Article

Preparing Education Students for an International Future? Connecting Students' Experience to Institutional Contexts

Nafsika Alexiadou[1] (iD)**, Zoi Kefala**[1]**,
and Linda Rönnberg**[1] (iD)

Abstract
This article focuses on "internationalization at home" (IaH) for education students in Swedish Universities and its significance for their professional formation and future practice. We draw on research in two large institutions and explore the perceptions and experiences of internationalization of home students in education. We find that while the "intercultural" understanding of students is well developed, the international and intercultural dimensions of experiencing IaH are limited, due to several institutional and learning environment contexts. This has consequences for the social dimensions of future teaching practice. In addition, the perception of the discipline as "national" is significant in shaping the outlook of students toward international questions and their own future personal and professional mobility. We contextualize these findings using documentary analysis and staff interviews, and argue that to achieve intercultural and international learning environments of quality, social relevance, and long-term social benefit, we need to rethink how internationalization perspectives are integrated in teacher education courses.

[1]Umeå University, Sweden

Corresponding Author:
Nafsika Alexiadou, Department of Applied Educational Science, Umeå University, SE-901 87 Umeå, Sweden.
Email: nafsika.alexiadou@umu.se

Introduction

Over the last 30 years, internationalization has been seen to foster the creation of better societies through its contribution to economic growth and social, cultural, and educational collaborations (Jacob & Meek, 2013; Streitwieser, 2014). Several definitions emphasize that internationalization is an institutional goal with a focus on the need to integrate "intercultural, international, and global dimensions" in the functions of higher education (HE; Knight, 2004, p. 9) and also with the attention to improving the quality of education and research, and contribution to society (De Wit et al., 2015). These views of internationalization add significant conceptual depth to a concept that in most university systems has been operationalized primarily around the physical mobility of students, academics, and knowledge (Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011), often through instrumental discourses of "brain race" and competition for talent (Mlambo et al., 2020; Sá & Sabzalieva, 2018).

In the Swedish policy context, debates around the need to internationalize and the expected benefits for students, institutions, and society are salient, especially since the publication in 2018 of a revised strategy on internationalization (cf. SOU 2018:3; 2018:78) that proposed new objectives in the Higher Education Act and an overhaul of activities with a more strategic, integrated, and systematic approach to policies and practices (Alexiadou & Rönnberg, 2021). One of the proposals is to ensure that "All students who earn university degrees have developed their international understanding or intercultural competence" (SOU 2018:3). This new emphasis extends earlier debates on the internationalization of the curriculum (Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010). Even if this objective has not yet been officially put into force, it signals expectations in this direction from the Swedish state to universities.

In this article, we focus on teacher education students in particular. They are key actors in bringing the benefits of internationalization and intercultural understanding to the next generation in their future profession, as recognized by the 2009 Government Bill on teacher education (Government Bill 2009/10; see also Nilsson, 2019). This can be done successfully when teachers of all levels of education acquire an understanding of international and intercultural agendas and, most importantly, are prepared for the enactment of such agendas in their own practice (Ogrodzka-Mazur & Gajdzica, 2015). Teacher education has the potential to engender a reflective engagement between research knowledge and professional beliefs that move beyond mere skills acquisition, to embrace a critical approach toward the social aims of education (Leeman & van Koeven, 2019), and to bring these perspectives into their work with children and young people in local communities. In this article, we explore how education students in Swedish universities position themselves, their subject, and their future career choices in relation to this ongoing debate of internationalization and within the context of their education programs. In doing so, we provide an understanding of internationalization experiences from the students' perspective and gain deeper insights into the contexts and conditions necessary for such experiences to be acquired and enriched. Internationalization in teacher education is, we argue, an important way for internationalization to make a meaningful and long-term contribution to society, and we need more research-based knowledge on how this can be done.

Education students have not often been the focus of research attention in relation to internationalization. At the same time, there is a strong expectation that education and teacher education programs will build intercultural and international competencies in their courses and develop relevant skills for their students. Even so, teacher education students are less mobile than other students (UKÄ, 2019). Following the calls from Abraham and von Brömssen (2018) and Svensson and Wihlborg (2010) to increase knowledge of internationalization processes and their impact on Swedish universities, we focus on internationalization at home (IaH). We examine its contribution to developing socially relevant contexts and contents of learning for domestic first and second cycle students and ask the following questions:

> How do education students understand and experience IaH and its relevance?
> How do they position themselves toward narratives of internationalization from the perspective of their particular disciplinary background?
> What are the contexts and limits for integrating internationalization into teacher education programs?

