

## Research paper

# Internationalization and university curricula in Denmark and Japan

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**Abstract:** *Universities are increasingly required to provide an education for students that enables them to acquire global knowledge, skills and languages, so that they can perform professionally and socially in an international and multicultural context. Although the situation varies according to the country, many universities have identified internationalization of the curriculum as a priority in promoting their global competitiveness. Danish and Japanese universities are presented here as two examples, of old and highly homogeneous nation states, struggling with best practice and how to move forward with this objective.*

## Introduction

At first glance it may seem rather odd to compare the higher education systems of two countries of such diverse cultural, physically distant locations, as Denmark and Japan. Denmark is after all, a small, North Atlantic, densely populated country, whereas Japan is a Pacific island country probably closer in size to Germany or Finland. Japan was enveloped in agrarian feudalism until the second half of the nineteenth century yet catapulted towards rapid industrialisation leading to its current successful appearance in the markets of the world. Yet, both countries have, in fact, close ties; not only in the economic and trade fields but also in cultural and academic areas.

The first known commercial treaty between Denmark and Japan dates back to 1867. Moreover, Japan's modernisation and the changes in its academic world are in many ways one result of the Iwakura Mission to Scandinavia undertaken in 1873. The Iwakura Mission consisted of more than one hundred scholars, students and administrators and aimed at gathering as much practical knowledge as possible about the workings of foreign governments, industry and public services. Indeed, a key purpose of the two year excursion was to gain (foreign) insights in to the improvement of the education of forthcoming Japanese generations. While not much is recorded about the subsequent Copenhagen visit, this early attempt at transgressing borders links neatly with one of the themes of a recent LEID conference entitled *Horizons and Time: The Researcher as Voyager*. This conference provided a very natural forum for researchers to engage in the field of internationalisation and transcend global barriers.

Denmark's international identity is regularly obscured in the general image conjured up of its Scandinavian neighbours. Yet like Japan, it is an example of a highly homogeneous nation state and aside from their contrasting present-day monarchies, both countries are indeed characterized by a convergence of tradition and innovation and not least continuity. In the field of higher education, both countries have an articulated commitment to internationalization. How this commitment is translated in to practice and concrete policies is the subject of this paper. As will be seen, developing a better understanding of an internationalized curriculum has no boundaries if it is judged in terms of attitude and impetus. Denmark and Japan, as well as other motivated OECD countries, were already the focus of a CERI study, on "Education in a New International Setting", in 1994.

An appropriate starting point would be to embark on defining what we mean by internationalization of the curriculum. This is centred around intercultural knowledge and understanding. It means giving students the opportunity to share and apply different views and to move beyond the dominant culture of their campus and/or discipline. Internationalization of the curriculum therefore calls for a focus not only on curriculum content but also on the general learning environment and teaching strategies. What form are curriculum developments in the sphere of higher education (HE) taking? Are we becoming more or less like each other? In what respects do HE curricula differ and what consequences does this have? And, somewhat like the Iwakura Mission, what can we learn from other countries? These are some of the questions that the seminar session, informing this paper, attempted to answer by tracing developments in Denmark and Japan.

## **General Context for the Internationalization of Higher Education**

There is no simple way of defining internationalization of the 'university'. If the 'university' is "a multitude of activities aimed at providing an educational experience with an environment that truly integrates a global perspective" (Knight and de Wit, 1997, p. 6), its location could be Japan, Denmark or a host of other spatial sites. According to Knight (2004), "internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization" (p. 5). As such, internationalization of HE takes place in a multitude of local, national, regional and world settings. Any definition of internationalization needs to be broad enough to take account of the internal differences in countries, cultures and education systems. After all, much has changed since the OECD defined the internationalized curriculum in higher education as

curricula with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students and/or foreign students (OECD, 1994, p. 9).

Denmark, like Japan, initially concentrated on internationally focused courses in the sciences and social sciences. This increased student awareness of international and global issues and likewise, the likelihood of studying abroad. Knight (2003) engages with the difficulties of comparing the development of nations with an updated definition where internationalization is defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 2). These ideas of process and integration are seen as an attempt to accommodate different history, traditions and cultural attributes.

According to the 1996 OECD report, *Internationalisation of Higher Education*, reform of the HE curriculum has two clear advantages. Firstly, it provides international educational opportunities for domestic students who may not otherwise be mobile. Secondly, it increases the attractiveness of the curriculum for foreign students, whose presence is generally beneficial to domestic students. It thereby broadens the education process as a whole, not least, when a course is taught through the medium of English, as opposed to Danish or Japanese, for example.

