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## INTERNATIONALISATION OF CURRICULUM: THE CASE OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHING STUDY PROGRAMMES IN SLOVENIA

*Abstract:* This paper focuses on the internationalisation of the curriculum. Internationalisation of higher education is about including international, intercultural and global dimensions into goals and activities (teaching, research and other facilities) of higher educational institutions. The aim of this research is to investigate how much internationalisation at home is realised through the internationalised curricula in the primary teaching study programme in Slovenia. The research design includes the analysis of the internationalisation of the formal curriculum of Slovenian universities that offer the primary teaching study programme. The data showed that the curriculum for these study programmes is still a work in progress regarding becoming internationalised. A general recommendation can be formulated to give more relevance to the internationalised learning outcomes and to clearly define the international competence that graduates should achieve during their studies.

*Keywords:* internationalisation of the curriculum, internationalisation of higher education, intercultural competences, internationalised learning outcomes, primary school teaching.

## GLOBALISATION AND INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Finding a holistic definition for the term 'globalisation' is a challenge, as definitions in literature are related to a single discipline whilst the concept of globalisation itself is an interdisciplinary phenomenon with multidisciplinary consequences. Globalisation is about the cross-border intensification of economic, political, social and cultural relations (Holm and Sørensen in Svetličič, 2004). This intensification reflects a process; however, the outcomes of globalisation contribute much more: the transfer of technology, economy, knowledge, people, currency, ideas that are broadening the interrelations and connections among nations (Knight, 2007).

Globalisation has influenced several aspects of the human being and areas of activities. Education and higher education is no exception. Globalisation has pushed universities into the process of internationalisation. Therefore, globalisation is the reason and internationalisation of universities, the consequence (Počtnik, 2016).

Globalisation and internationalisation are interrelated but do not have the same meaning. *Globalisation is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century. Internationalisation includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions – and even individuals – to cope with the global academic environment* (Knight & Altbach, 2007, 290). From this point of view, we can understand internationalisation of higher education as a response to globalisation (Knight, 2005). Therefore, internationalisation is about including international and intercultural and global dimensions into goals, activities (teaching studying, researching and other facilities) of higher educational institutions. *”Specific initiatives such as branch campuses, cross-border collaborative arrangements, programs for international students, establishing English-medium programs and degrees, and others have been put into place as part of internationalisation”* (Knight & Altbach, 2007, 290).

Knight (2007) identifies two different dimensions of internationalisation: internationalisation at home and internationalisation abroad.

## THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SLOVENIA

Like other nations, Slovenia has defined its own internationalisation of higher education strategy which was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on 28.07.2016 for the period 2016–2020 (Aškerc & Flander, 2016 a).

In order to realise this plan of internationalisation, the Strategy for the Internationalisation of the Slovenian Higher Education identifies five main areas:

1. mobility as a key component of the Slovenian higher education community, open to the international environment;
2. quality international scientific research and development cooperation;
3. promoting the development of intercultural competences;
4. targeting priority regions and countries;
5. promotion, support and monitoring of the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Slovenian Higher Education (Aškerc & Flander, 2016a, 10).

For the purpose of this paper, we have decided to focus only on the third area: promoting the development of intercultural competences.

## PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

Intercultural competences refer to the ability to cope successfully in international, intercultural and global contexts at home and abroad.

”Intercultural competences refer to having adequate relevant knowledge about particular cultures, as well as general knowledge about the sorts of issues arising when members of different cultures interact, holding receptive attitudes that encourage establishing and maintaining contact with diverse others, as well as having the skills required to draw upon both knowledge and attitudes when interacting with others from different cultures. One way to divide intercultural competences into separate skills is to distinguish between: *savoirs* (knowledge of the culture), *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting/relating), *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery/interaction), *savoir etre* (attitudes of curiosity/openness), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness)” (UNESCO, 2013, 16).

Developing intercultural competences is a long process rather than something which can be completed in a short period of time.

In the description of the area of the development of intercultural competences in the above mentioned Strategy for the Internationalisation of the Slovenian Higher Education it is stated that:

”Slovenian higher education institutions are responsible for the development of the intercultural and global competences of their graduates, which will enable them to function successfully in either a local/national environment, which is a part of the global environment, or directly in an international environment. Slovenian higher education institutions must therefore implement high-quality internationalised curricula<sup>1</sup>, which, in particular, systematically include the intercultural dimension into all study programmes and disciplines at all study levels and in all fields. This will be complimented by a range of quality study programmes, modules, and subjects offered in a foreign language” (Aškerc & Flander, 2016a,16).

