Internationalisation of Higher Education in the United States of America and Europe

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Chapter Twelve

Internationalisation of higher education as a research area

1. Introduction

Ulrich Teichler (1996 a, 435), describing the potentials and limits of comparative higher education, remarks that "we might consider internationalization of higher education as the next theme which gives rise to a new focus of both higher education policy and higher education research." In this chapter, the position of this theme in the area of educational research will be analysed. Before doing so, it is important to clarify the inclusion of the addition 'higher' in the term 'internationalisation of higher education'. The use of 'internationalisation of education', would in principle be correct. The use of one and the same term for different levels of education is characteristic of the subdivisions used under the broad umbrella of 'comparative and international education'. It also positions the research more clearly within the concept of comparative education, as described by Anweiler (1977, see Chapter Six). In the present stage of 'internationalisation of education', there is, however, such a strong emphasis on higher education that there seems to be a general tendency to use the term 'internationalisation of higher education'.

This limitation might not be correct in the long run. Teichler (1996 b, 344) states that for now "the major thrust of activity is in the domain of higher education", but internationalisation is also to be found "at other levels and in other sectors of education." In the past, other levels and sectors of education were marginally focussed on internationalisation other than of the curriculum (foreign languages, history and geography). There are programmes oriented towards short study visits, homestay projects and exchanges of teachers at the primary and secondary level as well as in vocational training. They are, however, relatively marginal, although there are strong signs that the interest for such programmes is rising. Perhaps the most obvious examples are the COMENIUS programme within the SOCRATES programme and the emphasis on vocational training in the LEONARDO programme of the European Commission.

It is becoming increasingly more accurate to leave out 'higher' and focus on 'internationalisation of education' in the case of using the term 'international education'. At the same time, by emphasising 'higher', the restriction of research to this level of education is more obvious. The research should be positioned within comparative higher education research, an area that might, in analogy with 'comparative and international education', better be called 'comparative and international higher education', thereby giving recognition to the growing importance of internationalisation in higher education.

In this way it will also be possible to address the problem which Van der Wende (1997 a, 12) identified through a survey of the specialised literature on higher education policy. "We find that, although an international comparative approach in the description and analysis of national higher education systems and policies is quite popular, the issue of internationalisation as a domain or context of higher education policy making is not really addressed," and (Ibid., 22)
research and related literature on internationalisation "little use is made of the theories, concepts and insights used in and gained from higher education research." This missing link is remarkable, when for instance Susan Oppe et al. (1990, 9) in a comparative study of study abroad programmes observe that "the predominant characteristics and norms of the respective systems of higher education have an impact on the structure of the study abroad programmes themselves."

Another missing or at least undervalued aspect of the study of the internationalisation of higher education, as is true for comparative and international higher education in general, is its multi- and inter-disciplinary character. As the previous chapters have made clear, research in this field will include aspects of educational, political, economic, social, cultural, anthropological, historical and legal study. As Goedegebuure and Van Vugt (1996, 390; see also Altbach, 2000 b, 3) state for research in higher education in general, it is not an individual discipline but subject to the methodological requirements of other disciplines. This does not imply, however, that higher education and its international dimension are not relevant as a theme of study.

During the past ten years internationalisation has become recognised as an area of research by organisations such as the European Association for Institutional Research (EAIR), the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER), the Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) and the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the OECD, as Ulrich Teichler (1999 a and b) observes for the first two organisations, and the work of Knight and De Wit (1995, 1997 and 1999) and Van der Wende (1997 a) indicate for the rest. Perhaps, this increased attention will help in establishing the missing link between higher education research and research on the internationalisation of higher education.

The interest in the internationalisation of higher education as a research area is a reflection of the growing strategic importance of internationalisation for higher education. Before the beginning of the 1990s, educational journals did not include many articles related to this topic. Exceptions are articles on student mobility in journals such as 'Higher Education in Europe'. It was only in the 1990s that journals such as 'Higher Education Management' (IMHE/OECD), 'Tertiary Education and Management' (EAIR) and the 'European Journal of Education' (European Institute of Education and Social Policy) started to publish articles on this subject on a regular basis. An example for the USA is 'International Higher Education' of the Boston College Center for International Higher Education. The publication of several books and the emergence of specialised journals in the US, such as 'International Education Forum' (AIEA), 'International Spectator' (NAFSA) and 'Frontiers' (independent), and in the United Kingdom, such as 'International Education' (UKCOSA) and 'International Higher Education' (TEXT Consortium), are also indications of an emerging research interest, although most of these publications publish mostly practice and case studies. The launch of the 'Journal of Studies in International Education' in 1997 was the first attempt to bring together practitioners and researchers in the field of international education on a global instead of national or regional scale.
2. Comparative higher education research and the internationalisation of higher education

