

Internationalisation of HE: episode one

Podcast transcript

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Key

+ Dr Jenna Mittelmeier: JM

+ Dr Sylvie Lomer: SL

Transcript

JM: Welcome to the first in our series of short podcasts focusing on the work conducted for a literature review entitled *Internationalisation and Its Impacts On Student Outcomes and Experiences*. This is part of the Event HE Connect Benefits series on student success. My name is Dr Jenna Mittelmeier from the University of Manchester, and I'm joined today by one of my collaborators on the review, Dr Sylvie Lomer, also from the University of Manchester. The review is co-published by our colleagues, Said Al Furqani and Daian Huang, who are both postgraduate researchers at our institution. Throughout our series of podcasts we will be discussing the role of internationalisation practices in global higher education and what the interdisciplinary research from the last decade tells us about how efforts to internationalise may or may not impact upon students' outcomes and experiences. The focus of this particular podcast within the series is set up to think about why we have undertaken this work and why we think internationalisation is an important topic, both for practice and for research related to higher education.

SL: My name is Dr Sylvie Lomer. I'm a Senior Lecturer in policy and practice at the Manchester Institute for Education at the University of Manchester and we're very excited that this report is now available and you can download it if you're a member of a Member institution from the website. So Jenna, do you want to talk our listeners through why you wanted to respond to this call from Advance HE?

JM: Sure. So my area of research expertise focuses on the internationalisation of higher education, and particularly on university practices with international students - the area of specialism for our whole team that contributed to the project. So I think my feeling was when the funding call from Advance HE came out for this literature review project that it was almost like a natural progression for the work that we've been doing over the last few years. So Sylvie and I previously had some funding from the Society for Research into Higher Education which focused on pedagogies with international students and how the presence of international students impacts on the ways that lecturers in the UK teach. Part of that included a systematic literature review about research into pedagogic practices in internationalised settings in UK higher education. So that was a little bit of a starting point for the present project. We also, led by Sylvie, had a project with our colleague, Steve Courtney that was funded by the British Academy where we evaluated internationalisation strategies across all the universities in the UK to evaluate how universities are focusing their

efforts in relation to internationalisation. So there were some other pieces of the puzzle as well, like a systematic review that I did about internationalisation specifically within The Journal higher education research and development for The Journal's 40th anniversary. Sylvie and I also have a book that's being published next year that's a research methods guidebook for researchers who include international students as participants within their work, and a lot of the work for that has been about mapping the subfield of existing research. So it felt like all of this came together quite nicely in this present project and felt like a really logical next step for evaluating the research field and synthesising what we know about internationalisation and kind of what evidence we have for what difference it actually makes in student experiences. Internationalisation has been a really hot topic of discussion in higher education for decades now and there's also decades of research into this topic that tends to be quite scattered across disciplines. So I was interested in doing this work because it felt something that was really important for the subfield to have this work be synthesised so that all of the noise could be made into something meaningful and I think that's been particularly important because a lot of the work that we did before this has brought questions like what is internationalisation actually doing within our institutions? What do we know about how internationalisation impacts on students' experiences and where could we possibly critique that and kind of develop new, more ethical ways of approaching this practice within all the broad things we do within the umbrella of internationalisation? So I think that doing a literature review was kind of a step towards that, mapping what research can tell us about internationalisation, but also to impact what it is that we still maybe don't know within this topic and what practices maybe aren't very evidence based yet. But maybe I could turn the question back to you, why did you agree to join me on this?

SL: I mean I think you've hit on a lot of the highlights, but from a lot of that previous work, I think some of the themes that came up around different patterns of internationalisation in different institutions and in different countries, they've shown that that really shapes different pedagogic practices. So where some lecturers in the UK HE sector may be lecturing to very internationalised classrooms, making use of an internationalised curriculum, others may only have a couple of international students in a classroom. They're maybe teaching in a subject which is perceived to be primarily domestically oriented or to have developed historically in that context, and so those two lecturers will need to adapt and develop their practices very differently and as you say, I think there is a real evidence gap and a real gap in the synthesis between the extensive conceptual work that's been done in internationalisation, particularly which is more your field than mine, internationalisation of the curriculum, and how that shapes in pedagogy practices within the classroom. So our Society for Research and Higher Education Funded project which was also co-funded by Advance HE, generated a tool kit where we tried to synthesise best practices from lecturers in terms of what they do to ethically and inclusively internationalise their classroom. And what we're trying to do here, I think, is to again, bridge that gap between pedagogy and practice and the theoretical conceptual work by this time specifically focusing on the empirical research and as you say, lots of practices are really not very evidence driven. It's hard to find the evidence. A lot of it

is very piecemeal, it's very case by case. Someone does an amazing thing in their institution and unless they publish it and make it more widely known, it's very difficult to pick that up and make it more widely established as a common practice. So I think what was quite exciting about the Advance HE brief was the emphasis on focusing on student outcomes, how does it change student experiences and outcomes and that, for us, has been a guiding question because while there's plenty of literature that looks at what staff think and what they try to do, we haven't necessarily always made that link with what happens as a result of those institutional and classroom level practices. So I think for me, I was motivated as well by the hope that we would, through this work and through the support of Advance HE, be able to influence people's practice and to offer a wider range of options and a sense of which options are backed by evidence. Very carefully avoiding using the I praise best practice because I think what we're talking about is a range of different practices that are available and have a different range and a different characteristic of evidence and theoretical foundations to build on. So I'm going to turn it back to you, Jenna, your turn again. It's been a few weeks. Can you remind me what we actually did?

