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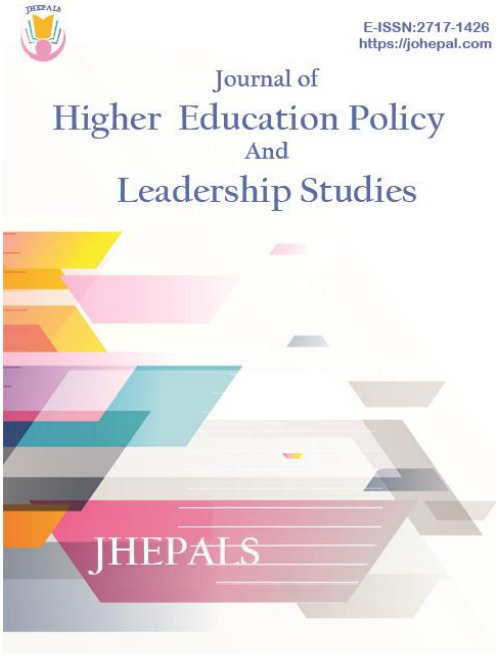

A New View of Internationalization: From a Western, Competitive Paradigm to a Global Cooperative Strategy

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A New View of Internationalization: From a Western, Competitive Paradigm to a Global Cooperative Strategy

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Abstract

Internationalization as a concept and strategy for, and in, higher education has evolved over the past four decades. Currently, discussion is increasing over whether internationalization is yet taking more distinctive forms in different parts of the world which better reflect local needs and priorities. We first consider several important moments in the development of international dimensions of higher education over the past hundred years which reflect the multidimensional and progressive development of internationalization: from an isolated to a process approach. Then we address the call for rethinking internationalization around the turn of the century, with initiatives such as internationalization of the curriculum in Australia and the UK and, across Europe, 'Internationalization at Home'. The Covid-19 pandemic brought to the forefront a further rethinking: 'internationalization of higher education for society' and virtualization. But, internationalization continues to both reflect and exacerbate the inequalities in global societies. Moving our understanding of internationalization from a western, competitive paradigm to a global cooperative strategy is now an imperative for the coming years.

Keywords: Internationalization; Higher Education; Mobility; Curriculum; Western Paradigm

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Introduction

Internationalization as a concept and strategy for, and in, higher education has evolved over the past four decades. Currently, discussion is increasing over whether internationalization is yet taking more distinctive forms in different parts of the world which better reflect local needs and priorities, and there is some evidence that this is happening (see for example, De Wit, Gacel-Ávila, Jones & Jooste, 2017; Thondhlana et al., 2021). This debate is provoking wider consideration of the impact on policy and practice offered by perspectives from those whose voices have had a more limited presence in the discourse. As described by Jones and de Wit (2014, 2021), there is now growing awareness that "Internationalization should no longer be considered in terms of a Westernized, largely Anglo-Saxon, and predominantly English-speaking paradigm." (2021, p. 35)

A new generation of scholars, such as those involved in the Critical Internationalization Studies Network (CISN, n.d.) is challenging the neoliberal view of internationalization as a revenue source dominated by Anglo-western perspectives and forms of knowledge. The valuing of a broader range of epistemologies, including those from the Global South and indigenous communities, not only allows internationalization to be more inclusive, but also encourages innovation in research methodologies and thematic constructions of internationalization itself (Montgomery, 2018). Furthermore, there is a need to review the interrelatedness between internationalization and other significant concerns. As argued by Jones (2022),

> [e]quality, 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 (p. iv).

Additional impetus for change was one result of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditional approaches to mobility and international student recruitment were curtailed, resulting in a growing use of alternative tools for internationalizing pedagogy, such as through Collaborative Online International Learning (Rubin, 2016). At the same time, increasing concern about the climate crisis makes it clear that some former approaches to internationalization are unsustainable in the long term (see for example the work of the Climate Action Network for International Educators (CANIE, n.d.)).

Several new and more responsible forms of internationalization are indeed being discussed more frequently (see for instance the contributions of rising scholars to the concluding chapter of the Handbook on International Higher Education- second edition (Deardorff et al., 2022,). In particular, broader 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).

Rumbley et al (2022) state that internationalization in higher education is "a multifaceted and evolving phenomenon. It touches on a wide scope of issues and can be defined in a multitude of ways" (2022, p. 19). And Hunter et al (2022) note that "the concept of internationalization continues to be refined and revised, and theories and definitions

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adjusted to match new and evolving understandings" (2022, p. 70). These critical reflections on internationalization are important contributions to a longer debate about rethinking internationalization in response to its predominant focus on mobility, revenue generation and soft power.

We now consider several important moments in the development of international dimensions of higher education over the past hundred years which reflect this multidimensional and progressive development of internationalization.

From Isolated Activities to a Process Approach

After World War I and again briefly after World War II, international education was driven primarily by optimistic political rationales of peace and mutual understanding. And although they have continued to be used as justifications for international cooperation and exchange, the reality shifted in the 1950s towards national security and foreign policy and that continued to be the case in the period of the Cold War (de Wit & Merkx, 2022).