The ‘internationalisation of higher education’ is still a long way from becoming the regular subject of substantial research-based academic studies, as noted by Ulrich Teichler (1996 b, 341). This lack of a strong research tradition explains why this area lacks academic recognition in the field of ‘comparative and international education’ and why it is marginalised under confusing terms within that field, as described in Chapter Five. Recognition of the ‘internationalisation of higher education’ as a special research area will be unavoidable and necessary in the coming years, given the growing importance, both in practice and in research, of this area, as Teichler (1996 a, 435) predicts.

One can say that within the broad field of Comparative and International Education, ‘comparative education’ research focuses on comparative study between systems, regions, countries, institutions, programmes, curricula etc. and ‘international(isation of) education’ research focuses on study of the internationalisation of systems, regions, countries, institutions, programmes, curricula etc. These studies can cover all levels of education or one specific level, such as higher education. Following this line of definition would position the internationalisation of higher education within the area of comparative higher education research, in a similar way to that used by Teichler (1996 a, 435; 1996 b, 369) and Altbach, 1997 a, 8), and this would support a broadening of this field to ‘comparative and international higher education research’. At the same time one has to take into account that the same applies to the ‘internationalisation of higher education’ research as to higher education research in general, namely that it is an interdisciplinary field of study (Altbach, Ibid., 11; 2000, 3) and that its researchers are the ‘non-genuine’ dimension experts of higher education and do not address its core dimensions (Teichler, 1996 a, 437).

3. Internationalisation of higher education, a research need

The call for research on study abroad has been around since before the 1990s, but became stronger in that decade. The need for research and evaluation of study abroad was already being stressed in 1985 by Barbara Burn (Briggs and Burn, 1985, 57-58), and this call was recognised by a broad coalition of American and European organisations such as NAFSA, CIEE and the IIE on the American side and the European Cultural Foundation, the European Institute of Education and Social Policy, the European Community and several national agencies in Europe. This joint interest resulted in a comparative study of study abroad programmes in the US and Europe (Burn et al., 1990; Opper et al., 1990).

In 1994, the International Research Centre for Cultural Studies (IFK) in Vienna, in co-operation with the Academic Co-operation Association (ACA), organised a seminar on ‘The International Dimension of Higher Education: Setting the Research Agenda’. Alan Smith (1994, 4), at that time director of ACA, based the reason for the seminar on "a broad spectrum of "stakeholder" interests in the qualitative and quantitative improvement of research on aspects of international co-operation and interaction in the higher education sector." Ulrich Teichler (1996 b, 341), in an article which draws on this seminar, observes that "most of the research available on academic mobility and international education seems to be coincidental, sporadic or episodic."

In the United States there is a longer tradition of research on the ‘internationalisation of higher education’ or rather on ‘international education’. However, with several notable exceptions, in
the 1990s this tradition has been followed mainly by practitioners. Their studies are generally focused on single programmes and institutions (Teichler (Ibid., 340-1), and are American biased (De Wit, 1998, 16). In August 1995 in Washington the need for a more coherent American research agenda was expressed at a meeting organised by the ‘Association of International Education Administrators’ (AIEA). The main motivation for ‘A Research Agenda for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in the United States’ as proposed by the AIEA (1995, 4) was that “the internationalisation of higher education is moving into a critical phase in the United States. From one perspective, the degree and character of internationalisation that has been achieved over the past several decades is one of the extraordinary success stories of American colleges and universities. (...) From another perspective, however, serious public policy questions are being raised about the value and importance of continued public contributions – from the federal and state governments and from private foundations – to international components of higher education. (...) a diversified set of research activities is urgently needed to inform that debate.”

