

Internationalization of Higher Education: A Critical Literature Review of the UK Outward Student Mobility*

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The outward student mobility has been recognized as an instrument for the internationalization of higher education (IHE) world-widely and in the UK. This paper intends to critically review the existing literature in order to identify the current trend and issues of the UK outward student mobility under the IHE. It points out that the focus of current international educational activities is attracting foreign/inward students out of the economic impetus in the UK. Consequently, the outward student mobility is given the less recognition than the inward one in the UK policy-making and researches, which could lead the imbalanced gains for UK-domiciled students. Thus, it suggests that both the UK government education sectors and institutions should more develop the outward student mobility; moreover, future researches could investigate more about outward students' personal development.

Keywords: internationalization of higher education (IHE), UK outward student mobility, policy-making agenda

Introduction

The internationalization of higher education (IHE) refers to “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p. 12). It has two dimensions, the IHE cross-border and at home. The cross-border process relies on attracting foreign talents and admitting international/inward students. The at-home one focuses on developing domestic curriculum in order to improve the gains for at-home students. It is suggested that both the inward and outward students should be granted the same recognition as they are both the key stakeholders on the agenda of the IHE. This paper aims to give a critical account of the current trends of the UK outward student mobility, highlighting the imbalanced recognition of the outward and inward student mobility within the UK educational policy-making. As for the outward student mobility, it will be discussed on three levels, the global, the regional, and the national level. Globally speaking, the current main trends of international student mobility are mainly from developing countries to developed countries. The initiations of student mobility are out of two impetuses, the economic benefits and advanced global rankings for both the national and the organizational policy-making. In the European context, the Erasmus is highlighted. As for the national level, the current trend and issues as well as the impacts for students would be discussed. This paper criticizes that the UK government fails to give the equal recognition of the outward and inward students, which would result in the unbalanced gains between them. Based on the existing literature, interestingly, this paper finds that the UK outward students studying abroad are

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motivated by unconventional reasons of traveling and gaining adventure instead of just gaining academic results. The students from middle and upper-middle class are in the prominent position in gaining the outward mobility chances, which is unfair to UK students from disadvantaged background. Also, there is limited research regarding the impacts of outward mobility on UK students. Thus, this paper highly recommends there could be more future research and UK policy-making strategies to develop outward mobility in order to balance the gains of students from different groups. Also, it gives specific suggestions at the end of the paper.

Internationalization of Higher Education

Updating Definitions of Internationalization

Since the late 1980s until the mid-1990s, internationalization was commonly described as a set of activities that happen only at the institutional level. Knight (2004) proposes that the IHE is an organizational process at the institutional level, and thus defines the IHE as “the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of the institution” (p. 21). However, this definition is criticized as being too narrow because firstly, it emphasizes that the process is limited to the institutional level; secondly, it does not clarify the wider goals (Qiang, 2003). Internationalization is not merely an aim in itself, but the responsive to challenges and requirements of the socioeconomic process related to globalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The process should be outward-looking rather than inward-looking, meaning that the institutions should integrate themselves a part of globalization, rather than just the benefit from it. Thus, the IHE institutions are the process of integrating the institutions and its key stakeholders—its students, faculty, and staff into a globalizing world. Within a new global context, Knight (2004) considers that the providers of the IHE are broader than before; thus, it happens not only at the institutional level but also the national, and sector level. She further integrates the global dimension into the advanced definition so that it becomes “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 11). Furthermore, Stensaker, Frølich, Gornitzka, and Maassen (2008) specify the relationship between the national policy-making and the national sectors by emphasizing the national strategic policy-making should satisfy the needs of institutions.

Motivations of IHE

The rationales or motivations of developing the IHE have been undergoing fundamental changes (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Qiang, 2003). Warner (1992) examines what drives the agenda of internationalization among institutions at the individual and institutional level. Introducing international elements into teaching and learning at universities is conducive in order to make both students and universities more competitive within the global context and labour market. It also helps students develop themselves by establishing global citizenship within the liberal model. It contributes to social justice and equity as students are given greater access to international issues. Knight and de Wit (1997) suggest that rationales are presented into four groups: social/cultural, political, academic, and economic. The political rationale is concerned with the country’s global status within the world. The economic rationale is related to economic benefits or revenue generation. The academic rationale is about achieving international standards for teaching and research. As for the social/cultural rationale, it concentrates on the role and place of the country’s own culture and language, and on the importance of understanding foreign languages and culture. Knight (2004) suggests that it is necessary to distinguish specific rationales of actors at different levels, especially the institutional level and national level. Qiang (2003) thinks that rationales should be

discussed from the points of view of the three stakeholders of higher education, the government sector, the private sector, and the education sector. Although the imperatives of developing the IHE have been constantly undergoing changes, the economic rationales especially, gaining income has been at the most predominant position since 1990s (Knight, 2012; Kreber, 2009).

