

## Editorial

# The internationalization of education as an opportunity for the cooperation and development of knowledge

The internationalization of higher education – and the development of national education systems guaranteeing education in national languages – together with national researchers and university teachers are opening up opportunities for international links and cooperation when developing new knowledge and for the exchange of research findings with researchers, university teachers and students from other countries. A comparative view and exchange of practice with foreign language and sociocultural backgrounds encourage self-reflection on the role of research and education in different environments and they provide opportunity for the development of the education system at all levels.

The nature of scientific research in itself promotes international links among human and other resources, which is beneficial at individual, institutional, national and general levels. Although *cognition* is universal, paths to new knowledge, as well as individual development of new *knowledge*, can be culturally specific. The Slovenian Resolution on the National Programme of Higher Education 2011–2020 recognizes internationalization as a key element in the development of higher education. In July 2016 the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Strategy for the Internationalization of Slovenian Higher Education 2016–2020, which focuses on five main areas (Aškerc Veniger and Flander 2016, p. 10):

- mobility as a key component of the Slovenian higher education community, open to the international environment;
- quality international scientific research and development cooperation;
- promoting the development of intercultural competences;
- targeting priority regions and countries;
- promoting, supporting and monitoring the Strategy for the Internationalization of Slovenian Higher Education.

Internationalization in different areas offers opportunities for a redefinition of the roles of science and knowledge in society, the conceptions of higher education quality and the development of pedagogy as a scientific discipline. The conception of quality is contextualized socioculturally and in terms of values at all levels of

education. It is often defined by a non-reflected “regime of truth” (Foucault 1980), which defines the norms and positions of the aims, goals and outcomes of education, that is, the economic and political truths when defining the quality of education and research. This makes it possible to think and implement internationalization in purely globalized, instrumentalized and neoliberal terms, leaving out the opportunity to build on the primary role and mission of universities – the development of new knowledge in international environments, in the situations of internationally diverse perspectives in order to improve the quality of life for individuals and entire societies, that is to coexist, according to Medveš (1991). The role of pedagogy as a scientific discipline in the field of internationalization can be recognized by following the trends, effects and influences of internationalization on the development of knowledge, science, teaching processes and education development.

This thematic issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies* brings articles by authors (including policymakers, university and secondary-school teachers, researchers and experts from international offices) who, in addition to their primary missions and work, want to share their research and scientific findings related to the forms and effects of internationalization, mainly in higher education, but also along the entire education vertical.

To be able to begin considering and examining the process of internationalization, it is necessary to define what it denotes formally and organizationally. **Alenka Flander**’s article *Internationalisation as an Approach to Enhance Higher Education in Contemporary Society* primarily explicates the systemic forms of internationalization and their impact on the improvement of higher education quality. It also confronts a number of dilemmas and issues, from establishing conditions for a successful internationalization of higher education to the effects of internationalization.

Individuals’ multilingualism and mastery of foreign languages as carriers of cultural meanings is an important element of internationalization. How foreign languages are learnt and taught and how foreign-language environments are approached in the first years of education may have a significant impact on attitudes towards learning and communicating in a foreign language later. The impact on the development of intercultural competences is even greater, and these should be developed in a planned and systematic manner. In *Teachers’ Intercultural Competences and Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in Slovenian Schools: Findings from European Survey on Language Competences Study*, **Maja Dolinar and Ana Mlekuž** present their findings on foreign-language teachers’ intercultural competences. They conclude that in foreign-language classes primary-school teachers frequently overlook the importance of teaching the culture as a context for language learning. They stress that Slovenian foreign-language teachers should be given more opportunity for international exchange, which would provide the foreign-language teaching process with greater intercultural emphasis.

Later, during higher education, proficiency in foreign languages is demonstrated in language use. **Violeta Jurković**’s article *Online Language Activities and Informal Learning of English among Slovenian Students* presents the findings on online activities and informal learning of English among Slovenian

students. The author identifies a higher frequency of the use of English in receptive activities than in productive activities and interactions. Interactions and productive activities are mainly conducted in Slovenian, and students' choice of language for receptive activities seems to depend on information accessibility and relevance.

To function in an international environment, it is important to be able to communicate in foreign languages, to contextualize content and meaning internationally, but also to develop globally competent researchers. This is the topic of **Ewelina Niemczyk**'s contribution *Rethinking Research Education in Globalized Times: Perspectives of European Post-Doctoral Fellows*. Niemczyk stresses that higher education programmes should provide better opportunities for the development of research abilities and for a better preparation of researchers for their role and responsibility in the global world by developing not only the knowledge of their scientific disciplines and of research methodology, but also "cultural intelligence" and communication skills. The skills are reflected during interaction with the colleagues and students who take part in exchange programmes or decide to complete their entire studies in a foreign country.

