

# Internationalizing curricula in higher education: quality and language of instruction

## Introduction

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The higher education landscape of Switzerland is complex and has been changing constantly over the past decades. New university types have been established; traditional universities have adapted their focus to address trends brought forward by the Bologna process. One key development in recent years has been the increase in student and staff mobility through exchange and co-operation programmes and initiatives. This development has led to the establishment of internationalization as a key policy area in higher education, which has resulted in the creation of internationalized learning environments aimed at equipping students with skills they need in a globalized world.

In this context, an international research community has formed that has conceptualized policy areas with which this development can be described and addressed, such as *internationalization at home*, *comprehensive internationalization* or *internationalization of the curriculum*. While these terms cannot be used interchangeably, they all encompass a vision of higher education institutions in which internationalization is practised as "a commitment, confirmed through action" (Hudzik 2011: 6) that runs throughout all the mission areas of a university and which results in a fundamental transformation of practices in teaching and learning in higher education.

While this vision may seem straightforward in theory, it presents major difficulties in practice as it requires universities to set new priorities and to redefine their understanding of quality in research and education. This is a difficult task to accomplish, if we take into account the fundamental principles of quality we associate with higher education. Looking at internationalization from the perspective of higher education rankings, for example, we notice that the international outlook of institutions tends to be measured on the basis of a limited set of indicators, emphasising the international mix of faculty and students as well as international research co-operation. And when we look at the methodology of key ranking systems, we realise that internationalization, if it figures at all, counts little towards the overall reputation of a university. This limited perception and importance of internationalization in higher education not

only stands in contrast to the desiderata stated by the research community but also to the vision expressed by higher education policy-makers (European Commission 2013; de Wit et al. 2015).

One important reason for this reduced vision of internationalization in higher education rankings lies in the vagueness of terms such as 'comprehensive', 'at home' or 'internationalized'. And this vagueness, in turn, is rooted in internationalization as a phenomenon itself, which is primarily concerned with policy-making and not with the impact of policies on actors (Green & Whitsed 2015: 5). Yet it is programme directors, teachers and students who, in the end, 'live' the spirit of internationalization through their curricula, teaching performance and learning experiences. This is where the present edition comes in. It sheds light on the issue of quality in internationalized teaching and learning by thinking about how internationalization, in a comprehensive sense, can be translated on the ground, given institutional constraints and stakeholder views.

The papers in this edition summarize findings from an interdisciplinary research project that was carried out in Switzerland from 2016 to 2017. Two Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences (BFH and ZHAW) jointly submitted a proposal to a call by *swissuniversities* (2014) entitled *Internationalization of Swiss Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts*. The call was aimed strategically at proposals that sought to enhance the visibility of Swiss universities of applied sciences across borders through "purposeful measures" in their internationalization efforts. In particular, *swissuniversities* called for participating universities to establish "new and promising cooperative ventures" between Swiss higher education institutions and institutions abroad that would serve as "models for developing and positioning universities of applied sciences across borders". With this explicit focus on universities of applied sciences as a case in point, *swissuniversities* acknowledged that efforts needed to be made, particularly in newer and regional universities in Switzerland, to develop their international expertise.

The project that was funded as a result of this call focused on the development of quality management parameters for international profiles. International profiles were defined, broadly, as internationalized study programmes, parts of programmes or optional elements in study programmes that, in line with European policy on internationalization (European Commission 2013: 6), were aimed at exposing "the non-mobile student majority to international approaches." Particular focus was placed on two areas of internationalization at home: First, emphasis was placed on study programmes in English, or English-taught programmes (ETPs), as English was assumed to constitute a "de facto part of any internationalisation strategy for learners, teachers and institutions" (European Commission 2013: 6). The second focus identified for further study was the systematic integration of a global dimension into study programmes (Hunter, White & Godbey 2006; Deardorff & Hunter 2006). Since English-taught

programmes are particularly common in the Swiss higher education landscape (Wächter & Maiworm 2014: 38-39), however, much of the project's research effort was directed toward defining quality parameters in study programmes in which the primary element of internationalization was a change of the medium of instruction to English.