Conceptualizing IaH

The concept of "internationalization at home" emerged at the end of the 1990s, as a result of the realization that only about 10% of European students took part in the Erasmus mobility programs (Wächter, 2003). It became clear that the majority of the non-mobile students missed out on the benefits of internationalization, and IaH was the vehicle for developing study programs that incorporate international and intercultural dimensions, through internationalized curricula (Leask, 2015) and other activities that expose students to a cosmopolitan outlook (Knight, 2004; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1996; Wächter, 2003). The intention is to bring to students the benefits of international and intercultural aspects of university education and research, without the need for physical movement.[1] As such, IaH looks at "domestic learning situations, inter-cultural pedagogy," and the creation of "culturally sensitive and inclusive curriculum practices that . . . foster international perspectives and attitudes" (Hellstén & Reid, 2008, p. 3).

Less attention is paid to the social dimensions of IaH (De Wit et al., 2015), and in particular its contribution to developing socially relevant contexts and contents for students of education. In this article, we pursue this line of inquiry and adopt the definition of Beelen and Jones (2015) that stresses the importance of a purposeful and systematic approach to institutionalizing IaH in the formal and informal dimensions of studying:

> Internationalisation at home refers to the integration of intercultural and international dimensions into the experiences and curricula of all students for the duration of their studies. (p. 69)

They suggest that we need to examine how these dimensions are introduced in programs of study and integrated in the learning contexts and social experiences of students.

IaH focuses on "home" students who study in increasingly multicultural contexts, as they need to adopt intercultural skills to interact with others who have a different background (Robson et al., 2018). The recognition is that today's graduates live in diverse societies, are likely to work in other countries, and are going to work with people from different backgrounds to them (Crowther et al., 2000). Even if not mobile themselves, home students benefit from IaH that can (potentially) provide them with intercultural competencies, in some instances even more efficiently than if they had studied abroad (Soria & Troisi, 2014). The concept of IaH has been related to three core issues, namely, *diversity as resource*, an *internationalized curriculum*, and a *culturally sensitive pedagogy* (Crowther et al., 2000). These dimensions of IaH provided us with a conceptual map for the design of our study into the Swedish students' understanding and conceptualization of internationalization. We examine these issues in turn, drawing on Harrison's (2015) systematic review of the concept.

Diversity as a resource is a dimension of IaH that brings interculturality to the center of the debate. It combines interactions between home and international students, and also exposure to and enriching exchanges between students from different cultural backgrounds. For diversity to act as a resource for all students, it needs to be meaningful and move beyond polite but superficial meetings between groups of students (Harrison, 2015). Genuine intercultural interactions are embedded in the social contexts of classrooms, relations between students and staff, university events, formal and informal encounters, as well as curricula contents and approaches. Several research studies that focus on diversity in the context of internationalization examine the perspectives of home students and the reasons they are reluctant to engage with their international peers. They find this lack of engagement in both social and pedagogical activities (Hyland et al., 2008) and highlight language barriers and cultural differences (Peacock & Harrison, 2009). In addition, there is a need for a well-developed curriculum explicitly designed to address internationalization and intercultural understanding (Baldassar & McKenzie, 2016); coordinated action by senior HE managers, course leaders, and student and research representatives (Robson et al., 2018); and teaching staff who practice a culturally sensitive pedagogy and are able to teach a curriculum that addresses global issues (Clifford, 2005). The attitudes of academic staff here are significant, as is the nature of the discipline as well as practical issues of organization and timing (Sawir, 2011).

An internationalized curriculum constitutes a second dimension of IaH and is seen to perform both an instrumental function of student employability and a humanist function of interculturality. Such a curriculum involves knowledge about international issues, nations, and cultures; the use of other languages; the development of critical thinking; and a global mindset and citizenship (Lilley et al., 2015). These characteristics directly and indirectly contribute to the preparation of global workers, but also, as Pavlin et al. (2013) note, the promotion of democratic and ethical life and inclusive societies.

A *culturally sensitive pedagogy* is a condition for a successful IaH. Research has shown that the interactions between international and home students in many learning contexts do "not work" for a plethora of reasons. Researchers highlight the importance

of learning environments where intercultural learning is "inherent to educational institutions" and where the otherness of students is a source of learning (Crowther et al., 2000, pp. 19, 33). Intercultural learning can be a direct and a long-term consequence of cultural exchange and the building of intercultural competencies. Inevitably, the role of language becomes central. English as a global language has provided opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas, meeting of people, and the traveling of research knowledge. But its hegemony in the academic world has also attracted criticisms in relation to the difficulties this generates for non-native English students and teaching staff (Harrison, 2015) and calls of alarm of a monocultural globalization (Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010).

The Study

As part of a larger project on internationalization,[2] this study focuses on students in two large universities in Sweden. The focus of this part of the research is on students who are enrolled in degree programs, during the academic year 2018–2019.[3] The recruitment of students took place through presentations of the project in large teaching groups, requesting for volunteers, as well as through posting our invitation-to-interview letters in learning platforms. In this article, we draw on 23 students in education, all of whom have completed at least 2 (and in most instances 3) years of university education by the time of the interview. The students attended programs in early childhood education (15 students) and study and career guidance (eight students). In addition to the student interviews, we draw selectively on interview material with nine academic staff from the two universities—in so far as these highlight issues relevant to the institutional response to issues of internationalization in teacher education programs. The nine staff members have responsibilities as department course directors (3), the coordination of internationalization (4), and in two cases, the management of teacher education at faculty level. Seven of the nine staff are lecturers or professors in teacher education programs.

