

Editorial

Special issue: Internationalisation and the global South

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Abstract

This special issue of *SOTL in the South* tackles the internationalisation of the scholarship of teaching and learning in the global South. In examining internationalisation as a means of driving globalisation, there is a group of forces that work together in a complex intersection that involve financial, military, environmental, migratory, technological, cultural, and political dimensions (Giddens, 1990). Many of these global forces are driven by commercial aims and flow from post-capitalism. In this context, this special issue portrays the struggles of conceiving and enacting internationalisation on campuses in the global South. These struggles are increasingly part of universities, yet this special issue also shows how Southern responses to internationalisation emerge from these struggles and project new practices inspired by the idea of intercultural education.

Universities around the globe are aspiring to become international organisations (Britez & Peters, 2010; Altbach & Salmi, 2011; de Witt, 2011), with international rankings playing a key role in attracting and circulating advanced human capital (Rizvi, 2017). From a critical point of view, internationalisation has promoted the commercialisation of both research activity and professional education, so as to produce revenue and build research reputation (Morley, 2016). Specifically, the internationalisation of teaching and learning in higher education has involved a series of strategies that include study-abroad and visiting experiences for both students and academics; the creation of international campuses; changes in the curriculum so as to reinforce the use of English as a foreign language; the incorporation of learning content that is considered to be of global importance; and the promotion of a global identity on-site and off campus (Knight, 2013).

As a result of internationalisation processes in teaching and learning in higher education, tensions have emerged at different levels and dimensions – particularly in the global South. First, universities in the global South have fewer resources to provide an international learning experience to their students when compared with wealthy and prestigious universities in the global North. This puts higher education institutions and their academics under undue pressure. While a group of universities in the global North hold the highest positions in the international rankings, enjoy generous research budgets and attract wealthy foreign students, most universities around the world, and particularly universities in countries with emerging economies can have only a modest aspiration in becoming international.

This imbalance is the result of a combination of a group of factors including: a reduced research capacity (with less research infrastructure and fewer researchers with a PhD degree), limited research budgets, language limitations (many of the countries with emerging economies are non-English speaking countries), and the presence of predominantly teaching-intensive universities, among others. More importantly, internationalisation could be seen as a homogenising narrative that imposes a ‘one-size fits all’ imaginary about what a university is, how it should look and function, and the types of learning experiences that should be offered to students. This narrative of isomorphism offers little space for diversity and pluralities.

The call for this special issue was conceived as an opportunity to create a space for scholars from different parts of the world to reflect on, and question, narratives about internationalisation and the ways in which they have been affecting academia in the global South. Several countries in Latin America (Chile, Brazil, and México), Africa (Zambia and voices from various other countries) and Singapore are represented in this special issue. All of them share evidence of the tensions emerging as a result of these internationalisation processes.

For instance, in Brazil, Figueiredo, Jordão, Antunes, Emmerich and Cons offer a panoramic view about how internationalisation is conceived by both graduate students and academic staff at a public university and the extent to which, from their differing perspectives, tensions emerge regarding the involvement in the processes of internationalisation and the status of English as an international language. We also learn about the challenges of national scholarship programmes in Chile and Brazil that are conceived and implemented by emulating a model of university produced in the global North (Chiappa & Finardi) and how research capacity-building programmes in Denmark shape and develop

the research and teaching practices of African scholars (Adriansen & Madsen). In turn, Lee, Soon and Putra tell us about two initiatives of internationalisation at home in a university in Singapore where, through informal curricula experiences, students cultivate global competencies in their local environment.

Research productivity and publishing papers and citation impact in universities become a pressing demand for academics and their universities. According to Masaiti, Mwila, Kulyambanino and Njobvu this poses a challenge that academics can hardly satisfy, given the lack of research funding and the limitations of research infrastructure. The internationalisation forces that prompt these tensions are fuelled by the significance given to academic productivity and publication in high-ranked journals (Masaiti *et al*), the influence of rankings (Chiappa & Finardi; Masaiti *et al*), and English as a medium of instruction (Figuereido *et al*).

