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TITLE The Continuing Need for Internationalization of Higher Education

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Abstract

The 15 member associations of the Network of International Education Associations (NIEA) are leading organizations in the field of internationalization of higher education.

International cooperation and exchange are essential conditions for tackling the huge challenges faced by humankind today, as expressed in the UN Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Internationalization of higher education and research is a key component in this respect by building international, global and intercultural competences, mutual understanding and respect among new generations of leaders, professionals and citizens worldwide.
The concept of internationalization, originally strongly linked to mobility of students and staff, has been broadened to include strategies for bringing international exposure to all students, and not just those who have the ability to travel. Internationalization at Home and virtual exchange are key elements in this respect. Internationalization is not seen as a goal in itself, but rather as a way to maximize positive societal impact of higher education in an increasingly interconnected world. In this sense, internationalization should be a continuous focus now and in years to come, to be supported by institutions, governments and international organizations such as UNESCO.

NIEA and its 15 member organizations will continue to facilitate the global conversation on internationalization of higher education, updating the concept by integrating insights from diverse perspectives on aspects like diversity, inclusivity, equity, sustainability and impact.

Internationalization is transversal to higher education missions of education, research and community engagement therefore this policy brief is relevant to multiple themes of the UNESCO WHEC2022 among them:

2. Higher Education and the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals).
3. Inclusion in Higher Education.
4. Quality and Relevance of Programmes.
5. Academic Mobility in Higher Education.
9. International Cooperation to Enhance Synergies.
10. The Futures of Higher Education.

Network of International Education Associations – NIEA

NIEA is composed of the following organizations:

1. Asociación Mexicana para la Educación Internacional (AMPEI) - México
2. Brazilian Association for International Education (FAUBAI) - Brazil
3. Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) – United States of America
4. Asia Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE) – Australia
5. Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) - Canada
6. Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC) - United States of America
7. European Association for International Education (EAIE)- the Netherlands
8. Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (OUI-IOHE) - Canada
9. International Education Association of Australia (IEAA) - Australia
10. International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) – South Africa
11. Institute of International Education (IIE) - United States of America
12. Japan Network for International Education (JAFSA) - Japan
13. NAFSA: Association of International Educators - United States of America
14. Red Colombiana para la Internacionalización de la Educación Superior (RCI) de la Asociación Colombiana de Universidades (ASCUN) - Colombia
15. Red de Cooperación Internacional de las Universidades Nacionales (RedCIUN) del Consejo Interuniversitario Nacional (CIN) - Argentina

The NIEA coordinator is:

● International Association of Universities (IAU) - France

Content

Acronyms

AIEA: Association of International Education Administrators

AMPEI: Asociación Mexicana para la Educación Internacional

APAIE: Asia Pacific Association for International Education

CBIE: Canadian Bureau for International Education

CONAHEC: Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration

EAIE: European Association for International Education

FAUBAI: Brazilian Association for International Education

IAU: International Association of Universities

IEAA: International Education Association of Australia

IEASA: International Education Association of South Africa

IIE: Institute of International Education

IaH: Internationalization at Home

HEI: Higher Education Institution

JAFSA: Japan Network for International Education

NAFSA: Association of International Educators

NIEA: Network of International Education Association

OUI-IOHE: Inter-American Organization for Higher Education

RCI-ASCUN: Red Colombiana para la Internacionalización de la Educación Superior (RCI) de la Asociación Colombiana de Universidades (ASCUN)

RedCIUN-CIN: Red de Cooperación Internacional de las Universidades Nacionales (RedCIUN) del Consejo Interuniversitario Nacional (CIN)

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

The Network of International Education Associations (NIEA) brings together 15 organizations from around the world, all working to advance the internationalization of higher education.

International cooperation is essential to tackle the world's most pressing challenges of our times, from public health (SDG3) and climate change (SDG13) to poverty (SDG1) and hunger (SDG2), and human rights abuses and war (SDG16: peace, justice and strong institutions). International higher education plays an essential role by fostering understanding, empathy, respect and collaboration among new generations of leaders, professionals and citizens of the world. It gives unique opportunities to individuals and builds bridges between institutions and nations. Intense people-to-people cooperation in higher education, as facilitated by our 15 member organizations, heightens the awareness of our common humanity and destiny and sets the foundation for collaborative progress towards a more sustainable future for humankind.

Besides research collaboration, internationalization is most often associated with students and scholars crossing national borders to study and teach at higher education institutions in other countries. However, just as important is "internationalization at home," defined as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015). This strategy integrates global learning into curricula and academic life in order to bring international, global, and intercultural competences to all students, and not just those who have the opportunity to be mobile. The expansion of virtual connections has opened new avenues for online cooperation in global learning.

