
УДК 378.014.242-057.875

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INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: CULTURAL COMPONENT

Резюме

Статья посвящена проблеме студенческой мобильности. Автор акцентирует внимание на том, что правильно организованная работа с иностранными студентами способствует формированию культурной компетенции у студентов, не принимающих участия в программах мобильности. Делается вывод о необходимости специальной теоретической и практической подготовки преподавателей, работающих в смешанных студенческих группах.

Резюме

Статтю присвячено проблемі студентської мобільності. Автор акцентує увагу на тому, що правильно організована робота з іноземними студентами сприяє формуванню культурної компетенції у студентів, які не беруть участі в програмах мобільності. Зроблено висновок про необхідність спеціальної теоретичної та практичної підготовки викладачів, які працюють у мішаних студентських групах.

Key words: cultural component, cultural profile, international perspective, international student, internationalization, inward mobility, mobile student, mobility, outward mobility.

Over the past 10–15 years international student mobility has become an increasingly important part of the global higher education (HE) landscape.

Internationalization of HE promoted by a number of recent changes in government policies and economic and social context has become a major issue in academic circles in Ukraine. UNESCO statistics reveal that Ukraine hosts a bit more than 44 thousand students studying at tertiary level with the number of inbound international students increasing annually [7] and ranks 9th among other host countries.

But even allowing for a fast growing awareness of the importance and value of international education, numerous exchange programs set before students by mobility promoting organizations and the obvious positive outcomes of education abroad outgoing students constitute only 10 to 20 per

cent of the student population worldwide. (The outward mobility figures for Ukraine, despite her long history of involvement in international education activities as a HE destination, are supposedly considerably lower, with no official statistics available from the Ministry of Education of Ukraine). The above figures are indicative of the fact that the overriding majority of students still opt out of international mobility. This brings up a number of important issues posed by a need to give the non-mobile domestic majority a European and international dimension. Being non-movers they nonetheless and to an even greater degree need to raise their understanding of people from different countries and cultures, increase their knowledge of and respect for other human beings and their way of living as otherwise they might soon get completely excluded from a multicultural context of modern life and the global society in general.

The benefits of outward mobility for students have always been taken for granted, with the main emphases made on academic and cultural components. The international learning outcomes of outward student mobility formulated at the British Columbia Center for International Education cover the following competence categories:

- 1) language skills;
- 2) international business etiquettes;
- 3) home country and global perspectives;
- 4) intercultural competence;
- 5) resilience and coping skills.

This competence-based assessment of the value of mobility schemes made by providers of HE mobility opportunities to a considerable degree coincides with how the participants themselves evaluate their mobility experience gained after a study period abroad in terms of effects on a wide context of their present life and a future where local and global issues are irrevocably intertwined. From this perspective, the following effects have been noted [5]:

- 1) professional effects;
- 2) academic effects;
- 3) social/personal effects;
- 4) language skill effects;
- 5) cultural effects.

Exploring this question further can lead us to the idea that these are the opportunities in terms of competence development that are missed by those students who choose to study at a higher education institution (HEI) at home as compared with those who go abroad.

It is absolutely clear that though staff in tertiary education at home can hardly compensate for the various cognitive and language skills students may acquire after a study period abroad as well as for the increase in their job opportunities they can successfully promote a more positive attitude towards people from other cultures, the gain of knowledge of other cultures and cultural awareness. In this respect the emergence of the 'international classroom' has given teaching staff at home an ideal means of resolving the issues outlined above and ample though untapped resources for developing the domestic student's international and intercultural perspectives [6].

Nowadays there is a considerable amount of literature on the benefits of the increasing presence of international students in the learning environment. These benefits are typically described as:

- cultural diversity for students and staff;
- the breaking down of national myopia;
- opportunities for multicultural, cross-cultural and culturally-inclusive education [1].

The claim that is commonly made is that the presence of 'culturally others' could become a most important instrument to enhance the international and intercultural dimension of HE at home, likewise it needs no further explanation that cross-cultural skills and understanding do not develop by merely spending time in the same space as those who are different to ourselves. What is more, staff are increasingly becoming aware that such interaction between students from different cultural backgrounds as boosted by international student mobility adds very little, if anything, to intercultural learning experience of both domestic and international students.