Two Streams of IHE

There are two streams for the IHE, at home and abroad, which are both regarded as strategies and solely at the institutional level in the first place (Knight, 2004). Their places are updated as two pillars of the IHE (Knight, 2012). The first stream is the cross-border higher education, referring to “the movement of people, programs, providers, policies, knowledge, ideas, projects, and services across national boundaries” (2012, p. 12). The focus of my research, the outward student mobility, is one of its most important strategies. Technically, in this stream, the inward/foreign students and the outward ones are main forces of mobility of people; thus, they should be given equal recognition. However, the UK higher education institutions pay less attention on sending UK students to study abroad, but put their attention on attracting foreign talents, students, and scholars, funding of diverse research, and increasing their rankings globally. These activities are lauded mainly for their financial benefits rather than transformational potential for students.

The second dimension, the at-home higher education, is campus-based, which helps domestic students study in a more international and intercultural environment in class without leaving their domestic campus (Knight, 2012). In Knight’s framework, two streams are equally important, intertwined, and complementary with each other. However, the current trend of the UK higher education is that the abroad dimension is more focused than at home (De Wit, 2011). Inequality is a long-term issue existing in the IHE. Home students, especially those within the remote and rural areas or from indigenous groups, have less access to international higher education, while those from privileged backgrounds are more likely to engage within international education as they can bear the costs of studying abroad (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In fact, developing curricula is still the core and ultimate goal of western and the UK’s higher education (Haigh, 2008). The internationalization at home emphasizing developing curriculum at home should be at the same priority as the cross-border higher education (Jones & de Wit, 2014). During the past few decades, a greater emphasis has been placed on educational input, especially the content of taught (Altbach & Knight, 2007). According to two key trends identified by the OECD (2020) for the following development of the IHE until 2030, the mix of students would be more diverse, and the issues regarding access to international higher education, especially the chances to study abroad for disadvantaged students, would be debated more at the national level. This indicates that the equality among international higher education would be further realized.

Student Outward Mobility

Global Student Mobility

The current main trends of international student mobility are from south to north, east to west, and from developing countries to developed countries (Brooks & Waters, 2009b). The main sending countries are economically developing ones; reversely, western developed countries are the main receivers of international students. According to the numbers of foreign students’ enrolment, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, France, and Germany are the top five destinations of international students studying abroad. This indicates that the English-speaking and Anglo-Saxon countries have been the major actors within the

international student mobility scene over the last few decades (Guruz, 2011). Currently, other countries in Asia and the Middle East, especially China, Singapore, and Malaysia aim to take more of a share in the international inflows of foreign students (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). However, the existing studies of global student outward mobility still focus on the mobility from developing countries to developed ones, or between nations within the European nations (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Prazeres, 2013). There is little attention brought to the flows from western developed nations to developing countries (Wakeling & Jefferies, 2013).

Brooks and Waters (2011) claim that there are two main trends of policy-making on global student mobility: First, the economic benefits are its prime impetus; second, it is not solely motivated by the nation-states, but also by a number of influential international organizations. Two international organizations are highlighted when discussing the policy-making of outward student mobility, and they correspond to the needs of the developing and developed countries respectively. For the developing countries, the World Bank greatly promotes their participation in global student mobility. It provides low-interest loans, abolishes restrictions in global trade, and encourages capital inflows to the developing countries. As for western developed countries, the one that gives them support is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It provides a platform for identifying best practices, sharing data, and exchanging experiences on educational policy-making between nations. It exerts impacts mainly on developed countries through the standardization of international higher education, including ranking universities globally, and by giving recognition of the English which gives predominance to English-speaking countries in student mobility.