In this era of deep global interconnectedness, there can be no meaningful innovation or increase in quality and societal relevance without international collaboration and partnerships. Therefore, there is a continuing need to focus on the internationalization of higher education.

The Continuing Need for Internationalization of Higher Education

Concepts of internationalization of higher education have developed over time. In its early stages, internationalization was focused mainly on student and scholar mobility. In the past decades it has evolved to a much broader focus across all functions of higher education including teaching, research, and service to society, as well as all structural aspects of how higher education institutions operate.

In order to reflect this, the European Association for International Education (EAIE) and the International Association of Universities (IAU), both involved in the Network of International Education Associations (NIEA) contributed to updating Jane Knight's definition of internationalization (Knight, 2005) as "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society." (De Wit et al., 2015).

This definition underlines the fact that internationalization happens mostly at the institutional level and that it is an intentional process and not an aim in itself. It also assumes that the final purpose of internationalization is to improve the quality of education and research for all (SDG4) and thus to contribute to society.

However, HEIs are not the only players in internationalization. Many different stakeholders play a major role. For instance, national governments influence the internationalization process through the adoption of different policies and more recently also with the implementation of specific national strategies for internationalization. These national strategies for internationalization often emphasize attraction of talent as a way to gain competitive advantage and generate economic benefits. The overfocus on mobility indicates an - unintended - elitist approach since, even if the mobility flows to and from different regions of the world have expanded, they are still accessible only to a minority of students and academics. Individuals who access international opportunities tend to come from privileged groups, while marginalized and disadvantaged groups remain largely excluded. Moreover, the fundamental narrative on internationalization has so far not been shaped by a truly global dialogue in which all perspectives are included and fully recognized.

In order to address this gap, the global conversation on internationalization needs to focus on a number of (relatively) new topics: inclusion, societal impact, sustainability, decolonization.

The need for an internationalization that recognizes the richness and diversity offered by all regions for a global higher education agenda which is equitable, ethical, socially responsible, accessible and accountable was affirmed by NIEA in the *Nelson Mandela Bay Declaration* in 2014 (NIEA, 2014) and restated in the *NIEA policy statement on the importance of international higher education and research* in 2020 (NIEA, 2020).

Therefore, internationalization of higher education remains essential but the concept needs to be continuously discussed, updated and adapted to respond to the changing global context. Indeed, NAFSA's 2020-2021 Senior Fellows reflected on internationalization and sustainability and the critical role of higher education institutions as "central pillars for a decent, peaceful, and sustainable global society." (Lamont et al., 2021)

Finally, it is important to remember that internationalization is not something confined to higher education, but momentum is building in the school sector for greater global outreach and for some of the practical ways in which this is now occurring (OECD, 2020). Synergies in internationalization between different levels of education should be explored more and fostered in the future.

Internationalization for all

The intersection of international education and social justice reinforces the need to expand internationalization to be more inclusive. We need to use all means available to foster global collaboration in a spirit of equity and diversity, respect and tolerance. One way of doing this is to embed global learning in the core curriculum to enable all students, including those who are not able to travel, to build their global competence.

Internationalization at Home (IaH) is not to be considered a substitute or a 'second-best option' for students who may not be internationally mobile during their studies. By targeting all students within their respective programs of study, IaH integrates global perspectives, thereby enriching the quality of a study program. Moreover, IaH can be an effective means of actively including diverse student cohorts – both internationally mobile incoming students and local students from a variety of backgrounds – into teaching and learning processes. IaH does not merely target students who may already be interested, but the entire student cohort. Elements of internationalization are integrated systematically into the compulsory curriculum.

Internationalization at home provides an opportunity to expose all students and scholars to a global experience. Technology and the global pandemic have greatly accelerated the implementation of online teaching and learning opportunities, including virtual exchange

through international collaborative projects, over the last two years. This modality is here to stay, although we need to guard against making assumptions and contributing to greater inequalities in under-resourced contexts. Broader implications and benefits for the local community are also often more prominent in internationalization at home efforts. Though access to technology is still unequal around the world, which is a hurdle that should be addressed, this modality provides an opportunity for inclusive growth moving forward.

International student mobility

While the internationalization narrative is broadening, international mobility does remain a key aspect. The experience of being immersed in a different environment, either for a shorter period as part of an exchange, or for a full degree program, is still very relevant. Indeed, some learning outcomes gained through a mobility experience cannot be reproduced in virtual formats.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a short-term decrease in the number of international students studying in other countries. "International Student Mobility Flows and COVID-19 Realities" - IIE/IC3 paper (Mason, 2021) states that for the top five host countries (Australia, Canada, China, US, UK) "enrollment varied from declines of approximately 20 percent to a modest decrease." This is also confirmed by the second IAU Global Survey on the impact of COVID-19, in which higher education institutions from all regions of the world reported decreased enrollment of international students (Jensen, Marinoni & van't Land, 2022). Several other countries, especially in continental Europe, did not see any decrease, as shown in an EAIE survey on the topic (EAIE, 2022).

