Internationalisation and Teaching through English: A Danish Perspective

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Contextualisation

This article reflects on the changing relationship between internationalisation and the emergence of English as the common language in higher education (HE). With the help of empirical data from Danish universities, the paper addresses the complexity of aligning the issues of curriculum policy and practice. While it is generally acknowledged that broadening the working definition of internationalisation will make it more appropriate for use in a wide variety of contexts, there is still a need to relay more on-site experiences from these contexts. This article is part of the growing body of internationalisation literature and activity written from a local and European perspective.

Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to examine where, and how, internationalisation policies have become operational within the traditional Danish university setting. 'Internationalisation', in this context, refers to specific internal changes in the teaching and research function of Danish higher education. The extent and availability of course teaching through English is used as a means of measuring the internationalisation process at institutional level. Participants included a stratified random sample of 100 Heads of Department at Danish universities. The forces of globalisation have accentuated the ongoing domestic debate in Denmark over the medium of instruction and the legitimacy of English as the lingua franca. This paper therefore commences with a contemporary discussion of internationalisation and globalisation as it relates to European and Danish higher education. It then moves to an analysis of questionnaire feedback from five regionally separate Danish universities. Results from this autumn 2003 survey indicate that due to the absence, at that time, of general government procedures with regard to internationalisation, departments were defining their own statements and actions and there were many variants of institutional commitment to internationalisation. The results also suggest that while acknowledging the widespread use and need for English, particularly in research, a multi-lingual approach would better address current trends and developments. The study concludes that some Danish universities are now rethinking internationalisation issues and moving away from a preoccupation with student mobility activity to an emphasis on developing global and international competencies.*

Introduction

The expansion in student enrolment at Danish universities has major implications for the future direction and role of these institutions. Foreign students are now a central part of academic life and a direct manifestation of internationalisation on Danish campuses.

Internationalisation, at department level, calls for an integration of international educational activities into the everyday life of the institution. It is not a random process or, indeed, a case of selection and closure. It requires ongoing, careful, planning and the evaluation of needs and outputs (EAIE, 1995). Results will vary as situational and departmental circumstances each have their own dynamics of play.

This study served three purposes. It provided an overview of how five Danish universities have approached internationalisation, focusing on perceived academic needs and future

flow. Secondly, it presented an overview of the contentious area of Danish language policy and demonstrated how the challenge of global English was being addressed. The present dominance, and spread, of 'global' English is closely associated with scientific, economic, technological and cultural developments. According to David Crystal "There has never been a language so widely spread, or spoken by so many people, as English" (Crystal, 1997, p 139). Thirdly, it provided a forum for the ongoing discussion of what is acceptable language mediation in the Danish research and teaching milieu.

Foreign students are not a homogeneous group. Their individual motivations and reactions to studying in Denmark are tempered by many factors such as nationality, gender, age, social class and religious affiliations and, as a result, any internationalisation policy will have to make provision for these characteristics. Given that Danish universities generally teach in what Altbach (1998) terms a 'non-metropolitan' language, the findings of the present study raise the contentious issue of how one chooses to respond to curricular regulation and successful integration. Thus the timing for this research seems appropriate. Feedback in this field may contribute to some useful activity and involvement by other institutions which are addressing issues of internationalisation.

English as the medium of instruction in Danish Universities

Much has changed in higher education since the implementation of the Bologna Declaration in 1999. The aim here was to increase the employability of European citizens, as well as to widen the appeal and competitive element of European higher education (Bologna Declaration, 1999). The Bologna Declaration has '…led to a better recognition and integration of the international dimension in higher education. This refers in particular to the need for convergence among the higher education systems in Europe', (Wende, 2001, p 431-441). Denmark is no exception here and its position has developed along the conventional path towards internationalisation. It has absorbed, and promoted, aspects such as student and staff mobility, research exchange and the recognition and transfer of subject credits. Indeed, the pace of this has occasionally invoked wistful glances back to the relative calm of academic life of the 1980s before the launch of the Bologna Express. Yet, in the absence of an internationalisation manual, the reality is that policy-making decisions in this area have been extremely ad hoc and the increasing mobility figures for foreign students going to Denmark indicate that they can no longer be ignored or simply immersed in the local system.

While internationalisation can strengthen the core structures and activities of an institution, and thus facilitate initiatives that otherwise might not have been possible if only locally based (Wit and Knight, 1999), it can also indirectly create some tensions. Across the literature (HEIGLO Project, 2004; Maiworm and Wächter, 2002; Reichert and Tauch, 2003; Wit, 2002) there is general agreement that three areas remain problematic. These are: first, that there is no single model for the implementation of internationalization. Second, international activities, at institutional level, are still characterised by a great degree of fluidity (thereby complicating co-ordination and evaluation procedures) and, third, that there is an absence of concrete measures to accommodate a balance between the local, regional and international dimension. The emergence of English as the common language in European higher education is a particular cause of tension here.

