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Students' Perceptions of Internationalisation of Three Master of Science (MSc) Programmes at a Danish University

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Research Domain: International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Abstract:

This article examines how Danish and international students perceive internationalisation, as related to English as a medium of instruction (EMI) and international student mobility, in three MSc programmes of a Danish university. Engaging with a critical stance towards internationalisation through a spatial lens, it explores discourses and practices of internationalisation, learning and pedagogical approaches. It further explores what it means to be 'a good international student' and what constitutes a good quality 'international experience'. Using an ethnographic qualitative inquiry and critical discourse analysis, this paper draws on 126 hours of observation of online teaching and 38 semi-structured interviews with 20 Danish and 18 international students enrolled in three MSc programmes delivered in English in a Danish University. Preliminary data analysis of this work in progress shows that Danish students have instrumentalist perceptions of what it means to experience international education, which may have direct pedagogical and institutional implications.

Paper: *Internationalisation of HE in Denmark*

In a global knowledge economy, internationalisation of higher education (HE) has brought about increasingly bold statements about the skills, knowledge and attitudes students should bring to their lives and work in a globalised and interconnected society (Leask and Bridge, 2013). This is often associated with the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) (Wächter and Maiworm, 2014; Hughes, 2008), which can also be seen as the 'anglicisation' of education (Leask, 2015), since EMI goes beyond a pedagogical change. Studies on Danish HE internationalisation (e.g., Jensen, 2014; Mosneaga and Agergaard, 2012) have shown how universities navigate between 'being internationalised' and 'doing internationalisation' through discussions of how they envisage, strategise and adjust to the increasing pressures within both national and supra-national policy circles. While policymakers aim to increase the level of transparency and transference between national educational systems, homogenizing university degrees, for example, to the instrumentalist viewpoint is consistent with its inherent pragmatic and economic goals in a competitive market (Stier, 2004). However, what this means to (and for) students is not always clear. Would students' perceptions of internationalisation be different from the instrumentalist ideology in overarching policies? The instrumentalist discourse, i.e. a pragmatic means to an end, can undermine other

purposes of internationalisation, such as idealistic ones, according to which internationalisation is a good in itself, and educationalist (pedagogical) ones, whereby internationalisation is seen as enriching the overall academic experience for lifelong learning (Stier, 2004).

Engaging with these debates, this study aims to answer the following research question: how do domestic and international students perceive internationalisation as related to EMI and inbound student mobility?

Methodology

To address the research question, this qualitative research draws on ethnographic inquiry (Mills and Morton, 2013), including 126 hours of online teaching observation and 38 semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996). Discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) is being used through a spatial analytical lens (Larsen, 2016). A spatial approach to this research has allowed the researchers to generate data about quality and relevance of perceived 'international' experiences by drawing on real-life experiences, with all their meanings, symbols, codes and significations, in the production and negotiations of spaces of internationalisation in Danish HE.

Fieldwork was conducted between March and June 2021 and sampling included 20 Danish students (15 male and 5 female) and 18 international students (6 male and 12 female) of three Master of Science (MSc) programmes at a Danish University that are delivered in English.

Preliminary Findings and Discussion

Instrumentalism -International students as assets

When students were asked about 'how international' they perceived these MSc programmes to be, a prevalent response was related to the presence of international students in the classroom. As one Danish student responded:

'I think there are other programmes that are more international, like 50% of the students or more are international [...] but in the course that I am taking now, we have only 2 students, ...so it's not that international...it is important to see different perspectives, learning different things'

Danish students described that they benefit from the presence of international students in the classroom by drawing on discourses of 'offering a window to the world' through sharing their perspectives. Whether students' awareness of varied perspectives is enough to contribute to personal growth and a multicultural society, from an educationalist standpoint is yet to be found.

Similarly, within the Danish HE internationalisation agenda, as noted by Kjærgaard (2009), 'foreign students and researchers are an important weapon in the global battle for knowledge and Denmark is ready to join the fight' (p. 30). It is expected that further data analysis will unveil how international students' perceptions of these MSc programmes are consonant with the Danish students' views and

experiences of internationalisation, as well as with broader policy debates in Denmark.

Conclusion

Internationalisation can enrich the overall academic experience which extends beyond the classroom. However, expanding access to international programmes does not automatically provide students with the skills and cultural knowledge needed to take advantage of available opportunities and to adapt to new locales (Sawir, 2005; Ranta and Meckelborg, 2013; Wang and Chang, 2016, cited in Oleksiyenko, 2018; Eiras and Huijser, 2021), nor does the presence of foreign students and scholars on a campus guarantee spontaneous cross-cultural interactivity and enrichment (Jaworski, 1993; Burke and Wyatt-Smith, 1996; Liu, 2001; Roberts and Tuleja, 2008, cited in Oleksiyenko, 2018). Completion of this research is expected to contribute to unpacking what specific benefits are brought by internationalisation in the Danish context, which could then inform pedagogical approaches and institutional policies.

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