These programs are regulated by nationally defined goals, and in addition to the theory and practice dimensions, they entail course components focusing on national legislation and school policy requirements. Instruction is almost entirely in Swedish. To provide a context to the interviews, we considered these aspects of the programs in our data collection, and we discuss their effect on the study findings. We have included in our analysis the national legislation with its general and program-specific education goals, as well as institutional program plans and sequencing of teaching modules in these two programs in each university. This was done with a focus on internationalization perspectives and the extent to which they are articulated in these policy and institutional texts.

Following our research questions, we constructed semi-structured interview guides that aimed to explore the internationalization dimensions of the students' learning environments. In particular, we are interested in (a) the students' conceptions and experiences of internationalization through the curriculum, interactions, formal and informal activities in their courses, departments, and universities; (b)

language and communication in formal and informal settings; (c) subject knowledge in relation to global issues; and finally, (d) their views on mobility and future employment opportunities. The interview guides for the academic staff addressed these among a wider set of questions, so in this article we draw only on themes that correspond to these four dimensions.

The data were analyzed through thematic coding guided by our focus on the interviewees' understanding and articulation of internationalization, and its relevance to the students' own studies and also construction of a professional and personal identity. Our analysis process involved a combination of an inductive approach to thematic coding and deconstructing of individual transcripts, with a gradual reconstructing of more abstract thematic categories that captured the meaning of the interviews (Alexiadou, 2001). More specifically, the analysis included three main steps. The first was the creation of first-order codes, which are closely connected to the language used by the interviewees. This step was primarily inductive in nature (looking for in vivo codes). The second step was the production of second-order themes that represent a building up of more abstract conceptualizations and bring together aspects from across all transcripts (Ibid). Finally, in the third step, the themes were reviewed in relation to the research questions and key insights from the literature, which facilitated the emergence of higher level aggregate categories (Gioia et al., 2013). The three aggregate categories, namely, "interculturality as an internationalization skill," "experiencing the limits of IaH," and "the nature of education as a discipline," capture the analyzed data and are used for the structure of the presentation of findings.

Findings

Interculturality as an Internationalization Skill

All the interviewed students were interested in the intercultural dimension of their studies, which they saw as closely connected to the contexts and processes of internationalization. They were all concerned, for instance, with climate change and global migration as contemporary major challenges that are likely to change parochial national identities and future working environments. In this respect, students' views are compatible with definitions of interculturality that stress the dynamic nature of culture. This entails the construction of hybrid identities whereby native, immigrant, and international students can transcend cultural boundaries by drawing on multiple ethnic and political affiliations (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016). Still, the responses of the students suggest tensions between what they *think* is valuable, what they have *read* in the context of their courses, and what they have *experienced* as part of their education. We identify a dissonance between a cognitive understanding of interculturality as a concept and the opportunity to enact it in a relational and academic context. This dissonance has some different but interrelated expressions in the student data.

First, in responses to direct questions about the value of engaging with non-Swedish students, our interviewees were uniformly positive and consider diversity as a resource. The obvious perhaps initial response from the students relates to having

interactions with other students from diverse backgrounds—perceived as a source of unique benefits and as a means to integrate intercultural dimensions in their learning activities. In addition, the students suggested that *learning about difficulties* related to integration of people from different countries and cultures is crucial for building interculturality. Still, several of the students felt their own study environments and programs were fairly "monocultural" (Fia), "far too white" (Molly), "ethnocentric" (Olga), and without sufficient focus on intercultural skills development. As such, the program "is not preparing" students for the multicultural setting they are about to encounter in their future profession (Nour).

Second, several interviewees acknowledged that interacting with diverse students can expand their own intellectual and social horizons. Coming in contact with diversity means that their way of thinking becomes broader, with the potential to increase empathy. As Nora below explains,

> They (fellow students) have the knowledge of being an immigrant or refugee coming to Sweden . . . we will meet school students with different backgrounds, especially refugees and they can help us understand these aspects that we have never thought about as typical Swedish students. (Nora)

To this end, the students see their engagement with diversity as a way to build interculturality as a skill, which captures the capacity of students to have empathy for others, be open to diversity, and promote the idea of building a society with related values. Meeting "others" means that students not only listen to and understand difficulties but can potentially be politically active in combating exclusion or marginalization of children with diverse backgrounds in the future. The example below also highlights the capacity for empowerment that adds a critical perspective to interculturality—not merely as a conceptual term but as an experience that could drive students to change things in their future practice:

> It was two or three persons (from the class) that had different cultures and religions that stood up and talked about it and how they felt in kindergartens and schools. I felt that some of the stories were very sad, how they got approached and I felt that I would do something different with this. (Johanna)

Interculturality in the experience of these students refers, then, primarily to coming in contact with other Swedish students who have an immigration or refugee background. This reflects the fact that their courses are mostly taught in Swedish, which limits the number of international students who could attend.