Having conducted an extensive study of internationalisation, Haarlev (1997, p 63) concluded that "The internationalisation process has been set in motion at the Danish institutions of higher education, though in many places it rests on a relatively fragile foundation". According to the report of the Danish Rectors' Conference in 1997, "…an action-oriented language policy should exist taking into account the national language on the one hand, and on the other hand, the competitiveness of institutions on the international education market and their scope for involvement in international education" (*The Internationalisation of Higher education in Denmark – A Debate Outline,* 1997, p 8). Relatively little has happened in the

intervening eight years. As will be seen from the findings of this paper, only half of the Danish institutions that responded had an extant, well-formulated, operational rationale for internationalisation. The importance of having a rationale should not be underestimated as it is just as necessary to know where policy is at work as where it is not. The dialogue surrounding what should, and should not, constitute change at departmental level is important groundwork before any policy can be either formulated or implemented. Creating a rationale for internationalisation is therefore developmental and moves through stages of explanation and prediction. Yet, Denmark's progress has indeed been slow. Callan (1998, p 49) for example cites The Netherlands and Sweden as "…excellent examples of countries in Europe where internationalisation of education takes place under the influence of explicit, historically layered national goals which are themselves the outcome of well-understood political processes and traditions".

Recent Danish government initiatives are now placing a focus on teaching through English at institutions of higher education (Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation 2004). These may help to address issues such as the expectations regarding the number of foreign students participating in Danish undergraduate programmes and the extent to which they should be accommodated by English-medium-instruction. As will be seen from the results of this study, student exchanges are a controversial area but a necessary feature of any internationalisation policy. According to Graddol (1997, p 2), "English is widely regarded as having become the global language of communication in technology, trade, culture, science and education". This is corroborated by Swaan (2001, p 65) who claims that the "…centre of the linguistic galaxy is, of course, English". While it is relatively uncertain if this position may be easily maintained in the future, English has without doubt become the major business lingua franca. A logical follow-up is the increasing availability of English-medium courses at higher educational institutions.

Wit (2002, p 72) maintains that "…many reports have been published about the programs for internationalisation in the European Union, but few about the processes of internationalisation as institutional and national strategies". This study is one attempt to compile such data. Secondly, Wit cautions that "…general overviews of developments in Europe do not give sufficient credit to the complexity of Europe, in particular its regional and national differences". Underlying similarities in the systems of higher education in individual countries do not necessarily translate into parallel approaches when looking at the impact of internationalisation. Indeed, the increase in mobility has in fact highlighted the great diversity of European higher education systems as evidenced in Neave (2003, p 151), "Mass mobility laid bare a very shocking diversity - which would have disturbed the student of comparative education not one iota but which now posed real and practical problems to the builders of a European 'higher education area'". Exploring the dual route of internationalisation and English-language-medium work at Danish universities creates at least a number of signposts in resolving some of these European complexities. The proposed study therefore reveals one significant set of responses to this dual route within the traditional Danish university setting.

Objectives

The general objective for this study was to draw together a descriptive, and exploratory, account of what was currently happening within the environment of a representative sample of traditional Danish universities. Having established the status of internationalisation policy, two further objectives were defined. The first of these was to elicit feedback on the changing role of English as a language of instruction within these institutions and, second, to explore what direction departments envisage taking in their planning for internationalisation and English-language-medium work.

Design and Methods

An initial, self-administered, postal questionnaire (see Appendix A) was distributed to respondents selected from a representative sample of departments from five 'traditional' Danish universities. These five were purposively selected out of the twelve institutions officially classified as Danish universities, on the grounds that they had the regular faculty divisions of sciences, arts and social sciences. All five of the selected universities were geographically spread across Denmark. A stratified random sample was conducted on the whole population of 'Departments at Traditional Institutions of Danish Higher education'. Two strata were used:

Strata 1. = SIZE: large or small departments. Large was defined as institutions with a department size greater than, or equal to, 20. Small institutions had less than 20 departments.