Furthermore, the Strategy defines and sets specific objectives for each area. Development of intercultural competences includes the following: the development of intercultural, social and civic competences of students and academic staff. Objective 18 is the only one that specifically refers to this field “Including intercultural competences and internationalised learning outcomes in study programmes” (Aškerc & Flander, 2016a, 17).

The objective of the Strategy is to use the proposed measures and activities to develop the intercultural, social and national competences of students and academic staff through the curriculum, so that they may operate successfully and gain employment on both global and local level.

1 Curricula contain the subjects and learning outcomes of study programmes.

The teaching profession is of strategic importance to develop intercultural competences in the future generations. To this end, our attention will be focussed on analysing the inclusion of intercultural competences and internationalised learning outcomes<sup>2</sup> in primary school teaching study programmes; the extent to which these objectives have been included in these programmes. Therefore, we are interested in understanding which opportunities future teachers are given to develop their intercultural competences within the higher education system since they will act as promoters of intercultural competences for future school populations.

## INTERNATIONALISED CURRICULA AS ONE OF THE TOOLS TO ACHIEVE INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME

Even though mobility is the most effective way to internationalise education, we also have to consider the fact that only a fraction of students and academic staff actually go abroad. In Slovenia, the level of international mobility is quite low: only 3% of students participate in international mobility programmes and approximately 6% of higher education teaching staff (Aškerc and Flanders, 2016b). Therefore, in order to broaden horizons, develop intercultural and global competences, and soft skills of the majority of students and academic staff, it is necessary to have a high-quality, structured, integrated and systematically organised study experience, which embeds internationalised curricula and the concept of internationalisation at home.

Internationalisation at home refers to the intentional and systematic inclusion of the international and intercultural dimension into the formal and informal curriculum for all the students within the national/domestic learning environment (Beelen and Jones, 2015). One of the outputs and evolutions of the internationalisation at home is the internationalisation of the curriculum that refers to the inclusion of international, intercultural and global dimensions in the contents of the formal curriculum as well as in the informal curriculum, for all the students, especially in the home/domestic learning environment (Aškerc, 2017).

The internationalised curriculum is part of the formal curriculum and therefore the international and intercultural dimensions have to be visible among the learning outcomes. Therefore, an internationalised curriculum leads to internationalised learning outcomes. There is no universal model of internationalised learning outcomes, since they are relative and differ depending on the different discipline and study programme (Aškerc, 2017).

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2 "Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning" (ECTS Users' Guide, 2009, 13).

With internationalisation at home the objectives of internationalisation of the curriculum are achieved, regardless of whether students have the experience of studying abroad or not. The main focus should be on the process of learning and teaching, and the learning outcomes of students, which include an international, intercultural, and global dimension.

The present paper focuses on the internationalisation of the curricula for primary school teachers. It attempts to combine two issues: internationalisation of the curricula measured by the intended learning outcomes and teachers' education. The academic production on the topic of internationalisation of higher education and internationalisation at home has prospered over the last decade (see for example Aerden, 2015, Beelen & Jones, 2015, De wit, Hunger, Howard & Egron-Polak, 2015), as well as research on the international dimensions of the teacher profession. These dimension connects to the issue of teacher's intercultural competencies. The attempts to find a common framework that defines the competences a teacher should have nowadays lead the European Commission to edit the document *The Common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications*, which have been devised in response to the challenges laid down in the Joint Interim Report by the Education Council and the European Commission on progress towards Education and Training 2010. Among keys competences listed there is the ability to work with and in society (European Commission, 2005).

"Teachers contribute to preparing learners for their role as EU citizens (...). They should be able to promote mobility and co-operation in Europe, and encourage intercultural respect and understanding. They also need to know the contribution that education makes to developing cohesive societies. They should have an understanding of the balance between respecting and being aware of the diversity of learners' cultures and identifying common values" (European Commission, 2005, 4).

But we have less evidence of academic works that combines both topics: the internationalisation of the curricula within the intercultural competences of primary school teachers.

## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purpose of this paper, a pilot study has been developed. The research aim was to investigate how much internationalisation at home is realised through the internationalised curricula in the primary school teaching study programme<sup>3</sup> in Slovenia. In Slovenia there are actually three universities with primary school

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3 Teaching pupils aged 6 to 11 (1<sup>st</sup> Grade to 6<sup>th</sup> Grade).

teaching study programmes: the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska, the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana and the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor. In Slovenia, the professional profile of primary teacher is regulated and governed by national regulation and therefore candidates have to fulfil statutory requirements in order to gain the relevant professional qualification. One of the requirements is a Master's diploma in Primary school teaching<sup>4</sup>. All three universities provide similar study programmes due to the regulation of the profession set parameters. The envisaged quality of learning outcomes and competences ensures the employability of graduates, as they are aligned with learning outcomes and competences that are required by law for the profession for which the study programme provides education.

The research design includes the analysis of the internationalisation of the formal curriculum of the three Slovenian universities offering the primary school teaching study programme. Since, as defined in the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Slovenian Higher Education 2016–2020, the curricula contain the subjects and learning outcomes of each study programme (Aškerc & Flander, 2016 a), the research design aims to investigate the internationalisation of the formal curricula by analysing qualitative data available in two different types of document: the list of competences that students develop within the study programme and the intended learning outcomes of the subjects. The analysis of the qualitative data was limited to the analysis of the contents of these two different types of document. For each type of document, we have defined the categories we were looking for and then scanned the documents in order to find where these categories are mentioned.

Since we had two different types of data, we analysed each type separately and therefore the analysis of the data has been conducted on two different levels:

- Level 1: list of the competencies students develop within the study programme for primary teacher in Slovenia (that refers to the competences that students develop in the study program as a whole and not of each subject separately);
- Level 2: list of the intended learning outcomes of each compulsory subject included into the curriculum.

In the analysis at Level 1 we focused our attention on the competences that have an international, intercultural and global dimensions, while at Level 2 we focused on the intended learning outcomes that have an international, intercultural and global connotation.

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4 Completion of a Master's is required to get the full professional title of Primary school teacher. Therefore, there is both an undergraduate and post graduate primary school teaching study programme. For the aim of this research both levels were considered (as a whole), due to the fact national legislation requires a Master's to get the professional qualification.

The selection of the above mentioned levels was founded on the following considerations:

- The list of subjects included in the study programmes gave no sufficient evidence of the international, intercultural and global dimensions of the curriculum. We considered the possibility of analysing the contents of all the subjects, but for the aim of this paper and from the perspective of the internationalisation of the curriculum, greater evidence is given in the learning outcomes rather than just content. In the internationalised curriculum the international and intercultural dimension should be clearly stated and reflected in the learning outcomes. International and intercultural dimension can be included in the subject contents but these do not necessarily lead to internationalised learning outcomes. Therefore, in one of the subsequent levels of research we considered and analysed the learning outcomes for all the compulsory subjects by analysing the course syllabi<sup>5</sup>.
- Not all data is accessible to the public. We only used data that is published on the relevant institutions' websites. Therefore, we did not manage to collect data referring to all three levels of research at all three universities, but we concluded that a combination of data relating to the three levels would give a sufficiently accurate picture of the situation.
- The lists of learning outcomes that refer to the study programme itself as a whole were not available. Therefore, for study programmes as a whole we used the list of competences that students acquire. Although learning outcomes differ from competences, we consider that for the aim of our analysis the list of competences a student develops are a reasonable substitute.

The collection of the qualitative data was limited to data published on the web pages of the faculties that have the study programme and refers to academic year 2018/2019.

Each university is presented and analysed as a case study, marked as Case 1, Case 2 and Case 3. The following data was available and analysed for each case:

Case 1:

- the competences students develop within the study programme
- the course syllabus of all the compulsory subjects

Case 2

- the competences students develop within the study programme
- the course syllabus of all the compulsory subjects was not available

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<sup>5</sup> The course syllabi include several elements describing the subject. The intended learning outcomes are one of the elements.

### Case 3

- the competences students develop within the study programme was not available
- the course syllabus of all the compulsory subjects

## RESULTS

In order to realise the aim of the research we considered the formal curriculum of the three above mentioned universities offering primary school teaching study programmes.

*Analysis at level 1: the list of competences graduate students develop within the study programme*

From the lists published we have extracted the competences<sup>6</sup> that are related to international, intercultural and global dimensions.

### Case 1

- Social competences
- Shapes safe and stimulating learning environment, in which learners feel accepted and in which diversity is valued and (...)
- Demonstrate positive attitude towards learners while respecting their social, cultural, linguistic and religious background
- Adapting the teaching and learning approaches to individual, social, linguistic and cultural differences between learners.