## **Internationalization and university curricula in Denmark**

### ***The driving forces behind internationalization of the curriculum***

In Denmark there are three types of HE institutions- universities, colleges, and Academies of Professional Higher Education. The latter two combine short term professional studies with practical training. They are all self-governing institutions and funded by the state. The

internationalization of higher education has pervaded both curriculum policy and practice in Danish universities since the implementation of the Bologna Agreement in 1999. One of the broader aims of Bologna is to develop a world-class European higher Education Area, which would match the quality of the best universities in the United States and elsewhere. Denmark has fully supported this approach. The three year bachelor degree was a first step in implementing a tiered system (the so-called 3+2+3 system) within higher education programmes. The Danish government was a direct driving force here with the aim of opening up a bottle neck in the education path and simplifying the various phases of degree completion. Yet the problem for Denmark with its relatively flat wage structure remains, ironically, that employers have been able to recruit a sufficient number of graduates with Master's qualifications and have not therefore favoured the employment of graduates with Bachelor's degrees. OECD (2005) has therefore strongly recommended that Danish universities give more emphasis to creating self-standing Bachelor qualifications that meet the needs of employers as well as providing the option to progress to a Master's qualification in the same or another university. A move in this direction has been the development of Professional Bachelor Degree programmes, introduced in 2000, which have been targeted, quite successfully, at the education and health sectors.

A key challenge facing universities in modern societies is their responsiveness to meeting national objectives. In most OECD countries, universities have varied the pace at which they have introduced necessary reforms. The 2005 OECD review maintains that Denmark has chosen to follow the historic tradition of retaining excellence in teaching and research at the expense of developing sufficient links with society and the economy.

Generally speaking, there is evidence of an increasing internationalization of the Danish knowledge system. This is being achieved by strengthening the interaction between knowledge institutions and the business community. University graduates will, through their job relations, transfer new knowledge within their specialities to the labour market. The labour market may be domestic and foreign but the local market will inevitably be informed by global influences. A focus for Danish universities on their role in preparing students for the world of work has assumed major significance. This has also to be seen against a background where self-management of the universities does not yet exist and where the proportion of Danish universities' income from public funds is relatively high and reflected in the amount of centralized government control.

From a Danish curriculum perspective, two points are particularly worth noting regarding internationalization of the curriculum. Firstly, the Ministry for Science, Technology and Innovation sets the rules for quality control of university programmes and teaching. In addition, students hold 50% of votes on the study boards. This gives them influence over the quality of the programmes and the teaching, which appears to contribute to ongoing quality assurance and development. Both staff and students have therefore influence on how much they should/can teach in English and can also discuss/control their needs regarding recruitment of lecturers from abroad.

A second point concerns the low completion rates at Danish universities. Students typically enrol at university when they are 21 or 22 years old. Between 40% and 75% complete their Bachelor degree and the level of non-completion for those progressing to a Master's qualification is relatively low. Given that a relatively small proportion of an age group (18%) enrolls at university and that Denmark offers the most generous student financial support in the world (up to six years of grants to support living costs), the non-completion rates are very problematic. Yet universities have an incentive to take action because their funding is based on students completing each year of their course. A proposed change for increasing the number of taught courses using English at undergraduate level would hardly alleviate this situation and thus policy in this area will continue to meet resistance. The scope for English as the language of instruction would therefore seem to be centred at masters' level and upwards.

## ***Recent trends and contents of the curriculum***

Danish universities are preoccupied with the idea that the activities they offer, match society's needs within the various disciplines. They are therefore alert and open to public criticism if there is a perceived waste by training students for jobs that do not exist.

Yet, internationalization of curricula is a lengthy and complex process. Recent efforts copied from Sweden, for example, have been focused on the financial and human resources for internationalised curricula. Funding for such projects in the past has been grouped under larger schemes, which also included mobility programmes. This has frequently resulted in all too small a proportion of available budgets left for curriculum development. There is a need then to differentiate between individually and institutionally oriented programmes and funding. To look at some recent trends, it is worth focusing on the general learning environment from a Danish university perspective and curriculum content.

### **General Learning Environment and Teaching Strategies**

Danish students are often rather older than those in other countries. This is partly because Danes do not begin their school studies until they are seven years old, and partly because many Danes take a year or two "out" from studying at compulsory school and high school and between high school and university. Thus, most Danes are at least twenty years old, and often more, when they begin their university studies. This has inevitable implications for the types of teaching undertaken at HE institutions. An obvious area of concern for foreign students is their relationship with staff and the classroom environment. Students come to class with different educational backgrounds and with different experiences and needs. They need time to adjust to classroom norms and to understand classroom interaction. This is particularly relevant to attendance at seminars where the focus is on smaller groups – typically 20 to 30 students- and where group work and problem-solving exercises are common practice. Exactly what goes on in these seminars depends on factors such as the way the teacher has planned the course and the size of the group, but students (domestic and foreign) will always be expected to contribute in some way or another.