When thinking about the international dimensions in the programs, most of the students participating in our study reported little exposure to international developments, with some variation depending on their particular program. International issues are often addressed through references to other education systems, and sometimes through comparisons between aspects of those systems and the Swedish one. The students report that such examples are often drawn from Nordic, western European, or Anglosaxon contexts, thus silencing large parts of the world. There are also guest

international lecturers who occasionally offer lectures. Such activities are generally seen positively by the students because they encourage knowledge and also reflection on both "our own" and other systems. However, the tendency to take Sweden as "the good example" in contrast to other ways of doing things elsewhere was brought up in several interviews. A practice of "idealizing Sweden" is seen as serving the function of inserting "trust" in the Swedish education system in future teachers who will be employed by the system after graduation and attracts critical comments by a small number of students:

> This can be really problematic . . . talking about the Swedish preschool as being very good and all the others as not as good means we are uncritically assessing this from our own cultural position and background and from our own national point of view. (Olga)

Even if there are examples of comparative, international, and intercultural dimensions and "international thinking" (Molly) in classroom discussions, much of such content is experienced as "scattered" or "superficial" (Annika). Indeed, the students raise several questions about the quality, quantity, and pedagogical approach in relation to these internationalization instances. Hanna, for instance, points to the lack of integration and unclear purposes of some of the international dimensions included in her program:

> We did have one international lecturer from the US and last semester we had a guest lecturer from Sri-Lanka. And, that was just a two-hour lecture on their educational system. The program itself is very focused on the Swedish school and workplace. As I said, two guest lectures and they have been a bit tacked on, . . . the purpose of it has been somewhat unclear although interesting to hear those perspectives. Some of my classmates were like, what are we going to use this for? (Hanna)

The students are generally critical of their courses for including international dimensions without integrating them systematically into the course design. These are then seen to be of little benefit to the students.

Finally, some of the students in our sample were in a position to reflect on both the intercultural and the international dimensions by drawing on their own personal experiences. These were students with an immigrant background themselves and mature students who have lived or studied in other countries before enrolling in their current program. Through studying, these students find that they have the opportunity to reflect on and compare their own life, school, and cultural experiences with those of their peers. Such experiences provide possibilities for personal reflection and maturity, as well as opportunities for transforming future practice:

> . . . trying to be the one who does not master the language that well [when doing the practicum in a preschool abroad] increases my understanding for parents I will meet in Sweden when working here, who do not know Swedish that well. (Lena)

In these cases, intercultural themes and the value of internationalization are lived, produce empathy, and are not merely understood at a conceptual level.

The limits of Internationalization at Home

The majority of the education students discussed at length aspects of their university experience that have reduced the potential benefits of internationalization. These refer to the institutional side of their education, the content of courses, and the disappointment felt (by few) in the lack of contacts with international students. The students come from two of Sweden's largest universities, both of which have many international students. Even though they have opportunities to participate in events of an international nature, the education students we interviewed participated little in such events. To meet international students and to have the space for meaningful interactions, individuals need to take initiative. This also applies to social activities that students suggest the universities do not help organize to the extent they could:

> There are always opportunities, the question is how much you search for them, . . . if you look, they are going to be there and you also have the possibility to create them yourself, but I wouldn't say that enough is done . . . we don't have lots of activities compared to KTH (Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan) for instance. (Peter)

Meeting students outside of the course context is a personal choice, and it involves effort that the students did not often make, even though there are exceptions. The students also identify "lost opportunities" in connection to engaging with international research and knowledge in their studies. Many students claim that they would welcome courses that present and examine other education systems, to have international perspectives on selected aspects of the course and to study international research in their field. Such knowledge is also closely connected to professional practice:

> To learn more about, for example, the German education system, from a perspective that would be useful for us in our profession later on. How do you move across borders, how do you come back and validate what you have? And then . . . we don't really get into the EU rules . . . it's supposed to be a European market for work and studies . . . I mean the Bologna process we haven't even discussed it. (Hanna)

Institutional and structural limitations. The students thus point to important limits to the implementation of IaH. Additional limitations are embedded in the regulatory and curricular frameworks for HE programs. The national goals for Swedish HE (SFS 1992:1434) and the program-specific goals (SFS 1993:100) are not promoting international and/or intercultural dimensions very extensively, despite their general high profile in current policy debates (SOU 2018:3). The generic core skills for all students are specified around *critical thinking*, *problem-solving*, and *scientifically-based knowledge*, whereas international dimensions are not very evident. The preschool program goals do not connect to international dimensions explicitly, even if the promotion of human rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child are mentioned (SFS 1993:100). The study and career counseling program is also largely nationally focused, except for one of the goals that encourages knowledge of social, education, and labor market developments "nationally as well as internationally" (SFS 1993:100). Still,

and as we have already seen in the former section, there are some courses that actively engage with international dimensions, in the study and career counseling program more extensively than in the preschool program. However, even when such engagements occur, our findings point to important constraints when it comes to integrating IaH in meaningful ways.