The project, which was managed jointly by ZHAW and BFH, foresaw the collaboration with partner institutions that brought specific expertise to the research themes and envisaged the creation of a sustainable network of institutions committed to the enhancement of quality in internationalization. Original partner institutions were the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg (Germany) and Università degli Studi di Padova (Italy). In the course of the project, other partner institutions joined the network, such as FH Joanneum Graz (Austria), Hochschule München (Germany), Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Finland), Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara (Romania), Universitat de Vic (Spain), and Xi'an Jiaotong – Liverpool University (China), resulting in a balanced mix of participating institutions, representing different university types, traditions, educational cultures and specialisations.

Focusing on English-taught programmes and, more broadly, on English as a lingua franca in higher education, the papers in the present edition, in particular, deal with questions of quality at the interface of internationalization and English as a medium of instruction and institutional use. Quality in higher education, as it pertains to the use of English, is conceptualized in this edition from different angles, ranging from policy-making, measuring and describing teaching performance, curricular implications, to student perceptions and the use of a different language in administrative contexts.

The authors of the papers in this volume have made use of various data from their respective cultural and institutional contexts. In addition, field research in one particular higher education institution in Switzerland was conducted that would serve as a joint data basis for analysis. The joint field research was carried out at Bern University of Applied Sciences (BFH) in the autumn semester of 2016/17. The programme studied in this field research, a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration programme, served as a case in point that would allow for illustration of how English-taught study programmes are run, structured and taught in Switzerland.

Bob Wilkinson's opening article sets the groundwork for understanding the complex interconnections between quality in higher education, internationalization and language from a policy perspective. Wilkinson (this volume) highlights in particular "aspects and factors that could be measured theoretically to monitor the quality of an internationally profiled EMI programme". Patrick Studer continues Wilkinson's discussion by focusing on the translation of some of these ideas into quality parameters for teaching in a comprehensively internationalized environment. Studer describes the process involved in defining

and applying teacher observation parameters using data from the BFH Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. Sarah Khan explores a different facet of the discussion, looking more specifically at the range of lecturing strategies employed by the teachers involved in the field research and the implications these strategies may have for teacher training. In particular, Khan focuses on prompting, eliciting, signposting, emphasising, paraphrasing, evaluating, defining, checking comprehension and indicating prior learning.

While Studer and Khan look at the quality of teaching in English through the lens of experts observing teaching practices in internationalized study programmes, Gautschi, Pinyana and Ali-Lawson & Bürki shift their perspective to the perception of quality by teachers, students and the institution itself. Curtis Gautschi highlights the importance of students involved in the internationalized study programme as the central stakeholder in the classroom. In his paper, Gautschi compares student perceptions of quality to teacher observation parameters by experts, looking for common ground and divergence. Angels Pinyana emphasizes the perspective of the lecturer involved in quality evaluation, analysing how lecturers perceive quality parameters in an English-taught programme, and whether these parameters can be observed in class. Both Gautschi and Pinyana use data from the joint field research at BFH. Debra Ali-Lawson and Jacqueline Bürki present institutional considerations made in the run-up and development of the English-taught programme in Business Administration at BFH. Ali-Lawson & Bürki show how higher education institutions may typically respond when they are put under pressure to internationalize their operations.

The research presented in this volume has been inspired further by previous research activities at the intersection of internationalization, quality and English as a language of instruction. Previous research activities presented in this edition were conducted in the framework of the LEAP (Learning English for Academic Purposes) project at the University of Padova and the EMIQM project at the University of Freiburg (Germany). Caroline Clark and Marta Guarda, in their critical review of findings from the LEAP project in Italy, point to the importance of support mechanisms for lecturers that facilitate student-centred learning and the need for the systematic inclusion of students into questions concerning the quality of English-medium instruction. Susanne Gundermann and Gregg Dubow extend the discussion to quality management by presenting an innovative approach to assuring the quality of English-taught programmes at the University of Freiburg. In Freiburg, English-taught programmes can undergo a university-internal certification process based on individual lecturers' teaching performance leading to a quality seal.

Stuart Perrin and Michaela Albl-Mikasa, in a co-operation project between Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University and ZHAW, conclude the discussion by looking at the use of English as a lingua franca in an institution's administration. Using the

example of minute-taking in relevant committee meetings in an all English-speaking university in China, the paper emphasizes the importance of operational and structural processes guiding the use of language in lingua franca settings in higher education.

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