### Case 2

- Acquiring knowledge, understanding and acting following the criteria of inclusion, non-discrimination and multiculturalism
- Shaping a holistic analysis of the individual/group need, their strong and weak areas of competences while considering the environmental factors (physical, social and cultural)
- Adapting the teaching and learning approaches to individual, social, linguistic and cultural differences between learners.

### Case 3

- Communication competences and skills, especially in international contexts
- Cooperative skills and team work (even in international contexts)

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<sup>6</sup> Competences, subjects and learning outcomes are quoted word by word.



- Awareness for natural and social environment, national culture, cultural heritage, identity, interculturalism and non-discrimination.

If we form categories (that refer to the intercultural dimensions) from the listed items, we can see that:

In Case 1, we find items related to:

- Shaping and adequate learning environments,
- Acceptance,
- Respect of differences,
- Adapting teaching and learning approaches.

In Case 2, we find items related to:

- Inclusion,
- Non-discrimination,
- Analysis of the individual/group need considering social factors,
- Adapting teaching and learning approaches.

In Case 3, we find items related to:

- Communication competences in international context,
- Cooperative skills in international context,
- Awareness for social environment, national culture, cultural heritage, identity, interculturalism and non-discrimination.

The analysis shows that the lists of competences at Level 1 can be considered as quite different; the only common denominator is awareness of differences and non-discrimination. That shows that there is no convergence at national level about the intercultural competence that primary teachers should develop within the formal curriculum.

#### *Level 2: the analysis of the intended learning outcomes for each compulsory subject*

Since we realised that the analysis of the list of subjects does not give sufficient information about the inclusion of international, intercultural and global dimensions in the formal curriculum, we considered analysing the syllabus of all the compulsory subjects, where data were available (Cases 1 and 3) focusing attention on the intended learning outcomes that have an international, intercultural and global connotation. Below, the subjects for which we have found learning outcomes related to international, intercultural and global dimension are displayed for each study case.

### Case 1

*Basics of Pedagogy:* Understand, develop sensitivity and feel committed to working in favour of individuals marginalised due to their ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender or special need.

*Social sciences II:* The students know and understand basic facts about the role of migration in contemporary society, and about multiculturalism and modern settlements patterns.

*Language in society:* The students are able to assess issues related to the use of language in education; language policy in school; maintaining or changing language and ethnic identity; language conflicts based on the understanding of terms acquired in the course.

*Sociology of Education:* Students understand teachers' roles in the process of social inclusion or exclusion; are aware of differences among members of class community; modify their actions according to racial, social and gender diversity in the class community and strive for coexistence in diversity; assess pupils fairly regardless their racial, social and gender diversity.

### Case 3

*Slovenian language I:* recognise and understand the learning difficulties as a result of multilingualism, multiculturalism, deprivation, etc.

*Music Art Didactic II:* recognise and understand the learning difficulties as a result of multilingualism, multiculturalism, deprivation, etc.

*Musical Culture:* Understanding influence of cultural environment on music language; ability to plan and organise visits to cultural performances, creating short programmes of cultural arrangements; autonomy in searching and preparing chosen music content from a defined cultural environment and present them in music professional and Slovenian literary language.

*Foreign Language for Primary School Teachers:* demonstrate knowledge and understanding of professional foreign language, vocabulary and content connected to pedagogical/educational issues for primary school teachers,

*Selected Topics from Social Sciences – Geography:* The student will be able to synthesise and evaluate the complexity of geographical space, with special emphasis on home country education and ability to form spatial and national identity and inter-cultural communication; evaluating sustainable development as local, regional, national and global space development; ability to independently collect, analyse and represent geographical information on an example of Slovenia and Europe.

*Mathematics Education II:* recognise and understand the learning difficulties as a result of multilingualism, multiculturalism, deprivation, et al.

*Children's literature:* they can choose books for easy reading (also for the students whose mother tongue is not Slovene) and books for children with special needs.

*Art Didactics I:* on completing this course the student should be able to recognise and understand the learning difficulties as a result of multilingualism, multiculturalism, deprivation, etc.

*Art Didactics II:* On completing this course the student should be able to recognise and understand the learning difficulties as a result of multilingualism, multiculturalism, deprivation, etc.

*Didactics of Slovene Language and Literature I:* recognise and understand the learning difficulties as a result of multilingualism, multiculturalism, deprivation, etc.

*Didactics of Slovene Language and Literature II:* recognize and understand the learning difficulties as a result of multilingualism, multiculturalism, deprivation, etc.