JM: Yeah, it's a good question. So the prompting from Advance HE was that they wanted a literature review about scholarly research over the last five years that showed demonstrable impact on students' experiences and outcomes and because we're overly ambitious, we decided to extend that to 10 years, mostly because we felt that internationalisation has such a long history of research and we also wanted to kind of capture the work that was being done prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and to see how the subfield of research has developed over the last decade. So we developed a really strict search strategy which is outlined in the reports when you get a chance to read it, and we combed through several databases of academic research. This initially brought up a huge number of articles. We started with 2,539 articles and we had to quickly get to work on developing our inclusion and exclusion criteria to whittle that number down and make sure that we were only including articles that fit within our intended purposes. So making sure we were only focusing on empirical research that collected data, rather than theoretical papers, and also including only papers that either measured or reflected on impacts on students which was the really key focus of this review. So we outline in the reports the ways that we, kind of in depth how we went about this, that in the end we had 606 papers that we included in our analysis, which was no small task let's say. Our next step was to take that big mass of papers and categorise them kind of in two ways. First was into 11 phonetic categories based on the topic that was in focus of the research and these cut across a really wide range of activities and universities. Everything from international student recruitment to internationalised pedagogies and curricular to inter-cultural social activities, study abroad among so many others. The second way that we categorised papers was according to the level of demonstrable impact. So thinking about did the data show impact of an activity and how it made a difference to students' experiences or outcomes, thinking about evidence that was either quantitative or qualitative in nature, whatever the research methods' approach was, or did it not collect information about that impact, but maybe reflected on it without specifically measuring it through the research design. So maybe in the discussion or the conclusion, or thinking was

that only limitedly or maybe not reflected by the authors, so kind of a descriptive research in nature without thinking about the impacts on students. So what we ended up with was this really complex literature review that considers the level of global evidence that we have across 11 subcategories of internationalisation efforts in higher education. I think that's really innovative in that sense because we're talking about a subfield that has existed for decades across multiple different fields of research. It's something that's of interest, I think, to just about anyone who teaches or works within a university. So it's really the first of its kind I think in that sense to really draw a decade of research together to try to make sense of what we know about what works within internationalisation. So the findings are interdisciplinary, they're cross contextual, they're international in scope. So really what we were trying to do was think about across the decade of research and over 600 published articles, we've synthesised what we currently know about internationalisation and evidence about how it impacts on students. But I wonder why do you think anyone should care about these findings?

SL: Well I think everyone should care about these findings who's working in a UK higher education institution, but obviously I'm biased. But I would say I think pretty much anyone who works in a UK HE institution will find at least one section that is of relevance to them and we are really not expecting that anyone is going to sit down and read this cover to cover. But I would think that anyone who works with teaching international students or with teaching in an internationalised subject, would be interested in the sections on, for example, inter-cultural competencies, curriculum pedagogies. Anyone who's leading curriculum development, let's say at a module lead level or a programme development level, or anyone who's got responsibilities for quality assurance and quality enhancement would be interested in as well the curriculum sections. We have a section as well on learning, online learning and educational technologies. So educational technologists I hope will find something of use and of value here as well, as well as everyone who's trying to cope with the rapid changes in the proposed Covid-19 context of incorporating hybrid and flexible learning in various different contextualised ways. Anyone who's involved in planning or designing learning spaces as well I think would be interested in the themes of curriculum as in how it relates to learning space and pedagogies as well. If people are running welcome events, or working in student support, we have a whole section on student support. Anyone who is working in international offices, we've got a section on study abroad. You'd be interested in that, and we have a section as well on work placements and service learning, so anyone who's involved in the support or the embedding of work placements and employability with a view to internationalisation will have something to pick up on here. Just to come back to your point, Jenna, about the way we categorise the impact, I think some people might be listening thinking well why would you bother if your focus is on looking at evidence of impact on students? Why would you bother having that limited impact category? I think we were really keen to make sure that some of the more critical voices in the literature on internationalisation were still represented in this review. So we wanted to make sure that the papers that are asking challenging conceptual questions about, for example, how might international students be marginalised in the process of work

placement learning and work based learning, that they would still be able to be included and represented in some capacity, but we have to acknowledge that when you look at things in terms of impact, that can't necessarily take the fall. So we encourage people, I think, to pay close attention actually to that final section, although it doesn't necessarily seem like it's high value, it's raising some of the most challenging questions that influence our practice. And I think anyone who is interested in publishing in this area or is interested in developing their scholarship and research in this area of practice, would be interested as well because as you said, it's such a huge, scattered interdisciplinary confusing and contradictory field, that I really hope this acts as a resource and a starting point for people to gain access and to say alright, well if I look at what has been included here and start with those articles, I'll have an overview. I'll have a brief map of my area and then I can build on up and bring in other literature that is more precise. So I hope that we're giving people a bit of a head start in capitalising and refining on their scholarship in practice.