Perspectives from staff. The interviews with staff raise a number of additional issues that point to limitations for an effective integration of internationalization in teacher education. These concern mostly problems of organization and structure of the programs. Some of these are of a practical nature, but there are also questions of commitment to the idea of internationalization that does not seem to be a high enough priority to command the resources, time, and attention necessary for its integration into teacher education:

> We have five program committees . . . they almost never focus on IaH . . . If we want to integrate it more in our programs, perhaps we need a different organisation and time for the five program chairs. To get all of them to work on IaH in the same direction is . . . a lot of work. The current organisation perhaps is not optimal for that. Also, it is in a separate box. Linus (*international contact person across teacher education programs*) works with it but not the education course leaders. (Malin, TE management)

> At the department level, we have the space to do it, but there isn't strong encouragement or commitment. If I can fund it and organize it, I am free to do it. Then, everyone is happy. But that is as far as we do. (Luis, professor)

The academics in our study attribute these limitations partly to historical patterns of work within teacher education and also to the focus of the university on the postgraduate level that seems to "attract most of the resources and opportunities for internationalisation" (Katarina, TE management). Despite the acknowledgment that there is a central university drive that puts internationalization high on the agenda, as a goal for teacher education it remains ill-defined or optional, limited by the lack of organizational structures to support it, and dependent on individual lecturers' initiative:

> There does not seem to be any pressure on us [teachers] to develop the courses in that direction, any expectations . . . And it becomes dependent on which individuals are in the teaching team. (Janne, lecturer)

> There is no model or method . . . there is no skill on how we should do it [in teacher education], what this competence is. (Annalena, lecturer)

> There was enthusiasm among at least some of the staff, but when it came down to it, it was difficult to capture "international perspectives," to include them in courses . . . (Martin, lecturer)

In addition, there is the issue of "what the students expect," with limited openness to other national settings:

> I tried to put up a co-operation with a Norwegian teacher education school. Surely you should see that Swedish and Norwegian are approximately the same, we even understand each other. But, even that, no, it's not Swedish schools. I want to learn to be a Swedish teacher. (Peter, lecturer)

The reported limitations from both student and staff perspectives highlight the need for courses to open up education contents and processes to more critical international perspectives that would help extend the horizons of students as well as expand the possibilities for reflective practice. They also highlight the institutional "gaps" between university-level ambitions to introduce IaH, and the existing structures and frameworks for teacher education programs that have no "space" for it.

The nature of education as a discipline

The perception of the discipline as "national" is significant in shaping the outlook of students toward international questions and their own future personal and professional mobility. Even though there is discussion of education as a generic area of study, the courses that students follow are seen as "typically Swedish" (Isa). Students understand the lack of international dimensions in their course content, although they would still like to see references to other systems seen as useful to future careers: "I thought we would learn more about other countries, at least Nordic ones, because lots of people work in Norway for example" (Sandra). Similar views are held by students from the preschool program, where "the Swedish education steers us to the public sector where I am clearly expected to work" (Emil).

The lack of international knowledge and the highly contextual nature of courses lead some students to question the transferability of the knowledge and skills they gain, to contexts beyond Sweden and in some cases even particular local ones:

> It's a lot of contextualized knowledge that we work with. I did my internship in Norrköping, and there is much that is contextualized . . ., students asked, "do you have this program at this university?." I know it exists in Stockholm, I don't know if it exists here. (Elba)

Interestingly, students seem to conflate the contextual nature of their subject with the wider issue of "applicability" in other contexts (national and international). The inability to distinguish between specific knowledge that can be easily acquired for different local contexts and the more generic knowledge and skills that the subject offers permeates the narrative of most students in relation to the nature of their subject. This seems to be the case for all the education specialisms of our sample of students, with a notable exception of Emil, who recognizes that discipline knowledge

> . . . is international, it is about children and theories on children's development are applicable everywhere. The aspect of care is universal. Education, learning, development,

teaching, and how I should teach, that knowledge is universal. Laws and regulations are related to Sweden, but I see my profession is a universal profession, absolutely. I can choose to work abroad. (Emil)