In the 1970s and 1980s, two different approaches to internationalization evolved. In the Anglophone region, in particular in Australia and the United Kingdom, international education shifted from development cooperation to revenue generation. Meanwhile, under the impetus of European programs, in particular ERASMUS, the priority across continental Europe became international cooperation and exchange. In the 1990s, according to de Wit and Merkx (2022) both in North America and Europe, following the examples of Australia and the United Kingdom, "competitiveness as a popular rationale for international education was added to the older rationales of foreign policy and national security" (2022, p. 43).

The definition of internationalization in higher education by Jane Knight (2003 & 2004) as "a process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education" (2004, p. 11), was widely accepted as a working definition and had its foundation in an earlier more institution-focused definition of internationalization as a process (Knight, 1993). It moved the higher education sector from what had previously been a rather static, ad hoc and fragmented approach, based on activities and related administrative procedures, mainly tucked away in the international offices of HE institutions, and often related to governmental bureaucracies. Instead the definition emphasised 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, but it brought new challenges to the forefront, as the process involved several misconceptions (de Wit, 2011) and unintended consequences (Knight, 2009), and left ample room for different approaches to an understanding of internationalization, including more competitive forms.

In the past two decades, internationalization has continued to be primarily dominated by competitive, neoliberal and Anglo-western approaches. According to the Fifth Global Survey of Internationalization of Higher Education by the International Association of Universities (IAU) (based on data from 2018), more than 90% of institutions mention internationalization in their mission or strategic plan (Marinoni, 2019). But Marinoni and de Wit (2019) remark that there is a strong divide between institutions that consider

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internationalization as highly important, and those that do not. In other words, some universities really place it at the forefront whereas for others it is still rather marginal and ad hoc. However, even for those relatively few universities which do place a high importance on internationalization, it is not always clearly defined and, in practice, is largely represented by mobility and competition rather than broader approaches incorporating internationalization for all.

Rethinking Internationalization

Around the turn of the century, a rethinking of internationalization began with initiatives such as internationalization of the curriculum in Australia and the UK (see e.g. Leask, 2009; 2015) and, across Europe, 'Internationalization at Home' (Beelen & Jones, 2015). An emphasis on curriculum to the benefit of all students was partly a reaction to the almost exclusive focus on mobility, available to very few students, and to the increasing commercialization of international education. Jones and Killick (2007) noted emerging values-based and pragmatically-based rationales, and pointed out that "[a]s institutions gain a more sophisticated model of internationalisation, internationalisation of the curriculum can be seen as the pivotal work, without which other actions are destined to remain peripheral and transformation unrealised" (2007, p. 110).

Brandenburg and de Wit (2011) called for critical reflection on internationalization, as there appeared to be an increasing discrepancy between internationalization perceived as "the last stance for humanistic ideas" and "the world of pure economic benefits allegedly represented by the term globalization" (2011, p. 15). Around the same time, Hudzik (2011) called for 'comprehensive internationalization', embedding internationalization in all aspects, internal and external, of higher education. These ideas led further to viewing domestic diversity through this lens, which had already begun earlier. According to Knight (2004, p. 11) "internationalization is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exist with countries, communities, and institutions", while Jones and Killick (2007) argued that "responding effectively to the diversity of international students and to the diversity of home students are in fact not two agendas but one" (p. 110). This has been expanded upon in more recent times with the suggestion that 'interculturalization' might be a more appropriate term than internationalization to reflect the central role of culture in these endeavours (Garson et al., 2016; Jones, 2013; 2019). Enabling all our students to benefit requires "the intercultural ….. to take precedence in our thinking over the international" (Jones, 2022, p. iii).

A Change in Emphasis

In response to this broad range of concerns it was timely to update Knight's 2003 definition, making it clear that the process needs to be intentional, and giving it a clear focus and direction. Accordingly, de Wit et al. (2015) developed a revised definition, with internationalization now seen as:

> 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

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> students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 29).

Jones et al. (2021) reemphasized the latter element by appealing for greater attention to social responsibility, and defining a conceptual framework for 'internationalization of higher education for society'.

Even before the enforced changes in pedagogy brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Stallivieri (2020) and others were emphasizing the 'virtualization of internationalization', also described as virtual mobility, virtual exchange or developing further Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) (see Rubin, 2016). Such changes in pedagogy, along with other rapid adjustments and evolutions in internationalization of higher education have continued to increase in range and complexity in response to the pandemic. Certainly, the world is facing strong threats to the underlying values of cooperative, values-driven internationalization and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). Populism, nationalism, xenophobia, and parochial politics are on the increase around the world, presenting challenges for those who view internationalization as more than simply a neoliberal or market-driven concern, and who call for a more inclusive, nuanced and comprehensive approach.

Does This Mean Real Change?