The impediments are numerous but easily fall into three categories:

1) Governmental policies. In many respects the idea of internationalization is inconsistent with both national and local HE policies [2].

2) Institutional policies. HEIs must renounce a 'bit & pieces strategy' in respect of internationalization and make every effort to clearly embed it

in their institutional culture, policy, goals as well as their mission statement and work out a long-term strategic, staged plan of internationalization. Furthermore, strategies for staff internationalization must be designed at the institutional level [2]. A HEI must ensure that international perspectives permeate both the teaching methodology and content of subjects and the structure and organization of courses and assist academic staff to understand what internationalization and internationalized curriculum mean.

3) Teaching policies. In terms of internationalization it means ‘implementation of a range of teaching processes designed to assist all students to learn about and understand the international context of their studies, and to operate effectively in international professional environments’ [4].

Thereupon we can argue that internationalization at the teacher level is a neglected aspect of this process. The role of the lecturer as the ‘core player’ in this process and a champion of cultural knowledge that is new for both international and domestic students is mostly undervalued though it goes without saying that it is the lecturer who in the long run determines the results in the international classroom and it is at the lecturer level that the fine detail of internationalization rather than the big picture is provided.

This third challenge is closely related to designing concrete ways by adopting and adapting which staff can easily become ‘the ideal lecturer of the international classroom’ [3]. They present a profile of what they perceive to be the ideal lecturer in the international classroom stressing the need for:

- 1) competence in non-native language of instruction;
- 2) competence in dealing with cultural differences;
- 3) competence in specific teaching and learning styles;
- 4) knowledge of the academic discipline in context;
- 5) insight into the cultural meaning of using media and technologies;
- 6) knowledge of foreign education systems;
- 7) knowledge of international labour market, and
- 8) further specific personal qualities.

Though the authors repeatedly stress that the profile is neither intended as a blueprint nor has the status of an empirically validated instrument and thus has no use in assessing the performance of lecturers, we can draw on it to decide on a list of specific culture-sensitive teaching skills, knowledge

and qualities staff in tertiary education need to possess in order to adequately cope with the challenges of a situation where 'non-nationals' have long ago become part of teaching settings.

Thus it can be argued that to provide a context conducive to teaching effectively in the international classroom the ideal lecturer is expected to have:

a) specific knowledge of: i) cultural profile of their international students ii) the role and social position of the lecturer and the student and the patterns of their interaction that vary greatly in different cultures; thus students who have been trained in other cultural teaching and learning styles require time to switch over to a different form of instruction as well as teacher-student and student-student interaction patterns; iii) the position of his/her academic subject in a wider international context and the need to regularly broaden its scope to include international content and reflect professional practices and traditions in other cultures thus assisting in understanding of intercultural issues; iv) international professional requirements in an employability skills profile for their profession;

b) specific teaching skills to make extensive use of i) certain teaching strategies aimed to foster intercultural sensitivity and integrate the cultural input of international students in the learning process; ii) assessment strategies and criteria that 'could specify and evaluate cross-cultural communication skills and be explicitly linked to international standards' [6]; such approach to assessment will both check on and encourage the development of international perspective; iii) of multi-media and ICT (electronic links, networks, email chat groups, etc.) in an integrated way in the communication process of teaching to further enhance the international component;

c) specific attitudes: i) be open-minded, emotionally stable, flexible, stereotype-free, have social initiative and cultural empathy; ii) possibly have personal experience of an intercultural encounter; iii) adhere to the principles underlying the objectives of teaching in culturally mixed groups.

From this perspective it becomes clear that it is impossible to become the 'ideal lecturer' in the international classroom only by involvement in teaching culturally mixed groups.

