of the curriculum, as well as teaching and learning in an international classroom (Quiang 2003). The most up-to-date definition was provided by Beelen and Jones (2015b, 76), who defined *internationalisation at home* as “a process of planned integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and non-formal curriculum for all students in the home or “national” learning environment.” However, in her definition of the internationalisation of the curriculum Leask (2015) highlights the formal curriculum and/or the study programme with didactic elements, as defined internationalisation of the curriculum as “an inclusion of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the curriculum content, learning outcomes, assessments, learning methods and study programme’s support services.« Internationalisation at home and internationalisation of the curriculum are neither hyponyms nor synonyms. These are two separate, mutually overlapping concepts, developed within different higher education environments (internationalisation at home was developed mainly in the UK and the rest of Europe, while internationalisation of the curriculum was used mostly in Australia), which differ mostly in their practical implementation. While *internationalisation at home* does not include mobility and focuses on the provision of the formal and non-formal curriculum in *the home or “national” study environment*, including activities of the non-formal curriculum, the *internationalisation of the curriculum* refers to various dimensions of the (formal) curriculum, regardless of where it is being implemented – consequently, it can also include the mobility of students, esp. when this is an integral or mandatory component of the study programme (e.g. in case when students must spend one or several semesters at a partner foreign HEI – the so-called “mobility window”).

In the Slovenian higher education environment we usually use the term “*internationalisation of the curriculum*” which, in practice, according to the above-cited authors, includes the implementation of a combination of internationalisation at home and internationalisation of the curriculum. In the manual for internationalisation of the curriculum for Slovenian higher education teaching and support staff, the internationalisation of the curriculum is defined as: “*the planned inclusion of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions in the content of the formal and non-formal curriculums for all students, primarily within the home learning environments*” « (Aškerc Veniger, in print).

Within this context the internationalised curriculum is mostly a component of the formal curriculum, therefore the international and intercultural dimension must be also reflected in the learning outcomes of study programmes, modules and courses (the so-called *internationalised learning outcomes*). Implementation of internationalisation of the curriculum is a complex process, touching the sole core of teaching and learning, therefore it is concentrated on the active role of teaching staff (and not the international office) responsible for the implementation of internationalised curriculum through student-centred approaches to learning and teaching. Outbound mobility and the presence of foreign students and visiting higher education teachers are considered an added value, which also applies to the provision of study programmes or courses in a foreign language. Another significant component of the internationalisation of the curriculum is the inclusion of local international and cultural practices in the regular study process, e.g. invitations to internationally-oriented organisations from the local environment to present their activity or collaboration of students with these organisation during the preparation of projects, etc. The belief that the inclusion of home and international students in study activities automatically leads to inter-cultural learning and teaching, as well as attainment of internationalised learning outcomes and the development of intercultural competences, is flawed. Given the planned internationalised learning outcomes, the successful implementation of the internationalised curriculum is subject to appropriately planned selection of teaching methods and forms of work, and the subsequent selection of appropriate evaluation and assessment methods used to check whether the

internationalised learning outcomes have been actually attained by all students of a specific study programme. (ibid.)

The definition and implementation of the internationalisation of the curriculum vary among profession and fields – future graduates need to become aware that the local professional segment is also linked to the international and global segment, whereby the approach to development and teaching at the local level often varies in specific aspects (e.g. environmental approaches and the relevant legislation in the field often differ from approaches and legislation in other countries). It is essential that all students develop an understanding of these connections, since they impact their study programmes and the profession, which they are pursuing, and this constitutes a vital part of the development of their ability to act as a critical and reflexive/reactive citizen and professional who can think and operate at all levels, i.e. local, national, international and global. Internationalisation of the curriculum is a tool, not an objective. It aims to improve the quality of learning and teaching in higher education, and to develop competences of future graduates which will make them more competitive in the labour market and help them successfully function in their day-to-day life, which is intrinsically linked to the international environment. (ibid)

Internationalisation of the curriculum at Slovenian HEIs

An overview of strategic institutional documents of Slovenian universities (i.e. University of Ljubljana – UL, University of Maribor – UM, University of Primorska – UP and University of Nova Gorica – UNG)¹ shows that the internationalisation in its broadest sense is very clearly addressed in the visions, missions, values and strategic documents of higher education institutions. Moreover, we observed that internationalisation component is becoming increasingly evident in the research and artistic activities of HEIs, while specific internationalisation content in the teaching process is much weaker. The mentioned strategic documents mostly highlight the quantitative elements of internationalisation of education, e.g. the number or percentage of implemented mobilities, which actually involve only a handful of students and staff,² the number of registered foreign students, offer of joint international study programmes and courses offered in a foreign language, implementation of study programmes abroad or outside of the country of accreditation, etc. The documents also show that the institutions consider that international cooperation within the scope of research and artistic activities significantly contributes to improving the quality and excellence of HEIs, while the significance of integration of the international dimension into the education process at the level of content with the aim to improve the quality and excellence of study is not entirely clear..

On the basis of the review of strategic documents in the field of internationalisation it is safe to conclude that the presence of international/foreign students or staff in the Slovenian higher education environment or the outgoing mobilities of Slovenian students and staff is often deemed as an automatic path towards the implementation intercultural learning and teaching and towards improved quality and excellence of education. However, none of the quantitative elements listed under the previous paragraph do not, on their own, facilitate the attainment of objectives related to the internationalisation of the curriculum. The core elements of internationalisation of the curriculum include contextual internationalisation elements in the learning and teaching process and/or properly trained teaching staff who in their role of education facilitators reasonably and systematically include international and intercultural elements in the study process depending on the field. Moreover, the documents failed to disclose any objectives concerning the inclusion of international dimension in the learning outcomes, and the related corresponding adjustment of learning methods and forms of work, including assessment, as well as empowerment and professional development of staff.