Strata 2. = DISCIPLINE: Social Sciences and Humanities were grouped as one category and Natural Sciences and Engineering were used as a second disciplinary category.
This provided four cells:
- Large Departments in Humanities and Social Sciences
- Large Departments in Natural Sciences and Engineering
- Small Departments in Humanities and Social Sciences
- Small Departments in Natural Sciences and Engineering

A systematic sample of 100 departments was aimed for from a population of 173 departments at 'traditional' institutions of Higher Education. Foreign language departments were excluded on the grounds that English-language-medium work was not applicable to these subject areas. The survey questionnaires were mailed to Heads of Department who differed in age, sex, nationality and background experience. The questionnaire included both open and closed questions. The research strategy applied here was exploratory and numerically descriptive. Use of a survey approach provided data that was inferential, descriptive, and that could be processed statistically. SPSS software was used to analyse the data and to show how the results of the main analysis were presented. Cross tabulation of responses to the availability of English-language-medium work were conducted. Variables such as departmental size, student population and department mobility figures were used in the cross tabulation procedures.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Part One consisted of closed questions and concentrated on issues of background information, eliciting a profile of the respondent and department. This information was important for statistical purposes, and the construction of variables, as well as providing answers to the research question itself. Part Two contained Group Single Choice/Rated Questions and open-ended short-text input questions. This section concentrated on eliciting departmental attitudes and evidence, where it existed, of implementation of policy plans regarding the issue of internationalisation. Part Three of the questionnaire addressed the issue of English-language-medium work and contained single choice/rated questions and short-text input questions.

Results

The response rate to the survey was 67%. Seven faculties were represented in the returned questionnaires. 54% of respondents were affiliated with departments in Humanities and Social Sciences and 42% in the areas of Natural Science and Engineering. 49% of the Heads of Department surveyed were aged between 40-55 years and a further 45% were older than this category. The gender breakdown showed that 90% of the respondents were male. In addition, there was a wide spread of experience recorded, ranging from six months

to 32 years in the post as Head of Department: 97% of the Heads of Department were Danish citizens.

The Danish university departments surveyed in this questionnaire were clearly giving different weightings to the issue of internationalisation. Departments were most concerned with issues of internationalisation in terms of their own visibility, and 67% ranked this as an important focus area. The contacts that were maintained, and initiated, with partner institutions outside of Denmark were assigned importance by 88% of the respondents, with only a marginal number of Heads of Department (3%) considering it of lesser significance in their particular academic area. By contrast, more than half of the respondents gave low ranking to staff mobility. This is illustrated in Table 1, which shows an overview of department positions regarding promotion and support for staff mobility.

Table 1. Staff Mobility: Heads of Department ranking of staff mobility as a priority in internationalization*

Promotion of and Support for Staff Mobility	Percent
1. Most Important	10
2. Important	30
3. Neither Important nor Unimportant	36
4. Not Very Important	15
5. Least Important	3
Missing	6
Total	100

Note: * In response to: Question 2.1 "Please rank the level of agreement that most accurately reflects your department's priorities with regard to internationalization". [1 = most important, 5 = least important]

This raises questions about what constitutes support and action since if conditions are not optimal for collaboration efforts at teaching and research levels then the international dimension will be difficult to sustain. Under the issue of internationalisation of curricula, over half of the respondents (55%) attached importance to this as a priority.

Different strategies were being applied even if, in some departments, there was evidently little or no activity in the area of internationalisation. The study findings point towards the beginning of a merger of teaching and research statements which are paving the way for more concrete policies and procedures at institutional level. There are clearly many concerns about how much English should pervade the teaching of Danish undergraduate courses. 51% of respondents reported that their departments did not offer English-language-taught programmes at undergraduate level, although 45% claimed to be either positive, or very positive, in their perceived support for such programmes. Interestingly more threats (64%) than opportunities were identified by respondents to an increased availability of English taught courses at departments other than their own. Issues such as the competency of students to engage in discussion, the quality of teaching, the attempt to find additional funding for such programmes plus, according to one respondent, the very sensitive area of "the likely degradation of Danish as a university level research and teaching language" have still to be dealt with.

Respondents to the questionnaire generally accepted that teaching through English would maximize the attractiveness of their institutions to foreign students, but also questioned the extent to which this was necessary. This attitude needs to be understood in the context of the Danish tradition of free education for all. While it is accepted practice in many countries that foreign students pay fees for their tuition, Danish higher education is funded through the 'taximeter' system. This is based on output and gives an institution an amount of funding based on the number of students who have passed their examinations.

Likewise, the results from the current study also indicated that the issue of language medium was not necessarily enhanced by the provision of more English-taught courses. This is reflected also in Heads of Department responses to the provision of English-language-taught programmes at undergraduate level (see Table 2).

Table 2. Availability of Undergraduate English-Language-Taught Programmes at Departments*

Course Availability	Heads of Department Responses	Percentage
Yes	33	49
No	34	51
Total	67	100

Note: * In response to Question 3.1 "Does your department offer English-language-taught programmes at undergraduate level?"

On the contrary, both domestic and foreign students needed more exposure to the multi-lingual and enlarging Europe. Given that a surprising 40% of respondents had no written policy statements about internationalisation, no generalisations can be made about the overall degree of impact on English-language-teaching. Clearly where policy did exist, as in 55% of cases, emphasis was given to the provision of courses taught through English, and here, policy *did* influence practice.