The teaching atmosphere in Danish university departments is quite informal. A number of exchange and guest students come from HE systems where they may not be on first name terms with their teachers and this can occasionally cause different dynamics in the student/teacher relationship. One of the key challenges of internationalization of the curriculum is sensitivity to the backgrounds of students. Teaching needs to bring multiple perspectives to the specific disciplines. Foreign students have increased awareness of these issues within Danish higher education.

Universities in Denmark offer a growing number of programmes including some 150 full-degree programmes, taught through the medium of English. This has doubled since 2002 where only 75 of such programmes were on offer. Approximately 1000 individual courses are taught in English. Yet there is great variation in the size of the programmes from one higher education institution to another. In addition, there are no tuition fees for foreign students and this has helped to attract a significant number of them to Danish HE institutions. Foreign students now account for about 4% of the university student population and about 2% at university college level. Not all universities have clear language policies, but the availability of Danish language courses for foreign students has been increasing.

### **The Curriculum Content**

There are underlying epistemological questions related to curriculum content and the idea, in practice, of the 'universality of knowledge' which does not always hold. Danish HE institutions are active participants in European and international networks. The universities in

the Copenhagen metropolitan area and in Southern Sweden cooperate in education and research in a transnational university consortium called “The Øresund University”. Denmark also participated in six of the subprojects in the “Tuning Educational Structures in Europe” project (business economics, education theory, geology, history, mathematics and physics).

Danish universities are also involved to varying degrees in joint Master’s courses (ERASMUS mundus). The aim here is to establish jointly developed curricula with agreed academic recognition of parts of the programme by both partner institutions. Some examples include: a joint Swedish-Danish education programme in horticulture; a German-Danish cooperation in joint programmes in business economics and business (which has been working for ten years) and joint English-Danish programmes in Marketing and Finance.

In summary, internationalization of Danish HE curricula has been particularly successful in the disciplines of business and economics, humanities and social sciences. By contrast, the natural sciences have a different agenda given that their academic content and practices have always claimed to have an inherent international orientation. Nevertheless, Danish internationalized curricula continues to be mirrored in such aspects as area and theme centres, joint research projects, research exchange programmes, work/study abroad and the more general teaching/learning process.

### ***Challenges ahead***

Denmark, however, like many other countries, is facing pressures related to the internationalization of higher education. According to the OECD Review (2005), Danish higher education has expanded its international connections, but the overall cross-border flows could be higher. A stronger promotion of the benefits of study abroad plus a more active recruitment of foreign students to Denmark, particularly at PhD level, needs to be implemented. This is without doubt a major benefit to a country of Denmark’s size and population. Yet, there are also other challenges, particularly in the issue of whether the country can continue to attract and retain qualified knowledge workers for a rapidly changing knowledge industry. In some ways, as the Iwakura Mission made a case for the necessity of progress, so too is there a need to navigate a path for internationalization.

## **Internationalization and university curricula in Japan**

### ***General context for the internationalization of universities***

Japanese concern about internationalization of universities was first provoked in 1971, when the OECD report ‘Review of National Practice for Education - Japan’ emphasized the urgent need for Japanese universities to participate in the realm of world universities, and to open up to foreign student and scholars (OECD, 1996). In 1983, the government launched a policy that set a target for 100,000 international students in higher education institutions. This was in line with several suggestions by the Central Council for Education (CCE) to promote international exchange of students and staff (Kitamura, 1989). The target number was reached in 2003, as a result of both the government and universities making efforts to promote holistic reform of university education to meet global standards and attract international students (Horie, 2002). Both the number and ratio of international students however, were still insignificant compared with other developed countries such as the US and UK. A majority of international students were coming from Asian countries close to Japan, and familiar with the Japanese language and culture. In the age of competition for students among universities worldwide, Japanese universities are required to make a further effort towards improvement of their education systems. Only then can they be competitive and comparable with overseas universities, and more importantly, open to students from any background and country (Ebuchi, 1997; Kitamura, 1989).