Non-western countries are emerging as important challengers to the dominance of western internationalization discourse. But there is still a trend towards homogenization of activities, approaches, policies and strategies. As de Wit et al. (2019) observe, in a report for the World Bank on national tertiary education, internationalization strategies of low- and middle-income countries largely copy the western paradigm in focusing strongly on mobility, reputation and branding, and on South-North relations. This is, to a great extent, driven by economic rationales, increased competitiveness, and dominance of the western university model. Little space is left for innovative ideas around internationalization, embedded in local and institutional contexts. Thondhlana et al. (2021) state that the Global South is embracing a strategic approach to International Higher Education (IHE) because of its critical importance in advancing knowledge-based societies and for sustainable national development, but they also note that, despite this awareness, very few countries have such policies in place. According to Thondhlana et al. (2021)

> Many of the countries still approach IHE in a piece-meal, un-coordinated and ad hoc way. Issues of colonial histories, economic problems, political turmoil, civil strife and other local challenges result in resistance towards an ostensible "international" foreign perspective that perpetuates tensions between indigenization and globalization (, p. 598).

At the same time, de Wit et al. (2022) in a comparative study of international student mobility and recruitment in non-Anglophone countries conclude that "despite greater challenges and a less advantageous starting position compared to their English-speaking competitors, many non-Anglophone countries establish themselves as successful study

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destinations and find their niche in the global market". They advocate that a comprehensive internationalization approach should "not be primarily driven by rationales of revenue generation, soft power, and rising in the rankings" (2022, p. 297).

Internationalization continues to both reflect and exacerbate the inequalities in global societies. Access to higher education is still only available to a small proportion of the global population, and travelling to study in another country for short or longer periods will always be the preserve of a relatively wealthy, middle-class elite. The prevailing result of institutional internationalization strategies which predominantly focus on mobility, will be inequality of access, opportunity and outcomes. Sadly, this focus continues to be the dominant paradigm as far as many institutional leaders are concerned. With such limited numbers taking part, mobility can neither solve the growing demands by employers for graduates able to work across countries and cultures, nor will it enable local knowledge and contexts to contribute to solving major global issues, such as those highlighted in the SDGs.

Egron-Polak and Marmolejo (2017) argue that the SDGs may offer a new framework within which the social role and responsibility of higher education internationalization could evolve. They conclude that,

> Higher education institutions already (…) collaborate to build capacity in partner institutions in many disciplines, they internationalise their curriculum with the aim of instilling in graduates a global consciousness; they have focused on developing learning outcomes linked to global citizenship; undertake research on sustainable lifestyles and alternative economic models, develop new health policies and practices that expand access to treatment, train teachers at home and internationally, etc. However, these valuable activities are often somewhat marginal in the overwhelming focus of internationalisation strategies on attracting more international students, on finding partner institutions that enjoy a strong international reputation, on building partnerships according to self-interest due to pressure to show impact at home, focusing on research that has the greatest potential to raise both individual and institutional status and others. (Egron-Polak & Marmolejo, 2017, p. 17)

Thematic examples of the role of higher education internationalization in wider society include its contribution in relation to refugees and migration, and the enhancement of social inclusion. It also needs to be seen in the context of all levels of education in order to be inclusive of as wide a population as possible. And it needs to reform the way we understand and undertake international partnerships. They need to be more focused on social responsibility and to be developed and sustained on more equal terms.

What Next?

So, what next for internationalization as a global phenomenon? As we have stated elsewhere (Jones & de Wit, 2021), far from becoming globalized in the sense of homogenization, our view is that internationalization strategy continues to develop beyond traditional understandings. Engaging with different political, economic, social, and historical factors in regional settings can offer new insights for those who choose not to imitate Anglo-

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western models. Some of the issues to be taken into account in these emerging contexts, we suggest, include:

- Potential tensions arising from past colonial influences of different kinds.
- Local identities, cultures and languages.
- Institutional values, including the local social role of higher education.
- Increasingly competitive global operating environments.
- Finding the right institutional balance between local, national, regional, and global objectives.
- Questions of sustainability.
- Recognizing potential contributions to addressing global challenges.

Thondhlana et al. (2021) argue that to mitigate the potential harmful effects of internationalization, there should be a balanced interplay around questions of globalisation, regionalisation, and nationalisation, and that "issues of decolonisation, de-radicalisation and de-imperialisation are necessary for healthy international interdependence and mutual respect of sovereign nations" (Thondhlana et al., 2021, p. 598). De Wit (as reported in Dell, 2019) formulates it as follows for the African context

> Africanisation should not be seen as opposite to internationalisation but as two sides of the same coin. Exclusive focus on Africanisation would mean isolation while exclusive internationalisation would imply ongoing dependency and copying of Western approaches to internationalisation, not embedded in the local context (Dell, 2019, n.p.).

We conclude that a socially-responsible approach is not easy and requires substantial public and private resources (Jones & de Wit, 2021),

> but it is more socially inclusive and in the long run will result in a tertiary education sector with higher quality. This approach implies paying greater attention to internationalization of the curriculum at home. It should align with other levels of education, and better address the international dimensions of social responsibility (Jones & de Wit, 2021, p. 45).

This is even more important than it was already, given the current complex geopolitical tensions and ongoing health, societal and environmental challenges. Moving our understanding of internationalization from a western, competitive paradigm to a global cooperative strategy is now an imperative for the coming years.

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