Foreign students' reasons for studying and their expectations are of special interest, but they are only rarely adequately examined. *International Students' Demand for the Quality of Teaching and Services: The Case of UP FAMNIT* by **Aleš Oven, Marko Gavriloski and Mitja Tretjak** addresses the expectations and reasons for studying at a Slovenian university expressed by foreign students. The findings show that the majority of the students participating in the study became familiar with the university primarily through their acquaintances. Their expectations are related to the development of their professional orientation and, most of all, to gaining new knowledge of their study discipline. It is also important to observe that students are not merely looking for further classical forms of knowledge acquisition, but for participation in universities' research work. The article *University Students' Views on the Impact of Student Mobility on their Achievements and Future Prospects* by **Mimoza Bogdanoska Jovanovska, Silvana Neškavska, Daniela Andonovska Trajkovska, Nataša Blažeska Tabakovska and Biljana Kuzmanovska Tasetovikj** examines the effects of internationalization and student exchange. The authors' findings show that student exchange programmes help improve students' academic achievements after the exchange, and they also boost their future career prospects, that is, the development of the skills required when looking for employment. A decision for mobility depends, among others, on the availability of information on mobility possibilities that students have and, unfortunately, also on their and their families' financial possibilities.

*Internationalization at Home: The Case of Non-Mobile Medical Students in Hungary* deals with the issue of developing intercultural competences in the students of medicine who are unable – for a variety of reasons, including poorer knowledge of foreign languages and financial difficulties – to participate in exchange programmes either at home or abroad. They, according to **Tímea Németh and Alexandra Csongor**, could participate in internationalization at home. The au-

thors foreground the significance of an adequate organization of the pedagogical process, the cooperation between Hungarian and foreign students in collaborative teaching methods, the integration of international and intercultural dimensions in the curriculum, and the implementation of intercultural language programmes.

Internationalization also importantly contributes to the integration and complementation of teaching content, forms and methods, provided that international cooperation is conducted in a systematic, planned way at the institutional – not merely individual – level. The article *Innovative Learning Methods in Educating Spatial Planners* by **Sanja Gašparović, Alma Zavodnik Lamovšek, Mojca Foški and Gašper Mrak** describes collaboration between two universities in educating spatial planning students. It provides an overview of the advantages and weaknesses of the study programmes of two internationally cooperating faculties, which was a starting point for the planning of the study exchange of teachers and the organization of suitable teaching methods in the programmes of the participating faculties.

It is also important that faculties and secondary schools work together and have joint projects internationally. **Robert Ojsteršek and Matej Veber** wrote the article *The Impact of International Integration on Project Work in Mechatronics Education*, in which they present an international experience of working on a joint project shared by secondary-school students and secondary-school and faculty teachers. The findings demonstrate that international experience leads to students' stronger motivation and better school achievements. Additionally, these approaches ensure secondary-school students' successful transition to higher education.

The articles in this thematic issue of our journal present the key elements of internationalization: (1) the formal and organizational structure of internationalization and recent findings about the influence of internationalization on the quality of higher education as well as the entire education vertical; (2) the importance of suitable foreign-language teaching as a starting point for the development of intercultural competences and abilities to learn, interact and communicate in a foreign language; (3) adequately globally competent researchers to employ intercultural competences to function in international environments; (4) examining the reasons for international study exchange, study in foreign countries and balancing study processes with international-exchange students' expectations; (5) examining the effects of international study exchange on domestic students and possible reasons for why they do not participate in international exchange programmes; (6) guaranteeing internationalization at home and the internationalization of the curriculum; (7) international content and implementation integration of study programmes at the institutional level; (8) implementing project cooperation among different levels of education in order to ensure international experience and successful transition to higher education.

The internationalization areas and emphases may serve as starting points for the planning of international cooperation among individuals (students, researchers, primary-school, secondary-school and university teachers and staff) and institutions at all levels of education. Mainly because they all work in the areas of education,

knowledge, learning, teaching and the content of coexistence in international environments. We are fully aware that there is danger of a widespread instrumentalization of internationalization. Therefore, we believe that this thematic issue will contribute greatly to a humanistic consideration of the reasons for the cooperation, exchange and development of knowledge, to recognizing the variety of individual, group and community perspectives and to their well-being.

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Editors of the thematic issue*

## References

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