Global Student Mobility

The EU policies on increasing student mobility have been evaluated as being the most successful practices within this field (Recchi, 2009). Brooks and Waters (2011) suggest that there are three main reasons of European educational policy-making for international student mobility, including fostering inter-cultural competence, promoting European identity, and to further European correlations. The European identity is reported as one of the main gains of student mobility (Prazeres, 2013). When discussing the “success story” about student mobility within Europe, two programmes initiated by the European Commission are highlighted (Teichler, 2010). The first programme is the Bologna Process which is targeted at the policy-making of higher education. It aims to facilitate student and staff mobility, to make higher education more inclusive and accessible for European students and to make it more attractive and competitive worldwide (Wächter, 2004). The second programme is the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus) which is a student exchange programme with provided funding and established by in 1987. It has funded four million people to study abroad within or beyond the EU, and two million to study at higher education institutions between 2014 to 2020. For the UK in particular, participation has been doubled over the past decade with the number of participants rising from 10,826 in 2008 to 28,247 in 2018 (Erasmus, 2015; 2020). Erasmus commonly dominates when discussing projects regarding UK student mobility. However, as a short-term exchange-based mobility scheme, it is no longer sufficient enough for the UK, as international higher education has changed dramatically with more students willing to participate in long-term international studies but lack the funding (Findlay, King, Stam, & Ruiz-Gelices, 2006).

UK Outward Student Mobility

At the national level, the student mobility of the UK is described as being a “one-side process” (Brooks & Waters, 2011, p. 95), since there is a huge gap between the number of outward and inward students in the UK.

While the UK is the second largest recipient of international students, there is a clear trend of immobility among UK students when comparing with the global trend (Prazeres, 2013). Also, within the European context, the tendency of UK students studying overseas is much lower than other European country. This low rate of outward mobility is criticized as it may reduce UK students' competitiveness within the global labour market because they are lacking international experiences (Findlay et al., 2010). However, it is worth mentioning that there is an increasing tendency of UK outward student mobility over the recent years.

The recognition in UK policy-making. The Prime Minister's Initiative on International Education ran from 1999-2004, aiming to increase the number of foreign students and further promote UK education abroad. This was followed by a second such initiative (commonly referred to as "PMI2"), which was launched in 2006 and ended in 2011 (Brooks & Waters, 2009). Although this was also motivated by an intention to attract inward students, more importance has come to be placed on cooperation between countries and institutions, acknowledging that UK students are given more access to study abroad. Even with this, the outward students are not given as equal recognition as inward students in the UK's agenda of IHE. Two representative UK policy papers aiming to increase internationalization of the UK's higher education, "The International Education: Global Growth and Prosperity" in 2013 and its update document "The International Education Strategy Global Potential, Global Growth" in 2019, both place the international student at the core of their strategies, but give less attention to the outward students. As explained by Findlay et al. (2010), this is probably because some UK policymakers might regard the outward student mobility as a hidden form of brain drain.

Given that the participation of UK outward student mobility remains low, the investigations about the motivations, experience, and gains of UK students studying abroad are limited (Brooks & Waters, 2011). Recent research on UK student mobility within the UK reveals that UK students show a great reluctance to become foreign students, so they prefer to stay at home (Prazeres, 2013). Woodfield (2010) identifies three main reasons regarding the low participation of outward student mobility among students from English-speaking countries, which are also applicable to the UK context. The first is that students from these countries are lacking the language skills to be able to master a second language. The second is that they are lacking the mobility culture. In light of this, why some UK students still want to participate the outward mobility? The next subsection will discuss the motivations of these students.

The motivations of UK outward student mobility. The employability is viewed as a prime concern for most international students, especially for those from developing countries, since overseas-educated graduates are explicitly preferred by employers, over their domestic counterparts. It may be a motivator for some UK students; however, they are reported to have less assertiveness for this factor (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). They are more likely to take the international experience as a way of developing themselves. According to the results of a qualitative study responded to by 140 students across 10 UK higher education institutions, extending their life experience outweighs them gaining great academic outcomes or better employment (Findlay et al., 2006). We can see that the experiential goals are the main casual factors for UK students to study abroad. Another main unconventional reason for UK outward student mobility is the desire to "travel" and sense of "adventure" (Brooks & Waters, 2011). In a survey conducted by the British Council in 2015 to better understand UK students' perceptions regarding overseas study, over half of the participants reported that their main motivation for studying abroad was traveling, with almost 45% of them wanting to have a unique overseas adventure.