Connected to the issue of international exposure is the use of language in course literature and the wider opportunities that students have to come into contact with research from international scholars. The courses across both universities are delivered mostly in Swedish, with the exception of few guest lectures throughout the years of studying. In addition, students from all programs report that there are few opportunities to use English as part of their studies. For instance, some reported that they had not been allowed to write their assignments in English, a skill they consider important for the future, not least for communicating with children and parents in the workplace:

I am going to be a teacher one day and I am probably going to have to face parents who don't speak Swedish or kids that don't . . . you have to speak good English and be able to write in English and have general good English knowledge. (Molly)

Also, very few opportunities of speaking English were available to the students we interviewed. The majority of reading texts are in Swedish ("our undergraduate education is very Swedish," Annalena, lecturer), and this has caused discussion among students and between students and lecturers. Many of the interviewees report mixed feelings in the class regarding English course literature while also suggesting that several lecturers do not expect the students to read non-Swedish literature:

Some of the students complained about English texts and some lecturers avoided to use them because students find them hard . . . but some of us say that if there are better texts in English, of course we should read them. (Lena)

This is clearly reflected in the staff interviews, where there is recognition that many lecturers "fear making things difficult for students . . . and I am not sure many of my colleagues are so interested in doing this anyway" (Janne, lecturer), or find the use of non-Swedish texts not appropriate in all circumstances:

If all students are Swedish, you cannot motivate them to discuss in English . . . And there are big parts of teacher education courses that have to do with [Swedish] language teaching. (Katarina, TE management)

International students would like to have more courses in English, but for the Swedish students I don't think so. Mother tongue is always the first language you can express yourself in and write . . . they also take written exams, it's difficult to express yourself in a second language, so this is not for the Swedish students. (Elin, study director)

Acceptance to an education program requires basic competence in English, and the majority of students already have a good competence in the language but, as expressed by one of the staff members we interviewed, "lack confidence to use it" (Peter, lecturer). The same may also apply to some of the staff, as their international

and research experience may be limited or may not be appreciated in the context of courses:

> For the first years of my appointment (in the 2000s) research and going to conferences abroad, was … not discouraged but seen as irrelevant to teacher education. This is slowly changing. (Ingrid, lecturer)

These perspectives point out the need for closer connections between research and teaching in teacher education and a more systematic approach to embedding international dimensions in courses as well as activities.

In sum, the view of education as a subject area seems to be limited by what many students themselves see as rather parochial definitions of professional practice and a set of specific skills that are non-transferrable to other teaching and learning contexts. Still, there are exceptions to this view, that highlight the more generic and universal character of education as a discipline.

Concluding remarks

Universities in Sweden are already committed to the rhetoric of internationalization. However, in the case of teacher education, the lofty ambitions of policy documents do not seem to make a real difference to the learning contexts and the students' experiences. There are still significant gaps to be addressed for the promotion of genuine and more long-term internationalization that reaches out to societies and communities beyond academia. Teachers are key agents for turning internationalization efforts into long-term benefits for society, and education programs at universities need to prepare students for their important future work. We want to highlight two points that connect successful incorporation of IaH to the institutional and disciplinary contexts of HE.

The first relates to examining the possibilities for a proper integration of internationalization in courses and programs. At present, deliberate efforts at developing IaH occupy a relatively peripheral position, and teacher education tends to make few links to international themes in programs and curricular texts. However, the interviewed students are overwhelmingly positive to further development of their studies to be more explicitly informed by international examples, comparative perspectives, and a scientific basis that draws from internationally informed research. In their narratives, the students connect internationalization to interculturality and acknowledge the diversity they will encounter during their working life. But possibilities for transformations of an emancipatory character are limited by the content and context of the education students' learning environments, something that is clearly confirmed also by the staff interviews. International perspectives and research for many of the courses are seen as fairly weak or not properly incorporated in the course design, and the tendency to rarely use English texts limits further the possibilities to access research content. This is in line with studies on the limitations of IaH when students do not engage in meaningful interactions, are not aware of programs and opportunities for

internationalization (Hofmeyr, 2021), and the program design allows for "cocooning" whereby students opt for non-international activities (Whatley et al., 2021).

Our second point concerns the nature of the discipline of education as a vehicle for a socially relevant internationalization approach. De Wit and Leask (2015) discuss the need to approach "disciplinary communities" as drivers for an implementation of changes that have meaning and impact (p. 10). The disciplinary context for internationalization is clearly as important as the university-specific one. Even though our study took place within the specificity of Swedish HE, the findings have wider implications for the study of education beyond Sweden. Education courses and research in most countries are concerned with similar core questions: What is the nature of education, and what are its values and purposes? How can we understand, organize, and improve teaching and learning processes? And how do we account for the cultural, political, economic, and social contexts of such processes? (Biesta, 2020). The core questions of the discipline of education are of a global nature and point to the need for a systematic and more thoughtful incorporation of internationalization dimensions in university curricula, learning contexts, and practices, even where (as in our study) international interactions are limited.