Exploring this question further, a survey [6] on the above culturally-sensitive areas in international teaching practice was conducted among

44 lecturers of People's Ukrainian Academy (PUA). In respect of the specific knowledge the survey reveals that though most interviewed (a) understand the international context of their professional areas and are familiar with the different theoretical approaches to their disciplines used in other systems and traditions (84%), only half of them (43%) can (b) describe how the general features of their professional areas are expressed in other cultures. Results of the survey as to the specific teaching skills (c) show that only a small majority (59%) (c) employ teaching techniques that require students to seek information from culturally different others and a sad minority (23%) (d) make use of assessment strategies sensitive to multi-cultural groups. Being familiar with (e) international literature in their field and able to discuss concepts and theories in their professional areas from the point of view of both 'national' and other traditions (77%), only a third of interviewees (31%) remember to (f) make this difference explicit to domestic as well as to international students by, for example, providing definitions and glossaries for all specialist terms, abbreviations and acronyms. Though the survey found that lecturers generally (g) know the cultural profile of student groups they teach and claim to understand their cultural backgrounds (82%), proceeding from face-to-face interviews with some of those surveyed it can be assumed that the above refers mainly to domestic students and the cultural background in respect of international students is typically reduced to information about their countries of origin and family backgrounds.

We can further assume that figures showing more than 50% (dark blue in the chart) lecturers' involvement in the process of 'internationalization at home' are due to their personal interest, profound professional knowledge and general academic background at PUA which is sensitive to international students rather than conscious 'internationalization treatment'.

Being trained as they were in culturally homogeneous academic environments, lecturers cannot be expected to possess specific professional skills sensitive to multicultural student body. Moreover, lecturers who do not teach culturally mixed groups on a regular basis are often not quite interested in the issues of international teaching and are sometimes discouraged by their lonely experiences of international encounters in classroom. They are likely to resist greatly different demands posed by

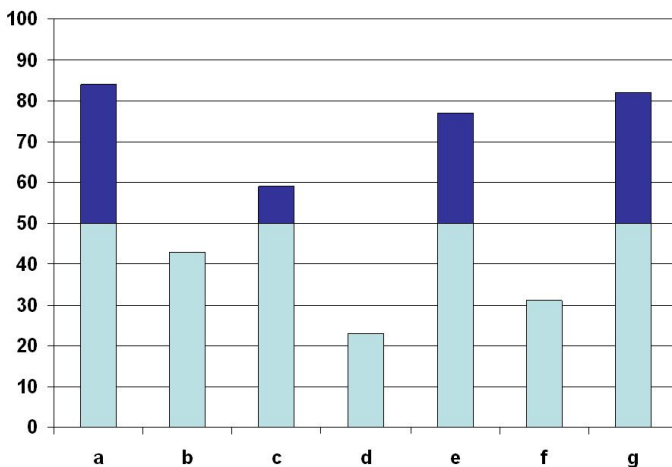


Figure 1. Employment of specific culture-sensitive teaching skills, knowledge and qualities by teaching staff

culturally diverse groups and even consider ‘other’ students a hindrance in their routine teaching practice. But assuming that further internationalization is necessitated by changes in government policies and economic and social context of modern life and that increased cultural diversity will soon become an important feature of any academic background, awareness should be raised among managers of HEIs for certain measures to ensure smooth functioning of their institutions in a globalized and internationalized academic environment.

To support the internationalization of teaching and learning at this level professional development programs should be launched at HEIs and resources allocated for the purpose of assisting staff to internationalize their courses and teaching practices. The programs will provide staff with information about structural options and pathways for course design, a range of teaching and learning processes and assessment strategies aimed to assist all students to develop international perspectives as professionals and citizens. Furthermore, systematic intercultural counseling and preparation for intercultural encounters should be institutionalized to help

lecturers give up their stereotype ideas about international students and overcome the negative experience of teaching in an international classroom such as they might have.

Further to cultural profile of international students it can be assumed that the concept requires further development to include such key notions as i) core values (national characteristics, religious and ethnic beliefs, attitudes and world views, social norms, etc.); ii) communication patterns (speech styles, non-verbal communication, audience expectations, etc.); iii) concepts of space and time (interpersonal distance, silence, eye contact, etc.).