Across all the papers contained in this special issue, counter-narratives towards internationalisation emerge, first as a critical discourse that problematises local and national challenges (Figuereido *et al*; Lee *et al*; Masaiti *et al*) and reflect on internationalisation processes that involve North-South partnerships (Chiappa & Finardi; Adriansen & Madsen), and second, that offer alternative academic projects that defy homogenising narratives about internationalisation. Particularly, the paper offered by Seeger, Hueichapan, Artigas, Quirilao, Lienqueo, Painemal and Alvarado, as well as the paper by Bahena, Corona, Bahena and Millán engage with new ways of understanding curriculum and universities so as to safeguard the indigenous identities that co-exist in Latin American universities (particularly in Chile and Mexico).

Figuereido *et al* conclude that although there are diverse manners of understanding and participating in this internationalisation processes at different levels (interpersonal, intercultural and interinstitutional), there are challenging demands for universities, their academics and students so as to become more international through mobility, branding and the use of English – especially in postgraduate programmes. In spite of this, they reflect on the perniciousness of conceiving internationalisation either as an absolute good or as a clear dis-benefit. Rather, they plead for the construction of an intercultural model of education and South-South collaborations.

Similarly, Lee *et al* conceive initiatives of internationalisation at home as opportunities for students to develop key global competencies such as collaboration, service to the local community, awareness of cultural differences, and social engagement in their local environment. The two experiences described in this reflective piece make us think about internationalisation in new and imaginative ways. Through informal curricula activities, students are exposed to diverse cultures, peoples, and ethnicities and learn values attached to critical thinking and respect among many others.

Chiappa and Finardi study the largest study-abroad scholarship programmes in Brazil and Chile. In total, these programmes funded more than 100,000 scholarships to study abroad. In both cases, about 80% of the students went to countries in the global North, mainly the USA, UK, Canada, France, Australia, Spain, and Germany. Less than 2% of the scholarships were granted to students traveling to countries in Latin American and Africa. Chiappa and Finardi view this imbalance as part of a colonial print, evidence that hierarchical power relationships installed during colonial times that still exist, though with different expressions. Furthermore, the authors suggest this print is likely to continue as

the new generation of higher education students and scholars will be trained by faculty members with little or no exposure to non-Western-European knowledge construction.

Adriansen and Madsen explored South-North mobility supported by the Danish International Development Assistance (Danida) programme. The authors surveyed about 300 and interviewed 14 African scholars granted a Danida scholarship during their Doctoral programmes. The results show that scholars perceive positive influences on their research abilities arising from the programme. However, Adriansen and Madsen illustrate how the programme also instilled a Westernised paradigm that acts at times as a “mode of pressure or exploitation in Academia”. Also, Adriansen and Madsen make a final key point, that the ‘mobility of scholars’ reinforces previous ‘mobility of knowledge’. To illustrate this, they present a case of a scholar who very early on, in his African schooling, was exposed to a French curriculum that neglected local knowledge and geography — the interplay between mobility of scholars and knowledge seems an essential venue for future research on internationalisation.

Masaiti *et al* revealed that, although most academics in Zambia are actively involved in research tasks, they face serious challenges due to the lack of adequate resources (laboratories, libraries and infrastructure) to conduct research. Also, he points out that peer-review publications and citations obtained by UNZA academics are rather limited. As a result, he problematises that research is mainly conceived as a means of gaining status and promotion. The author suggests, therefore, that universities might work in partnership with local industries so as to improve research indicators and address local pressing practical problems.

Further, local initiatives in universities in the global South that recognise and aim to value historically oppressed cultures, knowledges and language of indigenous peoples are shared in the two last articles. The experiences shown in the papers by Seeger *et al* and Méndez *et al* are meaningful and genuine intercultural experiences that traditional conceptualisations of internationalisation seem to miss altogether at times. Seeger *et al* describe an ambitious indigenous programme launched from a prestigious science and engineering Faculty in Chile, illustrating how the hard sciences are not immune to internationalisation tensions and geographical spaces. Méndez Bahena *et al* present the case of a new form of a community-based university in Mexico that promotes the right to a different cosmology, language, and culture and which promotes an intercultural university that empowers indigenous peoples.

Overall, this special issue portrays the struggles of conceiving and enacting internationalisation on campuses in the global South. These struggles are increasingly part of universities and these are well described by all the papers. Nevertheless, this special issue also shows how Southern responses to internationalisation emerge from these struggles and project new practices inspired by the idea of intercultural education.

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