

## **Learning beyond the Institution: A Cultural Capital Perspective on the International Student Experience (0270)**

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### **Outline**

The UK has one of the most international student populations in the OECD. International students make up 14 per cent of the enrolments in tertiary education in the UK, compared to an OECD average of fewer than seven per cent (OECD, 2008). The highest proportion of overseas UK students studying in the UK comes from China, India, USA, Nigeria and Malaysia. The majority of (other) EU students come from the Republic of Ireland, Germany, France, Greece and Cyprus (HESA-Data, 2007/08).

Countries in which English is the main language have an advantage in the international competition for foreign students, as language spoken and used in instruction is a decisive factor when choosing the country of study. Other important factors taken into consideration by HE applicants when deciding on the country of study are tuition fees and the costs of living (Bodycott, 2009). In the UK, there are higher tuition fees for international students than for domestic students. European students, although paying the same tuition fees as UK students, might pay less or no tuition fees at all in their home countries. Altogether, students can achieve a similar or the same qualification in another country without having to pay high tuition fees. The Bologna process, in addition, during which European countries have implemented a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, could have strengthened the position of other countries as Bachelor and Master's degrees have become more widely available. Also, a growing number of institutions in other countries for example, Scandinavia and the Netherlands now offer courses in English (OECD, 2008).

The growing competition of other countries increases the need to observe the situation of non-UK students studying in the UK.

The distinction of Non UK students in other overseas and EU students reflects differences in tuition fees charged for by higher education institutions. These differences will be explored using the examples of German and Indian students.

Studying abroad for a full course is a rare experience for German students as less than 5 per cent does so. Still, the numbers of German students who made the decision to take up a more expensive course in the UK rather than study in their home country have almost doubled over the last ten years. One reason for the increase of student migration could be the existing uncertainties students face in Germany in the course of the introduction of the two-tier courses (Bachelor/ Master's degree). Other reasons include the importance of international experience and English language skills. Studying abroad is not a normal route in the transition from school to employment in Germany. Indian young people, on the other hand, have a long tradition of studying abroad as overseas HEI are expected to provide educational and status advantage. The vast majority of Indian students study in the USA, the UK takes up the third position after Australia. Although the Indian HE system has been heavily expanded over the years, the quality of undergraduate provision is generally regarded as uneven and largely unsatisfactory.

The empirical part of the presentation tries to identify differences and similarities between both overseas and (other) EU students using the examples of Indian and German students in the UK. Data gained from a national longitudinal survey of UK undergraduate students were used to investigate the motivation and patterns of study of (other) EU and overseas students studying within the UK. The data analysed were drawn from the first two stages of the Futuretrack2006 (Purcell et al. 2008, Purcell et al. 2009) survey.

In terms of reasons for the selection of the HEI, Indian students stood out as having different priorities, considerably more likely to be influenced by the reputation of the university, its teaching and research reputation, schools career advisers and families and, to a lesser extent, those from other overseas locations gave a similar pattern of choice. The German and other European students also gave broadly similar responses – mostly closer to those of the UK students. During their first year, both overseas and (other) European students reported that they spend more time in lessons and on coursework or study; these differences were consistent even when the studied subjects were taken into account. Regarding plans after graduation, (other) EU students and overseas students were more likely to report plans for post-graduate courses and less likely to plan gap years than UK indigenous students.

The research findings can be used to address the new roles of the higher education in a global context. Education has previously been regarded as a means to reproduce disadvantages. Whilst growing expansion of the higher education system has led to greater possibilities of non-traditional students within national HE systems, it seems that the expansion of student mobility has reinforced and strengthened the extent to which the most socially advantaged students in each country have been able to build on their existing cultural capital and educational access advantages, in both EU and emerging countries (c.f. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). There is also considerable evidence that graduate recruiters value international migration and experience of studying in overseas countries as indicative of enterprise, willingness to take risks and obtain useful experience of different cultures and ways of doing things. However, if the experience of higher education migration is restricted to those with cumulative social advantage, it may be that the globalisation of HE increasingly narrows opportunities for those less able to take advantage of the opportunities available.

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