## ***The driving force behind internationalization of the curriculum***

There are several driving forces behind the new initiatives for curriculum reform in Japan. First of all, there is a growing social demand for education that prepares students for their career and lives in a global society (University Council 1998). The Japanese education system however, was originally designed to educate Japanese people in Japanese with the aim of adapting to Japanese society and culture (Hanami and Nishitani, 1997). An internationalized curriculum is necessary for Japanese universities if they are to turn out graduates whose outlook is broader so that they can contribute to the social and economic development of their nation, as well as that of the world.

Secondly, there is a necessity to attract international students by having such a curriculum on offer. International students are attracted by the curriculum because it is seen as enabling them to learn about different countries and cultures in another language with an international group cohort (OECD 1996). Japanese universities are struggling to recruit home students as evidenced by the decreasing numbers of the university population. International students are indispensable for Japanese universities; not only to secure numbers by way of student intake and income - tuition fees of international students are the same amount as home students pay, but also to establish a global educational environment that is beneficial for all students.

Finally, it is necessary for Japanese universities to reach a certain international standard in relation to foreign institutions. Many Japanese universities have offered study-abroad programmes for students to study at foreign-partner institutions. The credit points earned in such programmes are often transferred into the home credit system (Horie, 2002), and some of the programmes are concluded with a double or joint degree that is awarded separately by, or together with, Japanese and their foreign partner institutions (Huang, 2005). Thus, a curriculum that is compatible with foreign partners is needed for Japanese universities to maintain and promote their partnerships.

## ***Government policy on internationalisation of the curriculum***

In 1998, the University Council in Japan (1998) emphasized that it was necessary for universities to improve their programmes in order to prepare students for active participation in a global society that is increasingly mobile, complex and uncertain. It was the first time that the term 'undergraduate programme', rather than 'faculty programme', was used. The latter had been conventionally used as it reflected the fact that such programmes had been basically designed by each faculty. Three main educational objectives were suggested for undergraduate programmes. The first objective was to develop students' ability to explore issues. Students are expected to be capable of responding to change independently, exploring future issues by themselves, and making flexible and comprehensive judgement from a broad point of view. The second objective was to emphasize the principle of liberal education which would enable students to acquire a broad knowledge. This would help develop the quality of students' all round human experience. In that way they should examine issues from a diverse perspective and make appropriate decisions. The third objective was to link organically between liberal education and specialized education across all four years of study for the students. The Council believed that the aims of undergraduate education for the 21st century will be for students to cultivate their capacities for lifelong learning, rather than for them to complete their study in a specific academic area that should subsequently be completed at graduate level (Kinukawa, 2005; University Council in Japan, 1998). The Council (2000) also suggested several competencies that students need to acquire through 'liberal education': they are to judge and perform with high moral standards and responsibility, to understand their own and other cultures, to develop communication skills including foreign language abilities, and become more informationally and scientifically literate.

In 2004, the Central Council for Education (CCE) in Japan (2004) emphasized that a principle of undergraduate programmes should be to nourish a citizen of the 21st century who attains a balance between a material or economical aspect, such as mastering a specialized knowledge and vocational skills, and a spiritual or cultural aspect, such as acquiring a broader knowledge with a sense of morality and symbiosis. In view of these government policies, international or cross-cultural elements have been increasingly regarded as a key component of liberal education that will be a basis of any specialized education. It has to be said, however, that there have been no policies on the internationalisation of programmes or curriculum.

### ***Recent trends and contents of the curriculum***

In addition to the programmes for international students, such as the Japanese language and culture programmes, the number of programmes with international perspectives or contents, for both home and international students, has been expanded, especially since the 1990s (Huang, 2005). The private universities in particular, are active in attracting students by establishing new programmes which respond to social needs, since their funding is heavily dependent on tuition fees. New programmes relating to international or cross-cultural communication had been established in more than 20 private universities by 2002. Among these, curricula with international subjects or with titles denoting cross-cultural communication or understanding, constituted 27% of the total; curricula preparing students for specific international professions, such as international business and management, accounted for 18%, and curricula in foreign languages or linguistics made up 12% of the total (MEXT, 2003). Huang (2005) says that the programmes are currently moving from traditional foreign language and cultural studies types to ones involving a more intensive academic or professional programme and certification.

On the other hand, the number of newly established undergraduate programmes with international or cross-cultural titles in the former national universities - they were given corporate status in 2004, has not increased so rapidly. The internationalization of their curricula however, is mostly implemented through broadening the traditional subject areas with an international or comparative approach in existing faculties or based on the framework of existing specifications. Their programmes seem to be more academic, formal and professional, and more programmes are research-based at graduate-level than the programmes in the private sectors (Huang, 2005).

