



Critical Reflections on international student mobility in a time of global challenges

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Key themes

Part I: The broader concept and context of internationalization in and of higher education

What have been and are the main trends, rationales and drivers for internationalization over the past decades?

The different perceptions and meanings of internationalization in and of higher education, and what are key shifting paradigms?

What might be the future directions of internationalization in response to current drastically changing global contexts?

Part II: International Student Mobility

What do we mean by 'international student mobility' and its different types?

What are key trends in different types of student mobility?

What key ethical challenges and future directions in international student mobility can we expect? Points for discussion.....



Over the past half century, internationalization in and of higher education has evolved:

- From a marginal and ad hoc range of activities to more comprehensive and central processes and policies.
- It has become a key strategic agenda for universities but also national and local governments around the globe.
- It is driven by a diverse range of rationales, organizational and program strategies, and includes the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, internal and external to the system
- But at the same time has resulted in many different approaches and actions.



Looking Back

Education abroad in all its forms is more driving the agenda than internationalization at home

Increasing focus on international rankings are the rules and favor some over others.

The divide between the North and the South and between those universities classified as top world-class universities and the “Others” persists.

Internationalization has become more synonym to competition and marketization than to its traditional values (cooperation, exchange and service to society).

Inequality and exclusiveness increased nationally and internationally, in part due to elitist approaches to internationalization.

Recognition of the importance of addressing all aspects of education in an integrated way in university policy and strategy progress is only slowly and unevenly increasing.



A counter reaction: from competition back to cooperation?

As a counter reaction to the exclusive focus on mobility, movements like *'Internationalization at Home'* (Beelen and Jones, 2015), *'Internationalization of the Curriculum'* (Leask, 2015) and *'Comprehensive Internationalization'* (Hudzik, 2015) have emerged around the turn of the century, trying to shift the focus on internationalization for all students, not exclusively the small percentage of mobile ones.

Also the rather exclusive focus on only one of the three missions of universities, education, has been challenged with an appeal to more specific attention to *internationalization of research* (Woldegiyorgis et al, 2018) and *internationalization of higher education for society* (Jones et al, 2021).



A multifaceted and evolving concept

Two dimensions, *multifaceted* and *evolving*, are key characteristics of the internationalization of higher education;

And one can add, also of several of its components:

Study abroad, international students, internationalization at home, transnational or cross-border education, digitalization, the use of terms like 'global citizenship', and so on.

Internationalization is not one model that fits all, its diversity is institutional, local, national and regional defined, and has changed and evolved over time in response to changing contexts and challenges.



Its strength and its major obstacle

Its evolutionary adaptation to historical and geographical contexts is one of its *strengths*

But at the same time it is, together with its multifacetedness, its *major obstacle*, as the meaning of 'internationalization' has been used by stakeholders in a diverse range of - in several cases even strongly opposing - meanings and policies.

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A problematic sloppiness, mixing and confusing

the **'why'** (the rationales for internationalization)

the **'impact'** (its outcomes)

the **'what'** (its programs and actions)

the **'whom'** (partnerships) and

the **'how'** (its organization)

the **'where'** (its context).



Multifacetedness and sloppiness exists also in its different dimensions and subthemes

- One can question the difference between *'internationalization at home'* and *'internationalization of the curriculum'*
 - Frequently used terms like *'global citizen'* and *'global engagement'* more identify with a notion of sympathetic perception of what it might entail than that there is a clear common meaning and understanding
 - The use of intercultural, international and global
 - And as we discuss in part II in the use of international student mobility
- In the area of *cross-border delivery of education and transnational education*, there is not only no common agreement on their meanings, but also not on what they entail



The meaning of internationalization

The 1993 and in 2003 updated Knight definition emphasized a *process approach* involving a wide range of internal (academics, students, administrators) and external (national and local governments, the private sector, international entities) stakeholders.

Knight's definitions of internationalization as a process were an important step forward from the previous use of '*international education*' which was more *ad hoc and fragmented*.



Still ample room for misconceptions

The move to a process definition still left ample room for different approaches to an understanding of internationalization, including more competitive forms.

In that respect, the gradual shift from the term ‘international education’ to ‘internationalization of higher education’ has not created more clarity about its meaning and focus, reflected also in an *ongoing ad hoc and fragmented reality*.

And it brought *new challenges* to the forefront, as the process involved several *misconceptions* (de Wit, 2011) and *unintended consequences and myths* (Knight, 2009), claiming the need of ‘*the end of internationalization*’ as it was (Brandenburg and de Wit, 2011).



In response, Defining Internationalization of Higher Education for the Future

Reflects increased awareness that

- **IoHE must become more inclusive and less elitist**
- **Mobility must become an integral part of the internationalized curriculum that ensures internationalisation for all**

Re-emphasises that

- **Internationalization is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance quality**
- **Should not focus solely on economic rationales**

Updated definition

(de Wit et al, 2015, European
Parliament Study)

The **intentional** process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society





“This definition gives a normative direction to the process”, distinctive of the more neutral working definition of Knight

Such a more normative approach is also present in other meanings and definitions that have emerged over recent years, such as

‘Comprehensive internationalization’ (Hudzik, 2011),

‘Intelligent internationalization’ (Rumbley, 2015),

‘Ethical internationalization’ (Andreotti, 2016)

‘Conscientious internationalization’ (Wolhuter, 2008, Ledger and Kawalilak, 2020)

‘Responsible internationalization’ (Stallivieri, 2019) and

‘Humanistic internationalization’ (Streitwieser, 2019).

