

Internationalisation: Meaning and Definitions

Internationalisation

The most diffused definition of internationalisation is as follows: (OECD, 1999):

“Internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution”.

Both an international and an intercultural dimension is included in this definition, to emphasise the fact that internationalisation has an impact on the intercultural relations of different ethnic groups.

Internationalisation is often confused with comparative education, globalization, regionalization, trans-national education, intercultural education. The term that is most often used as interchangeable is globalization. Globalization and internationalisation are seen as interlinked but different concepts. Globalization can be considered the catalyst while internationalisation is the response in a proactive way (Knight & De Wit, 1999). The differences between the two concepts are defined as follows (Knight, 1997) :

“ Globalization is the flow of technology, economy, people, values, ideas, across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way due to each nation’s individual history, traditions, culture and priorities.

Internationalisation of higher education is one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalization yet, at the same time respects the individuality of the nation”

Broader terms are cooperation and collaboration. Virkus (Virkus, 2007) states that the BP has influenced and supported international collaboration, which is defined as:

Collaboration is defined as a mutually beneficial and well defined relationship between individuals to achieve common goals and cooperation as a structure and system of interaction designed to facilitate the accomplishment of a goal through people working together.

International courses

Van der Wende (1996) has researched several international courses comparatively. She has used the rather broad OECD-typology of international curricula ranging from:

- curricula with some international content,
- curricula that address cross-cultural skills,
- curricula leading to internationally recognised professions,
- special curricula designed for foreign students.

International courses are not *Trans-national courses*, which are (Council of Europe/UNESCO Code of good practice 2000):

“activities in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based” .

Joint Degree Programmes

A much more demanding approach from the curriculum development point of view are joint degree programmes, strongly advocated within the BP and confirmed at the Bologna-Berlin Conference (Berlin Communique, 2003) as a step towards internationalisation. A common framework for a joint degree must be flexible in order to allow for and reflect national differences, but it must also include a definition of a joint degree, which will serve as a basis for the legal framework at a national level (Stockholm Conclusions, 2002). Internationalizing curricula in joint courses can also be seen as something more comprehensive than developing curricula with international contents, or taught in English, as cooperation and coordination for the procedures of quality and recognition are crucial (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002; European University Association, 2004; European Masters new Evaluation Methodology (EMNEM), 2006).

The international harmonization of curricula in double courses is another important tendency . Double (sometimes called *twin*) courses are joint curricular, developed by two or more universities in different countries. The difference between joint and double degree is in certification: only joint degree courses give a joint Diploma and follow common regulations of quality assurance and qualification recognition. Double degree courses deliver a common curriculum, but the higher education institutions give separate Diploma. The certification obtained by twin courses is awarded by only one country and does not normally present legal problems of recognition (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002).

A survey of the European University Association (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002) states that an

agreed definition of joint degrees in Europe is still lacking. Sometimes it is simply used for programmes in which two different subject areas or disciplines have to be studied. Rauhvargers (Tauch C., Rauhvargers A. 2002, page 29) tried to list some main characteristics:

“Joint degrees are normally awarded after study programmes that correspond to all or at least some of the following characteristics:

- *the programmes are developed and/or approved jointly by several institutions;*
- *students of each participating institution study part of the programme at other institutions;*
- *the students’ stays at the participating institutions are of comparable length;*
- *periods of study and exams passed at the partner institution(s) are recognised fully and automatically;*
- *professors of each participating institution also teach at the other institutions, work out the curriculum jointly and form joint commissions for admission and examinations;*
- *after completion of the full programme, the student either obtains the national degrees of each participating institution or a degree (in fact usually an unofficial “certificate” or “diploma”) awarded jointly by them.”*

While in most European countries, higher education institutions have established joint curricula or a joint degree, this often seems to result from the individual initiative of particular institutions (Tauch & Rauhvargers, 2002).