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Explicit and implicit internationalisation: Exploring perspectives on internationalisation in a business school with a revised internationalisation of the curriculum toolkit



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ABSTRACT

Business and Management Schools have long been at the forefront of internationalisation, realising that international perspectives are crucial in any business environment. Business Schools compete globally for the best staff and students, seeing them more as assets than customers. As a result, internationalisation is infused throughout the university life and its programmes. However, internationalisation in its practical aspects can be understood differently depending on how subtly internationalisation is infused throughout a programme and how effectively it engages with inclusive pedagogy rather than just curriculum content. This study explores what internationalisation looks and feels like in practice on four programmes in a business school according to students and faculty using a reflective toolkit. What emerges is a clear picture of agreement among students about explicit aspects of internationalisation, such as case studies or considering the views of different nationalities represented by their peers. However, it is only staff and a few students who recognise more tacit forms of internationalisation. This study highlights the potential for internationalisation and recommends adaptations to a reflective toolkit to further facilitate dialogue between staff and students. It is also argued that discussing examples is valuable for students, particularly for articulating the benefits of internationalisation.

1. Introduction

Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC) is growing in popularity as a concept, with a wealth of policies and case studies developing as a response to globalisation and neoliberalism in universities. As programmes mature, internationalisation can have different meanings such as integrating international students, adapting ethnocentric teaching practices, recruiting a suitable mix of students, challenging assumptions, or positioning curriculum content in an international context. Business and management schools are well-positioned to create highly responsive programmes, thereby creating a regular need to revisit the true meaning of IoC for academic staff and students (Beelen & De Wit, 2011).

A review of the literature on internationalisation in UK HE has highlighted how the sector has been slow to adopt true internationalisation, often adopting a deficit view of international students needing either to be integrated with home students or that front-loading English language support and study skills can ‘fix’ the issue (De Vita, 2007). De Vita rightly calls out the straw man criticisms of students from Confucian Heritage Cultures, arguing instead that internationalisation is forcing improvements in the

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¹ This research was conducted while both authors were employed at Edinburgh Napier University.

inclusivity of curriculum and assessment practices that are to the benefit of all students.

One of the key shifts in recent years has been in conceptualising internationalisation beyond recruitment. Recognising that internationalisation means more than just where students come from (Lunn, 2008; Turner & Robson, 2007) or can happen “by osmosis” (Martin, 2000 in De Vita, 2007, p. 162), internationalisation has recently expanded to what students learn, how they interact, and what values their programme promotes. For example, Fielden links internationalisation to the concept of a global citizen, thereby requiring that internationalised curriculums engage with a skillset which helps to “achieve social cohesion in a multicultural society” (Fielden, 2007, p. 23). Crucially, this involves being open to challenge Anglo-centric values as a form of democratising the curriculum by increasing its international scope. Business education offers a way forward to make sense of internationalisation (Beelen & De Wit, 2011) since it neatly creates a tension between a global outlook and altruism on one hand and values of individualism and competition on the other. This study therefore seeks to achieve a snapshot of what internationalisation means to staff and students on four business programmes with explicit internationalisation agendas and ‘international’ central in their programme titles.

1.1. Evolving perceptions of internationalisation

Internationalisation of the curriculum in higher education (HE) has emerged from the internationalisation of UK Higher Education more broadly. This has occurred in tandem with the massification of the sector, with home student numbers swelling at the same time as international students came to study in the UK in significant numbers. While competition for international students grew between the UK, USA and Australia, the education on offer showed little sense of adapting to the needs of new international students, nor of being open to the potential benefits of new viewpoints. Altbach (2004) describes this as the risk of neo-colonialism, exemplifying the downside of globalisation in HE. Indeed, with the rise in transnational education and increased competition for international students between countries, much of higher education can now be thought of as globalised rather than internationalised. Offering a global outlook is key to this appeal (Montgomery, 2010), but it is only recently that this has gone beyond marketing rhetoric and started to shape how disciplines are understood.

Business Schools have been ahead of this trend, recognising that all their students require an understanding of business in a globalised environment and that Anglo-centric business theory is not a sufficiently broad theoretical framework for students looking to make sense of global business. While there are concerns that curriculums simply become bundled packages sold from the UK and USA to the rest of the world (Yang, 2003), business schools can show the way in international students and staff being seen as assets rather than commodities.

Our understanding of internationalisation has evolved along with the developments outlined above. Internationalisation has shifted from inclusion in how non-native English speakers access to the curriculum and now into how the curriculum has adapted to the needs of internationally-minded students. The emphasis is therefore far less on who is in the classroom but more on what they are doing – in a business environment, every student should think of themselves as an international student. Similarly, definitions have also shifted from internationalisation simply being either present or absent to putting greater emphasis on the quality of internationalisation, with internationalisation at home (IoH) describing a learning environment in which internationalisation is fully embedded as a value (Jones, 2014). This builds closely on Knight's vision for an integration of “an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003, p. 2), with the notable shift from ‘integrating’ to ‘embedding’ showing the core importance of internationalisation. Hudzik (2011, p.6) likewise refers to internationalisation as an ‘infusion’ throughout all aspects of HE, emphasising its importance as “an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility”.

This infusion of values shows a definition of internationalisation which goes beyond simply understanding other parts of the world and much more into appreciation of other cultures as students develop their own stance separate from any one culture. The sense of internationals as ‘other’ is therefore rejected, with internationalisation not just forming the subject content but expanding into “the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study” (Leask, 2015, p. 9). This paper adopts Leask's (2015) definition of internationalisation of the curriculum since it emphasises both that internationalisation may not be readily observable as a discrete part of a curriculum and also that internationalisation should be felt beyond course content throughout a programme of study. This should be expected in cases where values and practices have matured so that “internationalisation has been ‘normalised’ and is very much subsumed within a broader philosophy of diversity and inclusion” (Caruana & Ploner, 2010, p. 26), which can also include integrating international into the informal curriculum (Beelen & Jones, 2015). From this perspective, internationalisation should be so heavily infused throughout a business school that it would be most obvious through its absence, with non-internationalised curriculums appearing dated or parochial. Suggestions for balancing this need for nuance against the desire to quantify and evaluate internationalisation are included later in this paper and can be seen in the revised survey tool in appendix 2.

Unfortunately, even when it seems to be a given that internationalisation is mutually beneficial, approaches can be criticised for either over-selling their impact or taking a piecemeal approach (De Vita, 2007). Examples such as adding foreign language modules or international case studies can therefore be criticised for failing to engage with the need for inclusive pedagogy. This makes the point that while adding international content may be necessary, it is not sufficient. Indeed, De Vita makes this point by drawing upon Rizvi's wonderfully expressive concept of “global imagination: the capacity to determine how knowledge is globally linked, no matter how locally specific its uses” (Rizvi, 2001, p. 5). Emphasising the way of thinking rather than the content being thought about gives a persuasive contrast to Anglo-centric interpretations of foreign case studies, showing that internationalisation needs to be about more than just content.

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