Except for experimental motivators, UK students studying abroad also have academic reasons with a number of students thinking that the outward mobility provides them a "second chance" to access the higher education at

prestigious universities, after failing to enter top universities at home (Findlay et al., 2010; Prazeres, 2013). Remarkably, overseas universities they would attend are also in the top of the global ranks, especially Ivy League institutions within the US (Brooks & Waters, 2011). Although the choice of destination is highly dependent on students' personal characteristics and other situational factors, the United States is the first choice for most of the UK outward students.

In addition, the decision-making behind becoming an international student is not solely on an individual level, but also relates to the students' family and parental backgrounds. UK outward students are mainly within socially, educationally, and economically privileged backgrounds and mostly from middle or upper-middle social class. Parental socioeconomic status, degree of education, occupations, and positions are all casual factors of student mobility (Brooks & Waters, 2011). Besides, as showed in a report from the UUKi (2017), there is a higher participation for the outward mobility programme with white students rather than students from black or other minority ethnic groups. There is also a higher proportion of females studying abroad (Findlay et al., 2010). Thus, international student mobility is considered as the "class-specific" habitus. However, the dominant position of privileged students within outward mobility produces unequal gains between them and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds without the experience of studying abroad (Findlay et al., 2006).

Students' previous educational and life experiences also influence their decision-making of studying abroad. According to the results of a qualitative research conducted by Brooks and Waters (2009a), British pupils studying in independent and private schools are more likely to study overseas, rather than those that graduated from nation-state schools. In addition, students who have previous experience of international travel are more willing to study abroad (Brooks & Waters, 2009b). Also, they would be more willing to study abroad if they have friends or relatives overseas. The tuition fees are another causal factor of decision-making as lower cost might promote the international student mobility (Altbach & Knight, 2007). However, this might not be applied to British students as they are less likely to take advantage of lower tuition fees abroad (The British Council, 2015; Wakeling & Jefferies, 2013).

Impacts of outward mobility on UK students. First of all, there is inadequate knowledge regarding the impacts of outward mobility on UK students. Also, existing research on this topic is mainly in the form of statistical numbers about their employability, career development, learning outcomes. Based on existing literature and policy documents, there is a disparity of gains between the two groups of students from three perspectives. This is shown within the comparison of the outcomes between outward and domestic students while discussing the positive impacts of outward mobility on students. According to the statistics from the UK Higher Education International Unit (2015), outward students have a higher employment rate over their domestic peers within five top sectors. Moreover, they are probably paid with higher salaries. They are more likely to work at managerial, professional, and technical occupations. In addition, academically, outward students are 9% more likely to gain a 1st or 2:1 degree, even though they are from disadvantaged backgrounds. With the international experience and higher degree results valued by employers, outward students find it easier to achieve their desired careers, or in many cases just simply to find jobs quickly (Di Pietro, 2019).

According to Deardorff and Gaalen (2012), besides employability and academic outcomes, two other meaningful outcomes are increased, intercultural competence and personal enrichment. International students have been the focus of many cross-cultural/intercultural studies investigating their intercultural competence. There are various components prioritized by researchers as being central to intercultural competence. For instance, Kim (2002) sees adaptability at the heart of intercultural communication competence, a capacity to learn new

cultural ways and further modify old ways. Understanding or reconstructing one's identity is emphasized by Magala (2005) as a crucial element of intercultural competence. Knowing better of oneself is highlighted by Alred, Byram, and Fleming (2003) as one important perspective of developing cultural identity. With reviewing the literature, three abilities are highlighted by Deardorff (2011); they are "critical-thinking skills", "openness and curiosity", and "the ability to see from others' perspectives" respectively (p. 66). However, there is limited research regarding the impacts on intercultural competence of the UK outward students. According to the report from Erasmus in 2019, the intercultural competence of UK outward students participating the Erasmus scheme increases greatly. In this research, 95% of respondents reported that they have learned to better get along with people from different cultures, and 93% have improved their ability to take cultural differences into account.