The task may seem difficult but allowing for the inbound mobility rate data revealed by Data Center of UNESCO Institute for Statistics, it can be reduced to drawing up cultural profiles for student from those countries which persistently choose Ukraine as their education destination. The Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation account for the inbound mobility from Europe, and the Kingdom of Morocco and the Republic of Tunisia provide mobile students from the Africa region. The picture for the Asian region is more diverse, but the major countries choosing Ukraine as their destination are the People's Republic of China, the Republic of India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Federation of Malaysia, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Turkmenistan.

Inbound mobility rate statistics for PUA is in line with the above figures. Every year the institution welcomes mobile students from European, African and Asian regions with most of them coming from the Republic of Turkmenistan, the Republic of Turkey, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Islamic Republic of Iran constituting 61% of the total inbound mobile student population at PUA.

This means that the task of developing collection of cultural profiles can no longer be regarded as a major undertaking but as a core strategy of internationalization both at personal and institutional levels. Such profiles can initiate the development of positive attitudes towards other cultures, and behavioral skills to act efficiently and adequately in an intercultural context.

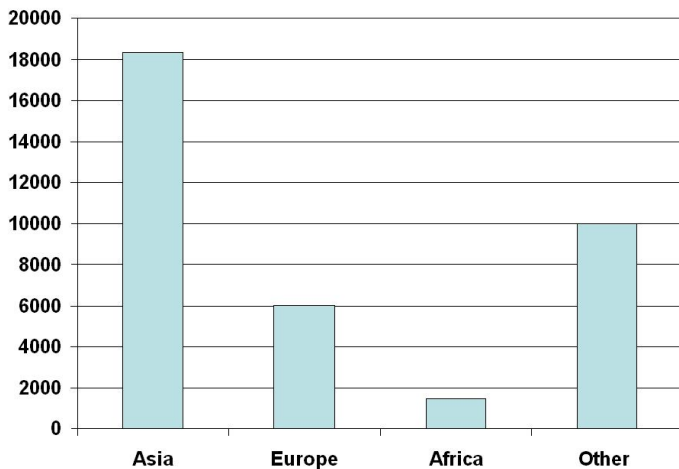


Figure 2. Inbound mobility rate, Ukraine, 2009

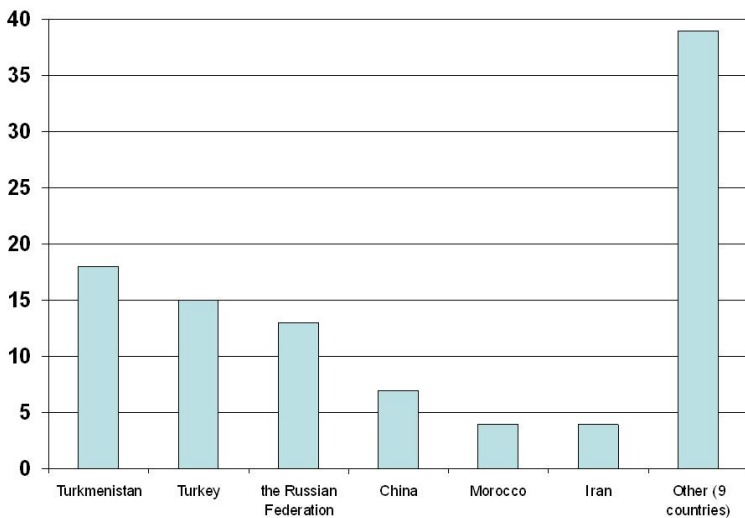


Figure 3. Inbound mobility rate at PUA, %

In order to ensure sustainable internationalization, meet the needs of international and domestic student body and integrate the cultural input of mobile students in the teaching and learning process both managerial and academic staff should raise their awareness for specific culture-sensitive teaching skills, knowledge and qualities staff in tertiary education need to possess. In our opinion, this can be done through both formal learning and international exposure of individual lecturers. Professional development programs, systematic intercultural counseling and development of a collection of cultural profiles of mobile students are seen as sensible, timely and adequate measures to address the challenge.

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