Listening to the student voices about the existing international and intercultural elements of teacher education, we can rethink how activities (such as international guest speakers) and approaches to delivery and language (for instance, the use of international research and languages of instruction) are better incorporated in course contents. This may lead also to less nation-centric debates and views about the subject. Second, we should examine what the students and staff report as the limitations of IaH, even if we think that as institutions, we already deal with these issues. At faculty and department levels, internationalization of teacher education programs is still of marginal significance. If there is indeed a commitment to the idea of IaH, more attention needs to be paid to the organization, structures, and resources devoted to its effective integration. In addition, more clarity and frequency of opportunities for international and intercultural encounters are necessary to reach all students. Third, as education specialists, we should open up our students' horizons to the nature of the discipline. We can distinguish more clearly the contextual from the more transferrable elements of education processes and contents that some of the students in our research seem to conflate. Our findings are significant in their potential to generate discussion among curriculum developers and course leaders on the contributions of internationalization to professional knowledge and the furthering of social impacts of teacher education courses. Such discussions can shed light on two types of actions universities can take in an attempt to draw out the benefits of internationalization for their local communities. Specifically relating to teacher education, they can focus attention and resources to professional formation that is sensitive to international and intercultural competence development in the ways outlined earlier. In addition, lessons from teacher education can be applied to other areas of professional education that universities are responsible for, where a successful integration of internationalization in learning environments at home can produce

graduates who appreciate social challenges and diverse contexts and apply their scientific knowledge critically and with sensitivity to difference. Such graduates are vital for bringing the benefits of HE internationalization to society both short- and long-term, to their local communities and beyond.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

ORCID iDs

Nafsika Alexiadou https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8731-4728

Linda Rönnberg https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0209-558X

Notes

1. In Sweden, the higher education (HE) Authority reported that in 2017/2018 about 28% of newly enrolled students and 41% of postgraduate students were international (UKÄ, 2019).
2. The project is titled "Internationalising Higher Education: Challenges and opportunities for Universities and academics in Sweden" and is supported by the Swedish Research Council (Grant No. 2017-03434).
3. A total of 71 students were interviewed across Social and Natural Sciences in the two Universities.

References

Abraham, G. Y., & von Brömssen, K. (2018). Internationalisation in teacher education: Student teachers' reflections on experiences from a field study in South Africa. *Education Inquiry*, *9*(4), 347–362.

Alexiadou, N. (2001). Researching policy implementation: Interview data analysis in institutional contexts. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, Theory and Practice*, *4*(1), 51–61.

Alexiadou, N., & Rönnberg, L. (2021). Transcending borders in higher education: Internationalisation policies in Sweden. *European Educational Research Journal*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904120988383

Baldassar, L., & McKenzie, L. (2016). Beyond "Just being there": Teaching IaH in two qualitative method units. *Teaching Sociology*, *44*(2), 84–95.

Bedenlier, S., & Zawacki-Richter, O. (2015). Internationalization of higher education and the impacts on academic faculty members. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, *10*(2), 185–201.

Beelen, J., & Jones, E. (2015). Redefining internationalization at home. In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi & P. Scott. (Eds.), *The European higher education area. Between critical reflections and future policies* (pp. 59–72). Springer Open.

Bhandari, R., & Blumenthal, P. (Eds.). (2011). *International students and lobal mobility in higher education: National trends and new directions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Biesta, G. (2020). Risking ourselves in education: Qualification, socialization, and subjectification revisited. *Educational Theory*, *70*, 89–104. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12411

Clifford, V. A. (2005). Embracing and resisting border pedagogies: Student views of internationalising the curriculum in higher education. *Higher Education in a Changing World*, *28*, 116–123.

Crowther, P., Joris, M., Otten, M., Nilsson, B., Teekens, H., & Wächter, B. (2000). *Internationalisation at home: A position paper*. European Association for International Education.

De Wit, H., Hunter, F., Howard, L., & Egron-Polak, E. (2015). *Internationalisation of higher education*. European Parliament.

De Wit, H., & Leask, B. (2015). Internationalization, the curriculum and the disciplines. *International Higher Education*, *83*, 10–12.

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, *16*(1), 15–31.

Government Bill 2009/10. *Bäst i klassen—En ny lärarutbildning* [Best in the Class. A Reformed Teacher Education]. Regeringen.

Hajisoteriou, C., & Angelides, P. (2016). *The globalisation of intercultural education: The politics of macro-micro integration*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Harrison, N. (2015). Practice, problems and power in "internationalisation at home": Critical reflections on recent research evidence. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *20*(4), 412–430.

Hellstén, M., & Reid, A. (2008). Introduction: Researching international pedagogies. In M. Hellstén & A. Reid. (Eds.), *Researching international pedagogies. Sustainable practice for teaching and learning in Higher Education* (pp. 1–8). Springer Science.

