

Internationalization of Higher Education, experiences from a TVET student exchange program between Oslo and Akershus University College for Applied Sciences (HIOA), Norway and Kyambogo University (KyU), Uganda.

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Overall objective

The overall objective of the paper is to explore some key impacts of internationalization of Higher education through a student exchange programs at HIOA, a pilot project at department the Department of Vocational Teacher Education (YFL) at the faculty of Education and International Studies. The main research question was:

- To what extent do the policies and strategies, support structures and academic content support and reflect the overall objectives of HIOA/YFL related to, a) enhancing the quality of internationalization efforts through the student exchange program.

The Norwegian students in this study spent three months at Kyambogo University(KyU). This pilot was the first cohort from YFL given the opportunity in Uganda. This study also examine the internal objectives and strategies developed at YFL, and also the outcome, based upon views and experiences of the various partners and actors involved.

Structure

The overall structure of the report will be based upon the framework developed by Tjeldvold (1997), and his educational rational. The model takes the contextual policies and strategies as the point of departure. It thereafter identifies the actual implementation at institutional level, focusing on HIOA`s strategies. These strategies are further deconstructed and applied to faculty level, (LUI), and thereafter to the institute level (YFL) as materialized at the different bachelor studies from where these 3 students were selected.

Research Method

Starting with a documentary review of HIOA`s policies and strategies, the study applied an Action research approach, in order for the researchers to engaged in a collaborative group of colleagues sharing a common concern to support the implementation of internationalization , at the entire faculty. By using an action research approach, building on the paradigm of a reflective practitioner (Shøn, 1999), the research also contributed to a professional discourse on internationalization at individual, institutional and faculty level at HIOA, but also engagement and innovative thinking at the partner institution. The range of actors involved at each level, starting with the leaders, here the international coordinators executing the policy at the overall institutional level at HIOA, the teachers at the various bachelor programs involved, and in the receiving or experiences end of the chain, the exchange students themselves.

This project is focusing on the following phases of the student exchange program, preparatory phase, HIOA and Kyambogo, e.g. i)The practical arrangements related to academic input and praxis abroad and 2)Relevance and utilization regards professional development at HIOA and and the added value of the stay at KyU.

Findings

Policies and strategies

HIOA`s policies and strategies clearly (LAU, 2012) is prioritize international cooperation and internationalization clear leadership at all levels of the institution, and underscores mobility of teachers and students as a powerful engine in the work of International Education. But the institution is lacking a distinct goal for e.g. how, by whom, and further description of how this will be implemented at the various faculties and institutes, as well as bachelor courses. When

looking into the study plans and syllabuses, we see the same tendency, no specific actions are described in the course syllabuses.

Administrators/Lecturers, KyU

The fact that staff at KyU did not know the objective of the exchange program, they found it difficult to plan for their stay. As one lecturer explained it “Would be important for the lecturers to know the plan, easier to interact, to mentor and guide, “I was acting blindly” I did not know why she came! (DHH). She continued, “I (now) think she came here for skills and not as I expected to learn about teaching methods” (DHH).

Neither did KyU staff know the background and skills of the students which also made it difficult for them to utilize their knowledge to inform their own studies, to interact professionally at different levels, and develop a 3 month academic and practical course adapted to the needs of the Norwegian TVET students. Knowing their background would enabled the lecturers to e.g. utilized the competence of the students, e.g. “to contribute by sharing and explaining how nutrition is dealt with in Norway, e.g, in hospitals, elderly homes and/or kindergartens. Our students would like that” (DHH).

Another department clearly addressed the need for information from the Norwegian institution, stating, ”We need more clear defined goals from the students” (FAS). After interacting with the student, we clearly realized we could get help from her, e.g. “thinking about structures, curriculum, and issues related to hair dressing that she now can share with our teachers, even at certificate courses”. (FAS). Starting with arranging e.g. a workshop, with her here, add textile, weaving etc.to beautify the hair (FAS).

The Dean at another faculty argued he would be more interested in “how Norwegian students could contribute, have some benchmarks that is what we would want”. E.g. he continued, “If he (the student) could write a report, feed-back, information both ways”. We have realized we could learn a lot from the student, specifically related to the delivery mode. “Here it is a challenge towards vocational education in general, there is a negative attitudes towards vocational training. This could be further elaborated on. The bread on your table “White color job is good!” By sharing views and discussing such issue through interaction, it would contribute to changing people’s attitudes, according to the dean (DCBE).

By and large, KyU staff found it interesting and challenging to have exchange students, but argued that an increased interaction with Norwegian staff and students would be better. They requested the establishment of a coordinator, who presented the plan, negotiated with the various departments who again assigned a responsible person to follow up the exchange program as well as supporting students in gaining knowledge (DHH).

Lecturers at HIOA

The lecturers all agreed that the recruitment of students and preparatory arrangements should have taken place at an earlier stage. Information regards contextual and cultural issues were not sufficient, learning epistemologies and classroom practices was another issue. In other words, there were “Insufficient information about available courses and programs at KyU”, in order for the Norwegian lecturers to prepare the students for the exchange, and also utilize their experiences when getting back to Norway.

Student’s voices

The students also had complains to the program. Firstly, they felt the information about exchange came too late, there were too many uncertainties, and the possibilities for exchange were too few. One stated, (there were)”Unclear structure when it came to information and responsibilities, this might be because the whole thing were in a pilot phase”, and continued, “I go because I got the opportunity and it gives me a broader perspective, thinking about this as a resource I can use in the future”. They also endorsed the attitude to the exchange by their Norwegian lecturers, but admitted challenges when arriving KyU, “Few, if any places were ready to receive them”, related to practical or academic training as well as integrate them in

broader social network net-work. Bu here were also a lot of positive gains, to quote one of them, “I learned a lot about myself in new surroundings and my ability to handle different situations”.

Summary

The quality of the exchange could be enhanced if administrative structures were improved and in place, if roles and responsibilities among the different actors are clarified early in the process, if the lecturers knew and could relate to courses and practices at KyU, also in their teaching at HIOA, and visa versa, in order for KyU to utilize the competence of the Norwegian students while being at KyU.