The number of English-taught programmes opened to all students has been increasing, although these still account for an insignificant proportion (Ohmori, 2004). It is desirable for universities to use English language as the medium of instruction in order to offer the programmes to international students from a variety of countries. It remains difficult, however, without further improvement in the English language ability of both home students and teaching staff.

The study-abroad programmes are becoming a key component of the internationalized curriculum. Most universities offer these programmes including the University Mobility of Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) programmes which students undertake at foreign institutions, for a certain period as a part of their curricula. These programmes are increasingly supported by institutionally organized structures based on bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements, such as the credit transfer system and the double or joint degree between Japanese and foreign institutions (OECD, 1996). In 2005, the government prepared a budget for Japanese universities to promote these foreign partnerships in joint curricula development, and consequently, more than 100 universities have applied for this subsidy (MEXT, 2005). Individual institutions have come to play an increasing role in stimulating and implementing internationalization of the curriculum. They are becoming more active and more enthusiastic in designing and applying diversified programmes at home and abroad (Huang, 2005).

## **Challenges ahead**

The purpose of a university, as emphasized by the government, is about cultivation of people who are capable of active participation in a global society. This is in line with the aim of the internationalized curriculum which is defined by the OECD. Internationalized curricula currently being developed in Japanese universities tend to be organized for training international professionals who will contribute economically to society on the basis of specialized faculty or postgraduate education. The curriculum however, does not seem to fully reflect both the expectations of the government and the aims of the internationalized curriculum that should nourish a citizen of the 21st century.

In order to realize these expectations and aims, the internationalized curriculum at undergraduate level may need to be developed further by linking specialized education with liberal education that will help students to acquire a broader knowledge, including international and interdisciplinary elements, with an emphasis on communal and ethical attributes. This link will enable students to form an integrated knowledge base for their future career and further learning in a global society. An internationalized curriculum, therefore, calls for campus-wide curricular reform rather than one anchored to a departmental curriculum since it requires an interfaculty approach. Further development of the curriculum with attention focused on curricular aims, contents and design at university level will be expected.

## **Conclusion**

Japanese and Danish universities provide us with examples of meaningful and sustainable practice. They reveal two countries that do not want to be left behind. They have expanded their relations with foreign universities. It is a development that has moved outwards from a local and regional level to one with international and multinational parameters. In terms of student mobility, both are modest 'sending' and 'receiving' countries and are actively engaged in promoting their changing educational landscapes. They both compete with universities in other parts of the world. In this situation, they are increasingly obliged to improve their higher education systems so as to be comparable with partner institutions. Confronting issues, such as curricular reform and promoting student and staff mobility, can therefore only enhance their global competitiveness.

In addition to these external curricular influences, there is of course each country's national agenda, with its insistence that universities prepare students for the world of work. This has encouraged, maybe even compelled Danish and Japanese universities to engage in internationalizing their curriculum. As many universities, especially in Anglophone nations such as Australia, Canada, UK and US, have tailored their curricula to attract international students, a number of universities in Denmark and Japan are following suit. The local language and use of English as a teaching medium are conditions of play. They invite reflection on what is an appropriate balance in an internationalized curriculum. Efforts to reorganize curricula are being achieved by adding international or multi-cultural elements to the existing one, or establishing new international professional programmes. It is, however, challenging. An internationalized curriculum is not just a simple matter of adaptation. As is evident in the OECD definition of the curriculum and government statements, the essence of the curriculum must contain multi-faceted elements, such as national, regional and global perspectives, and economic and cultural aspects, and this certainly compounds its definition. Yet, the curriculum can not be fully experienced and realised without the practicalities of ensuring adequacy of learning environment, ability and proficiency of the available teaching staff and teaching strategies that can be adapted for both home and international students.



In summary, it is fair to suggest that Danish and Japanese efforts share similarities and differences in their efforts at curricula reform. Japanese private institutions are active in internationalizing their curricula. The former national universities seem to have retained conventional academic disciplines and courses, although they were given Japanese corporate status. Like Japan, Danish universities are seeking to develop better links with society and the economy but with the awareness that teaching and research quality must not be compromised. One of the major contrasts to their parallel approaches, however, is that Denmark does not have private universities unlike Japan, where more than 70% of the Japanese universities are private sector. The three types of Danish institutions offering HE programmes have well defined profiles and while state supported, they remain self-governing institutions. Unlike Japan, no tuition fees apply. These differences in ownership and financing inevitably affect levels of curricular decision-making in both countries. The internationalisation of university curriculum however, does not have boundaries, since Denmark and Japan, as well as other motivated countries, are making similar efforts in the global age of higher education. Therefore, they can learn from each other for further curricular development as they better position themselves and promote their specific strengths.

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