Hofmeyr, A. S. (2021). Taking advantage of a multicultural campus: Impact of At-Home intercultural initiatives on Japanese students' skills and future goals. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *25*(2), 182–202. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315320906159

Hyland, F., Trahar, S., Anderson, J., & Dickens, A. (2008). *A changing world: The internationalisation experiences of staff and students (home and international) in UK higher education*. Higher Education Academy. Education Subject Centre, Escalate.

Jacob, M., & Meek, L. (2013). Scientific mobility and international research networks: Trends and policy tools for promoting research excellence and capacity building. *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(3), 331–344.

Knight, J. (2004). Internationalisation remodeled: Definition, approaches, and rationales. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *8*(1), 5–31.

Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalizing the curriculum*. Routledge.

Leask, B., & Bridge, C. (2013). Comparing internationalisation of the curriculum in action across disciplines: Theoretical and practical perspectives. *Compare*, *43*(1), 79–101.

Leeman, Y., & van Koeven, E. (2019). New immigrants. An incentive for intercultural education? *Education Inquiry*, *10*(3), 189–207.

Lilley, K., Barker, M., & Harris, N. (2015). Exploring the process of global citizen learning and the student mind-set. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *19*(3), 225–245.

Mlambo, V. H., Ogunnubi, O., & Mlambo, D. N. (2020). Student mobility, brain drain and the internationalisation of HE in Southern Africa. *African Journal of Development Studies*, *10*(2), 59–82.

Nilsson, P. A. (2019). *Studying abroad: Exploring mobility, expectations and experiences among mobile students*. Umeå University.

Ogrodzka-Mazur, E., & Gajdzica, A. (2015). "New professionalism" of the teacher and education towards interculturalism. *International Journal of Continuing Engineering Education and Life-Long Learning*, *25*(4), 487–497.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (1996). *Internationalizing the curriculum in higher education*.

Pavlin, S., Deželan, T., & Svetlik, I. (2013). *Challenges of citizenship in higher education: Shifting visions, roles and outcomes*. Echoraum.

Peacock, N., & Harrison, N. (2009). "It's so much easier to go with what's easy." "Mindfulness" and the discourse between home and international students in the UK. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *13*(4), 487–508.

Robson, S., Almeida, J., & Schartner, A. (2018). Internationalisation at home: Time for review and development? *European Journal of Higher Education*, *8*(1), 19–35.

Sá, C. M., & Sabzalieva, E. (2018). The politics of the great brain race: Public policy and international student recruitment in Australia, Canada, England and the USA. *Higher Education*, *75*, 231–253.

Sawir, E. (2011). Academic staff response to international students and internationalising the curriculum: The impact of disciplinary differences. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *16*(1), 45–57.

SFS 1992: 1434. Högskolelagen [The Higher Education Act]. Riksdagen.

SFS 1993:100. Högskoleförordningen [The Higher Education Ordinance]. Riksdagen.

Soria, K., & Troisi, J. (2014). Internationalization at Home alternatives to study abroad: Implications for students' development of global, international and intercultural competencies. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *18*(3), 261–280.

SOU 2018:3. *En Strategisk Agenda för Internationalisering* [A Strategic Agenda for Internationalisation]. Norstedts Juridik.

SOU 2018:78. *Ökad attraktionskraft för kunskapsnationen Sverige* [Increasing the attractiveness for Sweden as a knowledge nation]. Norstedts Juridik.

Streitwieser, B. (Ed.). (2014). *Internationalisation of HE and global mobility*. Symposium.

Svensson, L., & Wihlborg, M. (2010). Internationalising the content of higher education: The need for a curriculum perspective. *Higher Education*, *60*, 595–613.

UKÄ. (2019). *Universitet och Högskolor Årsrapport 2019* [Annual report 2019]. UKÄ.

Wächter, B. (2003). An introduction: Internationalisation at home in context. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *7*(1), 5–11.

Whatley, M., Landon, A. C., Tarrant, M. A., & Rubin, D. (2021). Program design and the development of students' global perspectives in faculty-led short-term study abroad. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *25*(3), 301–318. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315320906156

Author Biographies

Nafsika Alexiadou, PhD, is a professor at the Department of Applied Educational Science, Umeå University, Sweden. Her research interests are in the area of education policy at national and transnational levels, and comparative studies. She specializes on the analysis of education policy and governance in the European Union, higher education internationalization, and the themes of equality, inclusion and marketisation/privatization.

Zoi Kefala, MA, is a researcher at the Department of Applied Educational Science, Umeå University, Sweden, and currently works as a primary school teacher in Greece. Her research interests include interculturality, internationalization and bilingualism.

Linda Rönnberg, PhD, is a professor at the Department of Applied Educational Science, Umeå University and a Senior Research Fellow at the Department of Education, University of Turku. She is also a Docent in Political Science. Her research focuses on education governance and politics with a particular focus on evaluation, privatization and internationalization in compulsory and higher education.