

Strategies for Internationalization in Higher Education

JP AMMEUX

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1. Why internationalization is a key issue for higher education

In a globalized economy, organizations conduct more and more operations at the international level. For this reason, people interact more frequently with people from other countries:

- We buy raw materials, oil, semi-manufactured products, equipment and consumer goods in other countries. Consumers want the best quality for the lowest price and it is the same issue for companies based in Italy. To be competitive globally requires the optimization of purchases in terms of quality and price taking into account different options worldwide.
- We sell products abroad, within Europe and outside Europe. Every company has to select the most profitable markets to develop its activities.
- More and more often, companies are multinational and run operations in 10, 20, or 50 different countries. They are facing a variety of international issues in terms of logistics, SCM, Marketing, Finance, local Regulations, and human resources with teams composed of people from various origins in terms of nationality, background, languages, traditions, cultures...

The role of education, at least higher education, is to provide the best level of international preparation to people who will not be afraid of globalization but who will take advantage of it because they know better than others how to decide and how to manage in such a context.

Higher education is in a cutting edge position regarding this issue because our mission is to prepare well qualified people for the labor market taking into account needs of employers, needs of society and aspirations of young people who expect to have a good job including opportunities abroad or in Italy which involves international dimension

2. Three different strategies can be implemented to face the challenge of internationalization

1. A strategy based on programs content

This approach focuses on the integration of international issues in courses.

For example: in Marketing with International Marketing, Finance with International Finance, Strategy with International Strategy, HRM with International HRM....

An intensive language training in English, Spanish, French, German, Chinese... would also be welcomed in the implementation of this strategy.

The students' preparation does not generally include any international exposure and is mostly conceptual.

+++: the cost of the implementation of such a strategy is limited and organizational changes are limited.

--: the impact is limited and mostly focuses on knowledge. If the role of higher education is to provide an extensive preparation including Knowledge, and knowhow and Personal Development (soft skills) we can argue that the last 2 dimensions are underdeveloped with this approach.

2. A strategy based on programs and international exposure of students

In addition to foreign languages and international content in programs, many institutions run academic exchange programs in order to send their students abroad for 1 semester or 1 year.

This international exposure is very fruitful in terms of development of international competencies of students. For example, in terms of

- Improvement of foreign language skills
- Interaction with local students and international students on the campus which fosters intercultural skills
- Development of the international network of participants

- International mobility.

Additionally, international exposure develops soft skills such as:

- Sense of adaptation
- Sense of responsibility
- Open-mindedness.

Internships abroad have a similar impact on students if they spend at least 4 months in a professional environment in a foreign country.

+++: very positive impact on students' preparation, in terms of knowledge, knowhow and personal development

---: the cost of such a strategy is relatively high for the following reasons:

- It requires a high level of compatibility with foreign institutions in terms of content and calendar.
- It requires the creation of a large number of partnerships in order to send 3 to 5 students maximum to each destination, which is necessary for a rewarding immersion.
- It requires appropriate support for students' preparation before leaving the university (in terms of language, learning agreement, preparation for the cultural differences) Also when they are abroad for the supervision of their international experience; and when they are back to check the compatibility of their international academic curriculum with the home university requirements.
- For exchange programs, the university has to implement the appropriate support for the incoming foreign students it will welcome on campus.
- For international internships , support has to be organized help students who are looking for a job abroad.

3. A strategy based on a complete intercultural learning process consistent with Internationalization at Home (IaH)

Mastering intercultural skills is a key issue for the preparation of students who will work in an international environment.

We can prepare students with international content in courses, foreign language training, international exposure but we can do more and better.

Our students that spend a semester abroad can develop their intercultural skills, but sometimes they don't do the maximum in this domain because they tend to interact more with students coming from their home country, because it is easier.

Foreign students on our campus create opportunities for intercultural interaction for everyone. However, in many cases, international students tend to live and to work with international students and they don't always mix so much with local students. To stay in a classroom beside foreign students does not mean that we automatically develop our intercultural skills. In some cases the cultural shock can produce the contrary effect (example with some Indian students at IESEG).

Finally, a strong preparation in terms of intercultural skills for every student is very important to maximize the benefit of the international strategy.

As soon as students join a program (Bachelor or Master) they have to follow courses on intercultural communication (intercultural management) they have carry out academic activities with foreign students, and participate in non-academic activities with international students. These processes must be carefully monitored in order to make sure that every student maximizes opportunities to interact with foreign students and effectively improve their intercultural skills. This can be measured through indicators of Intercultural Intelligence.

+++: the benefit of such a strategy is outstanding because students increase the benefit of their time abroad through the intercultural preparation and they are further enriched by the intercultural

experience during the total duration of their studies(3, 4 or 5 years).

---: the cost of this strategy is high because it requires an institution to create the best conditions for internationalization at home:

- All stakeholders (professors, administrative staff, students) have to be involved in the process.
- The implementation of courses, workshops, experiences dedicated to intercultural issues requires resources
- Teaching in English is required too if we want to attract students coming from across the world: Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, Europe, Australia.