In addition, there are insufficient studies investigating UK outward students' personal development. Black and Duhon (2006) identify confidence and independence as two main abilities when testing outward students' personal development. Tran (2016) advocates that outward students should be cultivated with "cosmopolitan qualities" and transformative capacity (p. 106). That is to say, students should be prepared as more adaptive and flexible when dealing with multicultural issues. The interpersonal skills are highlighted by Krzaklewska and Krupnik (2005), which includes social development, friendship creation, and development of communication skills with individuals with different backgrounds. According to the self-reports from UK outward students about their experience at abroad, their personal development is somehow affected by the cultural factors, such as, they would be more tolerant to cultural differences if they are accepted more by the local community. Accordingly, this paper believes that these two dimensions (intercultural competence and personal development) mutually affect each other and jointly promote the UK students more international and intercultural.

Besides the positive impacts, many of the potential negative impacts of outward mobility are highlighted, culture shock being one such case that is often highlighted. The main manifestations of culture shock are the discomfort of encountering cultural differences, the confusion of identity, negative emotions when dealing with a new cultural environment. In fact, it is widely recognized that UK outward students studying abroad within a multicultural environment may experience culture shock (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Far more than that though, existing studies have found that some outward students experience reverse cultural shock after re-entering their home country (Tohyama, 2008). Reverse cultural shock is "the process of readjusting, re-aculturating, and re-assimilating into one's own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time" (Gaw, 2000, p. 83). Nevertheless, the studies regarding the UK outward students' reverse cultural shock remain relatively neglected (Szkudlarek, 2010).

Recommendations

Strategies for Developing the UK Outward Student Mobility

There are strategies at national, institutional, and individual levels. Firstly, at the national level, the UK government, especially the education sector, should advertise the benefits of studying abroad at the economic, social, and personal levels so that it will attract more students to participate in the programme of outward mobility. This should also be in addition of increasing the recognition of qualifications abroad. Secondly, cooperate more with international organizations, including Erasmus, the Bologna Process, and OECD who provide various exchange programmes and funds to British students. The institutions could also work with these organizations or even provide their own schemes of outward student mobility.

As we already know that the opportunities of accessing outward mobility are unequal between the advantaged and disadvantaged students, the UK government and education institutions are supposed to provide greater financial help to students. Further consideration for a broader range of outward mobility opportunities may alleviate this, for example, shorter placements, virtual opportunities, or UK-based placements. As for higher education institutions, they should think about the needs of these disadvantaged groups and tailor their support in order to reflect those requirements. The UK educational sector could initiate more outward programmes in the long- or short-term, also programmes that focus on the more popular destinations.

Suggestions for Future Researches

For researchers within this field, they are encouraged to investigate more about the outward students' adjustment difficulties before, during, and after their journey abroad. Future research could focus more on how the UK outward students deal with negative emotions whilst studying abroad, which could serve as suggestions for future students. There should be more longitudinal studies about the long-term effects on outward students' cultural and personal development. A longitude investigation on the impact of studying abroad on the participants also would provide an insight on how students internalized their intercultural learning several months after their return. It would also be interesting to make such research more longitudinal-evaluating students' perceptions several years later after they have gained work experience, so they can reflect from a longer-term perspective upon the importance of the different competencies they acquired. In addition, it is necessary to study the cultural and personal developments of outward students with different demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, age, academic degrees, and family backgrounds to see whether their developments will be influenced by external factors. Finally, it is highly recommended to explore the potential relations between students' intercultural competence and their personal development.

Conclusion

Within reviewing the existing literature, this paper first introduces the IHE which serves as the conceptual framework for this research from its updating definitions, motivations, stakeholders and two streams which are IHE at home and abroad. Notably, outward students are supposed to be given equal recognition as the inward students. This paper also reviews the current trend and issues of outward student mobility from the global, regional/European, and the national/UK level. It critically puts forward that the current educational international activities initiated by English-speaking or developed countries are mostly out of economic impetus. Also, it highlights that the less recognition outward students than inward ones in the UK policy-making could result in the limited gains for the outward students. As for their gains in particular, the relevant literature is also insufficient. Thus, it is highly recommended that the UK educational sectors and institutions should put more efforts on developing outward student mobility by cooperating with international organizations and providing more school funds. Also, the future research should investigate more about outward students' growth within their employment, academic, cultural, and personal development especially.

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