It is yet to be seen if the decrease in international student numbers is temporary and if enrollment numbers of international students will return to pre-pandemic level once the pandemic has disappeared or reduced its intensity. Preliminary data for the academic year that started in 2021 already show a rebound of international students' numbers in some countries (Martel, M., 2021) (HESA, 2022).

Over time international student mobility is expected to expand. According to Project Atlas/UNESCO data: there were 5.3 million international students in 2019 and 5.6 million in 2020 (IIE, 2022). HolonIQ market analysis indicates that that number will grow to 8 million by 2030 (HolonIQ, 2022).

The overall number of students in higher education worldwide is expected to grow from 230 million in 2019 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022) to 600 million in 2040 (Calderon, 2015), further expanding the potential for international mobility of students.

Thirty-five years into its existence, the Erasmus+ program of the European Union is still going strong. With a sharply increased budget for its 2021-2027 cycle, Erasmus+ offers even more opportunities for student mobility, both in Europe and worldwide, as well as, for the first time, financial support for blended mobility, combining short-term physical mobility with a period of virtual exchange.

In implementing student mobility, the international education community is more and more mindful of the need to minimize the environmental impact of travel and to maximize the positive impact of the experience in terms of knowledge, skills and competences gained.

Policy recommendations

Based on the analysis above, we, the members of the Network of International Education Associations, recommend that national governments, regional governmental organizations, UNESCO and multiple agencies in the United Nations system work to provide increased support for internationalization of higher education, specifically by:

1. **Creating a set of principles**. The Network of International Education Associations (NIEA) pledges to work with UNESCO and the United Nations system to help write a set of principles to use when developing internationalization strategies and when establishing relevant internationalization programs at higher education institutions, incorporating diverse perspectives, mutual respect, and aimed at generating positive societal impact.

2. **Supporting international research and academic collaboration at a truly global level**. National governments should support worldwide academic collaboration in order to educate global citizens and conduct research, in diverse local environments, which would help solve the world's great challenges and contribute to sustainable development, as identified in the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations and the associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. **Implementing national internationalization strategies**. Internationalization strategies implemented by national governments should be based on the principle of the common good, prioritize global cooperation over competition and promote a holistic view of internationalization as a means to achieve sustainable development.

4. **Pledging to make internationalization more inclusive, purposeful and sustainable.** National governments and international organizations should work together with HEIs in developing mechanisms (financial and others) for all students and scholars to have access to the benefits of international education through the purposeful use of mobility and internationalization at home. In developing incentives for international activities, the environmental impact of mobility should always be taken into account.

5. **Creating synergies in internationalization between different levels of education.** National governments should incentivize dialogue between different levels of education in order to build international, global and intercultural competences through the different educational levels.

6. **Closing the digital divide in international education.** National governments and private companies should create public-private partnerships to fund technology that closes the digital divide within international education. Access to technology and connectivity should be guaranteed for all students enrolled in in-person or virtual degree granting courses.

7. **Recognizing foreign diplomas and periods of study abroad**. The complete recognition of foreign diplomas and periods of study abroad can be achieved by national governments by ratifying and implementing the *UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* and the respective UNESCO Regional Conventions. Flexible mechanisms for the recognition of refugees' qualifications should be further developed, in line with the UNESCO qualifications passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants initiative.

Conclusions

Exposure to international education has lifelong benefits. Benefits include exposure to new ideas and expanded access to resources and collaborative networks, the development of intercultural competence and the ability to communicate and understand each other across cultures, and the ability to cultivate deeper levels of expertise and partnerships needed to solve current global challenges.

However, a question remains to be answered: if the value of international cooperation and multicultural diversity for societies seems clear, why is this view not shared by everyone?

The answer is in the role of education, and higher education in particular. Knowledge is not something human beings have by birth, but it needs to be acquired. Higher education is not only the place where knowledge is taught and learned, but it is also the place where knowledge is created and advanced, where ideas are shaped and narratives for the future are born. It is only through the interaction and mutual enrichment of previous knowledge systems, belonging to different ethnicities, nations and cultures, that overall human knowledge can advance for the betterment of the world and humankind as a whole. Higher education is an actor second to none in this process, and intentional internationalization is a key element in transmitting and advancing knowledge creation from one generation to the next.

The 15 NIEA member associations provide the fora where the essential global conversations in international higher education can be initiated and facilitated. We remain committed to work together with UNESCO, other agencies in the United Nations system, other regional governmental organizations and national governments in order to promote international higher education as a force for the global common good.

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