JM: I think that's really helpful. Something that's going through my mind is how internationalisation is something that all of our universities do to some degree, at least within my working practice. It's been kind of a status quo for how my work with students and my work as a lecturer has been framed, but I think there's this question about how well do we know that what we're doing works? So how much do we actually know about whether internationalisation makes a difference for students that we teach and thinking about how we can bring a more evidence based approach to the various internationalisation activities that we do. I think that's really what's at the heart of this literature review, trying to take the really scattered research fields and make sense of what universities can take from the evidence about what we know about approaches to internationalisation. We won't be talking about the findings on this particular podcast in the series, but I think what we've developed is this really complex picture that some areas of internationalisation are really well evidenced and that research provides good suggestions for developing such activities to meaningfully impact on students. But there are lots of categories within our review that has very little evidence than being mainstay practices within our sector. So I think like you said, it's my hope that more than anything else, the review can give higher education staff or senior leads or policy makers an opportunity just to pause and kind of reflect on what they're doing in relation to internationalisation or international students, to kind of question why are we taking this approach? How we is it evidenced? And if it isn't well evidenced, to think about how they might be able to start producing evidence about these practices in the future?

SL: Absolutely and I think that one of the great examples of this is that there is a widely shared assumption in the literature on internationalisation in as well in the way that we talk about internationalisation and particularly with reference to international student recruitment. We have an asset based framing which is great, that acknowledges the value that international students can bring through their own knowledge and experiences into the classroom that enriches the curriculum and it enriches experiences for domestic students. So what that leads to, as an assumption, is that we should do lots of group work practices and Jenna, you've published on this extensively. I'm sure we can add some links in the show notes, those publications. But this model of inter-cultural group work is a great

example of what you're talking about in terms of what's assumed practice and what we've been able to do in the review is pull together as much evidence as we can find about how inter-cultural group work is actually impacting students and what the specific practices are that might allow people to capitalise and make inter-cultural group work effective, not challenging and minimise exposure to instances of discrimination and racism, for example. And for me, one of the issues that this review has also been able to highlight, the connections between different areas of practice. So we were able to include, as I think you mentioned, admissions and recruitment as a theme and an area of practice. Well if we think that inter-cultural group work is great and we have an asset based framing which is great, theoretically we would need to ensure that all classrooms in a given institution, in a given programme and even in a given module, had the capacity to facilitate inter-cultural group work. And what we were hoping to look for in the admissions and recruitment sub theme was whether that was the case, whether there was a holistic and synthesised connection between those two and I'm going to avoid spoiling the result that we're going to share in a later podcast. But I think that keen listeners will probably have a sense about what the outcome of that synthesis across different areas of practice might or might not be.

JM: Yeah, I think that's a good point about how this literature review has really picked apart assumptions that I think often time we assume that the presence of international students is a meaningful cultural experience for home students, or that if we just stick diverse students together in a single space, that that will somehow magically create a meaningful experience for them. I think a lot of what this review has done is to look at the evidence of how well that has actually shown through research and what research actually shows us about the experiences of students within these intercultural spaces and what institutions might do to help create some of those meaningful experiences that they're perhaps assuming happen kind of by magic. So it is a lot of unpacking I think, this review and so there's a lot of consideration, I think, for people at all levels about reflecting on their own practices or practices of their institutions and thinking about how well those might actually be evidenced or perhaps if there is limited evidence, for what is assumed to be standard practice.

SL: I think that reflects that there are a wide range of conflicting understandings of what internationalisation means and how one might study it and how to bring it about in the classroom on campus. That can be a very challenging field to navigate as a practitioner and as a researcher. So we are hopeful that this literature review does perform a useful function in terms of synthesising and summarising this wide, disparate, scattered range of literature as concisely as possible, and we really have done so with practice in mind to try to draw out some of the key conclusions and implications for practitioners and also for leaders and researchers.

JM: We think that's a good pitch for the literature review. We hope that listeners will have a chance to read through the literature review. We also have an accompanying blog post that gives a general summary of some of our key findings but I think with that, we'll say thank you for listening to our reflections on why we think this work is important. In the second podcast of the series, we'll start to reflect on what we found and how it impacts on practices in higher

education, but in the meantime, you can read the report on the Advance HE website. You can also find details about our upcoming webinars about this work and as I mentioned, a blog introduction to the findings.

SL: Thank you very much.

JM: Thanks for listening.

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