The arguments for a research agenda for the internationalisation of higher education in the US seem to have primarily a national political character, whereas the call for research on the internationalisation of higher education in Europe seems to be of a more generic and scholarly nature. At the same time, a review by Richard Lambert (1995, 10) of Smith, Teichler and Van der Wende (1997) can be read as a critique of European conceptual thinking and research on internationalisation. He notices in the texts a dramatic “tension that underlies much of the discussion. On the one hand, several authors eloquently call for the development of a more satisfying research tradition that will correct what Teichler characterizes as ‘the lack of theory, the weakness of methodology, and small base of knowledge, achieved so far’ (...) On the other hand, it is difficult to prevent the whiff of scholasticism from creeping into the field, where the elegance of the formulation and research design is more important than the use to which the results are put.” He also sees an uncertainty in the conception of what is being studied. “Several papers are principally concerned (...) with students going abroad (...) Others are concerned with internationalisation more generally (...) some of the papers look out to the external environment (...) A number of papers view internationalisation in the context of the current European interest in institutional quality.” From this he concludes: “A somewhat sharper focus on just what is being studied, or perhaps a partitioning of the field into the different segments being studied, may help clarify the development of a research agenda.” In other words: we Americans may be biased, but you, Europeans, still have to find out the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of internationalisation of higher education. And that is not an incorrect analysis, as indicated in this thesis. One could add that the danger of European bias is also present, with so much of our research attention going to the European programmes (see also De Wit, 1998 c).

Setting the differences in approach and focus aside, there appears to be a general consensus, encompassing more than just the USA and Europe, and including in particular Canada and Australia, that more research on the internationalisation of higher education is needed, as the calls from practitioners (ACA, AIEA) and from higher education researchers such as Altbach (1997 a) and Teichler (1996 a and b) confirm.

As Altbach (2000 b, 14) states, this research is "of increasing relevance in a globalized academic environment." One must be realistic, however. Internationalisation is not yet recognised as a research theme by most higher education scholars. If one were forced to give an assessment of the present level of research on the internationalisation of higher education (Teichler, 1996 a,
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444), it would be placed primarily in the category of being of interest to occasional researching practitioners and the applied higher education researchers and research units, not to higher education scholars, and (Ibid., 449) focused more on practical than on methodological issues.

The initiative for a ‘Journal of Studies in International Education’, launched in 1997, did not come from the research community but from practitioners with a research interest. After an initial period of three years in which the journal was published by one organisation, the Council on International Educational Exchange, to promote the study of international education, the journal became recognised by other organisations in the field as an important instrument to disseminate research in their field. As of 2000, the journal is published by a new ‘Association for Studies in International Education’, a joint initiative of American organisations such as the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA), the Council on International Educational Exchange (Council) and World Education Services (WES); together with the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE); IDP-Education Australia; the European Association for International Education (EAIE); the Netherlands Organisation for International Co-operation in Higher Education (NUFFIC); the United Kingdom Council for International Education (UKCOSA); and the International Education Association South Africa (IEASA). As of 2001, the journal will be published by publishing company SAGE on behalf of the association, and will move from two to four issues a year, an indication of its acceptance as a research journal. Although based on the initiative of organisations of practitioners, members of the research community are represented in the membership of its editorial and advisory board.

The publication of this journal, the appearance of more articles in other academic journals and the publication of a growing number of books on the international dimensions of higher education reflect the growing importance of this area in general and as a research theme in itself. Themes for interdisciplinary research on the internationalisation of higher education that emerge out of this thesis, include: the historical development of the international dimension in higher education (history); political rationales for the internationalisation of higher education, globalisation and internationalisation and regionalisation (political science, international relations); economic rationales for internationalisation, such as competitiveness and labour market (economics); social and cultural rationales (social sciences, psychology); and academic rationales and quality assessment (education). Comparative studies of developments in different countries and regions and in different sectors of education are also relevant for the better understanding of the internationalisation of higher education.

There is still a long way to go, however, before the ‘missing link’ between internationalisation of higher education and comparative higher education studies has been established. This becomes clear if one looks at the overview by Teichler (Ibid., 440) of the disciplinary and thematic structure of research in higher education. It not only demonstrates, as Teichler himself notes, that there is a lack of paradigmatic consensus on higher education as a field of research, it also shows that the ‘internationalisation of higher education’ lacks recognition as a theme within higher education studies. Of the seven classifications presented, only two have reference to aspects of internationalisation: Goldschmidt, Teichler and Webler (1984) to study abroad, and Altbach (1991) to foreign students. Goedegebuure and Van Vught (1996, 387), in their categorisation of comparative higher education studies, only make reference to evaluation projects commissioned
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by the European Commission on the effectiveness of European programmes and point out that the comparative component in those studies is more or less a side-issue.

Acceptance of the relevance and stimulation of research on the internationalisation of higher education by schools of education and other disciplines is needed to make this area more accepted by the community of higher education researchers and beyond.