Discussion

Teaching through the medium of English, at the Danish institutions surveyed in the current study, constitutes an activity response to the process of internationalisation which was already underway in most cases. There is a compelling need to move forward and address the issues of ethos and competency, as they relate to foreign staff, and student mobility. After all, co-operative partnerships with overseas institutions should only be engaged upon if their mission is compatible with one's own. For those departments who are still formulating a policy, it is important to be clear about the primary goal of such a policy and how it fits in to the larger scheme at sector, and institutional, level.

Much has changed in Danish higher education since this study and the subsequent implementation of the 2004 Danish University Law. Danish universities are about to enter a new competitive stage where institutions will need to compete to attract the best students, both national and international, and their accompanying funding. This paves the way for a liberalisation of the present taximeter system. The changes clearly place the student in a central, decisive role. While Heads of Departments (HoDs) may have seen the intake of foreign students as a matter of choice in 2003, the reality now is perhaps one of economic need. Perhaps this exemplifies how internationalisation may divide the world of education in to winner and losers. As far as Denmark is concerned, the era of state monopoly in Danish

higher education has passed. Time will tell whether the transformation will be a "…product of conscious adaptation, blind imitation, or pressure to conform" (Stromquist, 2002). What awaits is a new, and challenging, phase which is not risk-free but decidedly opportunistic.

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Appendix A: Departmental Evaluation Form

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect feedback regarding the issue of internationalisation at your department.

Please Note: The results of this survey are confidential. No Head of Department names are recorded or identified.

Section 1

Please supply the following background information.

1.1. Faculty
- ❑ Arts
- ❑ Health Sciences
- ❑ Law
- ❑ Sciences
- ❑ Social Sciences
- ❑ Theology
- ❑ Engineering and Science
- ❑ Other

⇓
1.2. Age

- ❑ 25-39
- ❑ 40-55
- ❑ 56+

⇓
1.3. Gender
- ❑ Male
- ❑ Female

⇓
1.4. Nationality
- ❑ Danish
- ❑ Non-Danish citizen

⇓
1.5 Length of service as HoD?
_____ year/s

⇓
1.6. Proportion (%) of your career to date spent in teaching, administration and research?

% Teaching
% Administration
% Research

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⇓
1.7. For how long has your department been set up?

- ❑ Less than one year
- ❑ 1-2 years
- ❑ 3-5 years
- ❑ 6-10 years
- ❑ More than 10 years

⇓
1.8. Number of teaching staff employed at your department?

Full-time staff	Part-time staff	Research staff

⇓
1.9. Number of students presently enrolled at your department?

Full-time students	Part-time students	Overseas students

Section 2
⇓
2.1. Please rank the level of agreement that most accurately reflects your department's priorities with regard to internationalisation.
[1=most important; 5=least important]

Priorities	*1* most important	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5* least important
Internationalisation of curricula	○	○	○	○	○
Expansion and maintenance of links with partner institutions abroad	○	○	○	○	○
Concern with international visibility of the department	○	○	○	○	○
Promotion of and support for staff mobility	○	○	○	○	○
Increasing the number of incoming and outgoing students participating in exchange schemes	○	○	○	○	○
Concern with increasing domestic student intake	○	○	○	○	○

⇓
2.2. Does your department have a policy on internationalisation?
- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

⇓
2.3. Please explain why /why not such a policy was implemented/not implemented

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⇓
2.4. In what ways are you ensuring that your department is up to date with international developments?

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⇓
2.5. What is your department's attitude to joint or multiple degree programmes?
[Ie, degrees awarded by 2 or more higher education institutions]

- ❑ Against
- ❑ Neutral
- ❑ In favour
- ❑ Don't know

⇓
2.6. In the space below, please write any additional comments you may have about internationalisation.

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⇓
2.7. Do you wish to attach any policy documents or other paperwork that your department has prepared about internationalisation? *Yes   No*

Section 3

⇓

3.1. Does your department offer English-language taught programmes at undergraduate level?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

⇓

3.2. Please rank the degree of support within your department for such programmes.
(1=very negative; 5=very positive)

Type of support	1 Very Negative	2	3	4	5 Very Positive
Teaching	○	○	○	○	○
Financial	○	○	○	○	○
Moral	○	○	○	○	○

⇓

3.3. What threats and opportunities can you identify for *your* department from an increased number of English-medium undergraduate courses in other departments at the university?

Threats	Opportunities

⇓

3.4. Overall, how important is it for exchange students to acquire a good knowledge of the native language spoken in the country of the institution they are attending?

- ❑ Very Important
- ❑ Important
- ❑ Neither important nor unimportant
- ❑ Unimportant

⇓

3.5. Please provide your telephone number if you are willing to respond to a brief interview follow-up.

Phone #

Thank you for participating in this survey.