Other definitions have a more focused approach: *‘learner-centered’* (Coelen, 2016),

‘forced’ (related to refugees, Ergin et al, 2019), and

‘coerced’ (Teferra, 2019).

Another term more frequently used these days as alternative to internationalization is *‘global engagement’*, focusing more on the aspect of cooperation, networking and partnership.



A changing paradigm?

These Appeals for change resonate in words and re-emphasize the calls made already 20 years ago.

In practice the focus continues though to be on internationalization abroad, mobility.

De Wit and Rumbley (2017) speak of *rhetoric* more than concrete action, and Leask, Jones and de Wit (2018) of *a struggle to move beyond good intentions and isolated examples of good practice*.

A new generation of scholars, such as those involved in the *Critical Internationalization Studies Network* (CISN, n.d.) is challenging the view of internationalization dominated by Anglo-western perspectives and forms of knowledge.

Jones (2022) argues that “*Equality, diversity and inclusion, social justice, decolonization, global power relations and geopolitics, human rights, anti-racism, gender identity and equality, ethics, multiculturalism, and sustainability are just some of the related elements which all have a role to play in broadening our understanding of internationalization*” (2022: iv).



A changing global landscape

Key challenges

Geopolitical developments and tensions

Increased competition for global talent

Health concerns

Sustainability/environment

Other SDGs

Nationalism

Racism

and other factors

Key questions

How will internationalization be shaped by this global landscape?

How will those working in internationalization respond to the challenges they face?

And how will they therefore contribute to shaping the future?



Part II: Challenges in the meanings of ‘international student mobility’

Many scholars of *international student mobility* do not distinguish between different types of student mobility, while there is a fundamental difference between:

- Degree seeking
- Credit seeking, and
- Certificate seeking international students

And their different rationales, their experiences and their outcomes

- They also ignore the *difference in:*
Levels of what international students study,
Their origins
Their Funding and Costs
and
Their motivations

- The same is true with the use of terms and meanings of *virtual mobility/virtual exchange/COIL*

In other words: There is also not one model that fits all international students



What are the major trends in student mobility?

Degree seeking students

Still the largest group, app. 6 million

Mostly South-North mobility, but increasingly also South-South, limited north-North

Asia (with China and India leading by far) currently dominant in sending, Africa the future one, Latin America limited

US, UK, Australia, Germany and France still the main host countries: China was before the pandemic starting to bypass them. A call for more diversity of host countries!

Cross-border Delivery (branch campuses, franchises, articulation/twinning programs) perceived as an alternative option, but really?

Many challenging factors in the North

Increasing costs of living

Lack of housing and other services

Language concerns (dominance of English)

Labor market needs (stay rate)

Tuition Fees

Nationalism/racism

Quality of education

Increasing competition in the North and from the South

Call for more diversity of origins



Credit seeking students

Mainly North-North

Mainly within Europe (Erasmus) and from the US to Europe (undergraduate study abroad)

Limited in the UK, Australia, Canada

In Western Europe reaching its limits

In Eastern Europe still the reverse

Increasingly shorter (less than 3 months)

Mainly female and white

Limited in service learning

Language debate

Climate change discussions

Virtual exchange development

Imbalances

Educational Tourism



Key Questions we have to ask ourselves to realize a transformative internationalization for the future

Who is engaged in internationalization, within and beyond institutions? Who is being left out?

What might equitable and inclusive internationalization look like?

What types of leadership are needed to achieve it?

How can internationalization be deployed as a tool of decolonization?

How can internationalization better prepare all graduates and society to face future global challenges, including environmental decimation and the decline of systems and institutions?

What deeper systemic changes need to be made, for example, to internationalization practices and policies, power structures, teaching methods, tuition policies and other aspects of internationalization to address inequities in society?

How can internationalization efforts be strengthened in order to make a more meaningful contribution to society?

What do re-imagined mobility and blended mobility models look like moving forward?

What would a more holistic approach to internationalization look like, one that includes students' well-being, support and meaningful mutual engagement with communities?

How might the digital transformation of higher education lead to new approaches in internationalization?

How can we avoid returning to isolation and redefine global engagement in a context of geopolitical tensions?

In summary



Internationalization as a process of higher education as well as of its diverse dimensions in higher education requires *more clarity* on the meaning, the rationales, its programs and its organization as well as its outcomes/impact.

Accepting and describing its multifacetedness and historical and geographic contextuality is an essential starting point for its understanding.

By being sloppy in its use, internationalization of and in higher education has become an *obstacle instead of its solution to the future of higher education*, and it is too easy to blame external factors and actors.

Both scholars and policy makers need to be *more clear about what they mean and what the context is in which they use that meaning* of internationalization and its different dimensions.

This is even more true than ever given the *current geopolitical environment, and for the main theme of this event: international student mobility*.



Ethical questions for discussion:

Are tuition fees the real issue or is it more elitism and inequality?

The role of English, a problem or an opportunity?

Is decreasing dependence on a small number of sending countries possible?

Can we guarantee intercultural interaction and outcomes through mobility?

Is credit mobility good and degree mobility bad?

Are labor market needs in the host countries more important than in the sending countries?

Are virtual exchange and online delivery the solution for our ethical questions?

Is mobility elitist and for that reason always bad?

Is the internationalization industry (agents, service providers, etc.) an absolute need or questionable?



Thank you

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