¹ Internationalisation Strategy of the University of Ljubljana 2014-2107 (2020) (2014), Internationalisation Strategy: Internationalisation as the development of quality of the University of Maribor 2013-2020 (2013), and the Medium-term Development Strategy of the University of Primorska 2014-2020 (2014) – “Internationalisation” chapter. We were not able to acquire any documents which include internationalisation objectives from the University of Nova Gorica, but we thoroughly inspected the information on the university’s website (<http://www.ung.si/sl/>).

² The mobility participation rate in Slovenia is a mere 3% for students and 6% for teaching staff (Aškerc and Flander 2016).

The above-listed strategic documents were adopted prior to adoption of the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Slovenian higher education 2016-2020 (Aškerc and Flande, ed. 2016), which – in one of its five strategic goals – explicitly highlights the “*promotion of the development of intercultural competences*” (3rd strategic goal). The Strategy stipulates that Slovenian HEIs are:

“responsible for the development of graduates’ intercultural and global competences, which will facilitate the successful activity of the graduates either in their local/national environment, embedded in the global environment, or directly in the international environment. /.../ Therefore the expansion of the horizons of students and teaching staff, their intercultural and global skills, and the development of soft skills are (mainly) subject to a high quality, structured, integrated and systematically organised study experience, embedded in the internationalised curriculum and in the concept of internationalisation at home.”

On the basis of the 3rd strategic goal, Goal 18 explicitly states: “Embedding of intercultural competences and internationalised learning outcomes into study programmes,” (ibid, 16, 17), while the measures in the Strategy Action Plan, which is enclosed to the Strategy 2016-2018, include the training of higher education teaching staff in the field of intercultural competences and embedding of internationalised learning outcomes into study programmes.

In their study Klemenčič and Flander (2013) found that at the majority of Slovenian institutions internationalisation at home³ is still in its early phases, and – despite a relatively high international integration of Slovenian institutions – the direct effects of internationalisation on the quality of education are the least visible. The effects are more present in the form of international content and topics in teaching, and much less in other forms, such as the offer of courses in foreign languages, inclusion of visiting foreign lecturers in the teaching process and connecting of foreign and home students during the education process (and internationalisation of the curriculum).

On the basis of findings of their research the authors designed 16 recommendations for the Slovenian higher education sector, recommending institutions – in connection with internationalisation at home – to:

“Consider the introduction of a systematised or, ideally, a “hybrid systematised” approach as the “individualised” approach for the organisation of studies and training for foreign Erasmus students and as a part of internationalisation of study at home within the scope of modernisation of teaching and learning. A systematised and hybrid systematised approach provide for the offer of courses and study programmes in foreign languages.”(ibid.)

At the same time the authors highlight the significance of properly trained and empowered higher education staff as a vital element of successful internationalisation at home and implementation of the internationalisation of the curriculum: *“Institutions should encourage and support higher education teachers and associates in their activities within the scope of internationalisation of teaching and learning. We therefore recommend the institutions to develop an activity plan for the internationalisation of teaching and learning.”* (ibid.)

Conclusion

To become competitive at the international, global level and to develop individuals’ ability for effective work in a local or international environment, with which the local environment is inseparably linked, it is essential that during their studies graduates already develop relevant international and intercultural knowledge, skills and positions. In this respect we must also highlight the development of awareness that the profession/discipline or the selected study programme can also be conditioned by cultural and local/regional environmental factors. However, research shows that such knowledge and intercultural competences cannot be developed or acquired within a short period or within a single module (McKinnon 2012), since the

³ In their study the authors use the term “internationalisation at home”, which, however, they defined slightly more broadly for the purpose of their study, compared to the definition provided by Beelen and Jones (2015, 76). When this paper refers to the findings of the study authors (Klemenčič and Flander 2013), the term internationalisation at home is to be interpreted according to their own definition.

development of intercultural competences is not a spontaneous phenomenon, but a life-long process which should be systematically developed and clearly considered in the education process and during development of staff.

Since internationalisation of the curriculum and internationalisation at home by definition touch the essence of teaching and learning, the attainment of their objectives focuses on the active role of teaching staff, who must be properly trained to reasonably include the intercultural and international elements in the study process and learning outcomes, which must be attained by students at the end of semester or upon completion of studies. Although internationalisation and international cooperation are usually directly evident from the visions, missions, values and strategic documents of higher education institutions, these elements are inadequately in the strategic institutional goals in the field of education, most often only through quantitative data, while lacking content-related elements of internationalisation of education. These elements are more clearly addressed by the Strategy for Internationalisation of Slovenian Higher Education 2016-2020, which was, however, adopted after the adoption of the institutional strategies. Consequently, we can expect that the strategic goals from the national strategy will be duly considered in the updated versions of institutional strategies.

We should also highlight that the internationalisation of the curriculum is a tool not an objective, since internationalisation aims to improve the quality of learning and teaching, and to effectively develop the key competences of future graduates. From the perspective of higher education institutions the internationalised curriculum is also an important tool for improving the reputation, quality and recognisability both in the local and international higher education environment. Although inclusion of international and (inter)cultural elements in the study process constitutes a big challenge, it is also an opportunity for thinking out-of-the-box through innovative adoption of new ideas, approaches, sources and methods as well as forms of work in the existing study process.

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