*Didactics of Science and Technics I:* recognize and understand the learning difficulties as a result of multilingualism, multiculturalism, deprivation, etc.

*Selected Topics from Social Sciences – History:* The student will be able to synthesise and evaluate the complexity of historical space, with special emphasis on home country education and ability to form spatial and national identity and inter-cultural communication, ability to independently collect, analyse and represent historical information on an example of Slovenia and Europe, transfer of theoretical knowledge into field research and ability to research domestic landscape in inclusion in making decisions about its development,

*Teacher as Research Practitioner in Science, Technology, and Mathematics:* on completion of this course the student will be able to: demonstrate the reasonable attitude regarding joining the European initiative, including project schemes of EU; demonstrate knowledge and understanding of chosen results from international research aiming at improvement in teaching practices.

Analysis at Level 2 gives much more evidence about the international, intercultural and global dimension of the curriculum. The intended study outcomes give more evidence of inclusion of these dimensions, although we have noticed that the subjects are quite similar. The study outcomes are set and defined by the teacher, who decides to put more emphasis on aspect or another. Internationalisation is therefore given evidence even in subject's areas where we might not expect it since its contents are not much related to international, multicultural and global dimension.

## FINAL REMARKS

Internationalisation at home is the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments. It encompasses study programmes, the process of learning and teaching, development of human resources in higher education, extracurricular activities and connecting with local cultural and ethnic groups.

Analysis at Level 1 showed that there is no convergence at a national level about the intercultural competences that primary teachers should develop within the formal curriculum. This is a relevant issue for policy makers and stakeholders that is worth defining since teachers need these competences for their profession in an environment that is getting more and more international and intercultural.

Analysis at Level 2 showed that internationalisation, intercultural and global dimension can be recorded even in subject areas where content is not traditionally related to international, multicultural and global dimensions. There are subjects where international, intercultural and global dimensions are expected, such as social sciences and literature, but we can find examples of other subjects where international and global perspectives are reasonably included, e.g. *Teachers as research practitioners in science, technology and mathematics*. Data shows that there is still plenty of room to strengthen the internationalisation of the intended learning outcomes in several compulsory subjects. Therefore, the internationalisation of the curriculum is possible, but has to be empowered in order to become an important issue for achieving internationalisation at home.

The analysis presented in the paper is limited to the formal curriculum, as stated in the official document published by the two faculties. We believe that international and intercultural dimensions are *de facto* included in several different manners outside of the formal curriculum. Even when analysing the syllabi of the compulsory subjects we have noticed cases where the international, intercultural and global dimension were present among the contents but not listed among the intended study outcomes. Therefore, we can assume not always are given enough importance to translate them into learning outcomes or/and given them proper evidence. Their relevance for the process of internationalisation of higher education should raise the question whether these elements should in fact be included in the formal curriculum. In an internationalised curriculum the international and intercultural dimension should be clearly visible in the learning outcomes. We can therefore conclude that the curriculum for the primary teaching study programme is still a work in progress regarding becoming internationalised. A general recommendation can be formulised to give more relevance

to the internationalised learning outcomes and to clearly define a framework of international competence that graduate students should achieve at the end of the study.

The ability to function successfully in an intercultural, multilingual and international environment, and to understand cultural specifics, is of crucial importance to every individual in modern society. Teachers and the educational system have an important role in developing intercultural competences among future generations.

If internationalisation and the intercultural competences developed within are often seen even as an added value to students, that will be able to cope in international environments and get jobs in different cultural setting, the perspective for future teachers is slightly different: the international mobility<sup>7</sup> among primary school teachers is lower since it is a regulated profession that requires even high linguistic standards in order to be performed even if in *The Common European principles for teacher competences and qualifications* (European Commission, 2005) it is stated that mobility should be a central component of initial and continuing teacher education programs. Therefore, the perspective of working as a teacher abroad is less frequent as it might be for other professions. Although the perspective for future teachers is to work in the national context, internationalisation has an important impact because the national context is changing as well and the “customers” of the educational systems are changing: which means teaching pupils coming from abroad, facing family situations that reflect different cultures with different cultural heritage, interacting with parents that belong to different culture, preparing pupils to cope with different cultures at home and abroad. To sum up, we can expect that teachers are teaching in a context that is getting more and more international and intercultural and they too need intercultural competences to successfully fulfil the challenges of their profession.

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<sup>7</sup> For international mobility we refer to the opportunity to work abroad and not only to shorter study visits.

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