



Internationalization in and of Higher Education: Critical Reflections on its conceptual evolution

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Key themes

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?



Much progress but lack of strong theoretical foundation for internationalization in higher education

Research on international education is *occasional, coincidental, sporadic and episodic* (Teichler, 1996)

Research on internationalization has become more multidimensional and multifaceted, and more intertwined with research on other aspects: mainstreaming. (Kehm and Teichler, 2007)

There are currently more journals than the *Journal of Studies in International Education* founded in 1997, focusing on internationalization or aspects of it.

Internationalization has become one of the main themes in higher education journals, and also there are many books, blogs and webinars .

But the theoretical foundation is still rather weak, Lee and Stensaker (2021) speak of undertheoretization of the field.



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*.

But it 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).



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.

Related, there is a mixed use of '*internationalization of higher education*' and '*internationalization in higher education*', while in essence they are rather distinctive in their meaning and use, with the first describing and analyzing the conceptual process and the second the different manifestations of internationalization in higher education.

And there is a discussion about the similarities and differences between 'globalization' and 'internationalization' of higher education, between 'international education' and 'internationalization of higher education', and between 'internationalization of higher education' and 'international higher education'.



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).



A need for change

Concerns about elitist, competitive and market-oriented approaches to internationalization have persisted.

A need for more attention to the qualitative, human dimensions of internationalization, including global learning for all; employability; improvement of the quality of research, education, and service to society.



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.



Multifacetedness and sloppiness also in its different dimensions and subthemes

- One can question the difference between *'internationalization at home'* and *'internationalization of the curriculum'*
- 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, both in their rationales, their experiences and their outcomes
- They also ignore the *difference in levels of international students, and in their origins and motivations*
- 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 same is true with the use of *virtual mobility/virtual exchange/COIL* and their distinction from *distance education/online education/MOOCs*
- 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



A changing paradigm?

Appeals for change, and a related call for virtual exchange or ‘Collaborative Online International Learning’, resonates in words.

In practice the focus continues 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).



Decolonizing internationalization

It reemphasizes the critique of *internationalization as a Western paradigm* (Jones and de Wit, 2014; de Wit, 2020) and the call for '*decolonizing the curriculum*' (Stein, and Andreotti, 2016).

Concerns around the *decolonization and indigenization of curriculum in higher education* are being linked with curriculum internationalization (Buckner & Stein, 2020; Bullen & Flavell, 2021; Leask, 2015; Stein, 2017, 2021; Stein et al., 2020; Stein and Andreotti, 2016).



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?



Seven Themes for the future

Inclusivity and equity

A decolonized internationalization

Internationalization for society

Forced internationalization

Internationalization of the curriculum at home

Digital internationalization, and

The affordability of internationalization.

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*.



Thank you

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