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Joint Modules and Internationalisation in Higher Education: Reflections on the Joint Module ‘Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning’

Abstract: This paper places the development of the Joint Module ‘Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning’ (COMPALL) in the context of international developments in higher education and in adult education. Based on this framework, the development of the joint module is reflected regarding its institutional and didactical structure as well as participants’ motivation and diversity.

Introduction

In recent times, owing to globalisation and the Bologna Process, higher education institutions have been making relevant efforts towards internationalisation. These efforts have involved research projects aimed at implementing and improving knowledge and skills in specific areas relevant to teams from different countries. Apart from research, higher education institutions have progressively enrolled more international students than ever before (cf. Varghese, in this volume). Additionally, several international teaching programmes have been conceived and developed, enrolling teaching staff and students from multiple regions and academic traditions, raising new opportunities and challenges for institutions and participants.

Of these international teaching programmes, some have specifically approached adult education and lifelong learning as their main subjects (cf. Németh, in this volume). These programmes foster debates on issues influenced by international trends and organisations, discourses and programmes. In fact, adult education and lifelong learning specifically show dimensions that go beyond the nation state, which is why they have been referred to by many authors to stress the international character of these matters.

Among these teaching programmes, the Joint Module “Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning” (*Joint Module COMPALL*) includes different teaching approaches to reach students from several countries and disciplinary traditions. The COMPALL joint-module methodology programme has been referred to as an innovative teaching practice because of the opportunities

provided to students and teaching staff in adult education and lifelong learning (Tino, Guimarães, Frison, & Fedeli, in this volume). Based on a preparatory phase (online and/or on campus) featuring an intensive programme in Würzburg (the winter school), the *Joint Module COMPALL* has been an interesting challenge for everybody involved in its activities. That experience needs to be reflected on. Therefore, this book analyses the challenges of internationalisation in higher education in general and in the academic discipline of adult education specifically. Using the *Joint Module COMPALL* as an example for reflecting on international developments in higher education, the book identifies the lessons learned in its development.

Internationalisation in higher education

Internationalisation in higher education is not a new phenomenon. Several contributions in this volume show that internationalisation has been the basis of all academic activities since medieval times, when the first universities in Europe were founded (cf. Boffo & Gioli, in this volume; Varghese, in this volume). Travelling to academic institutions, exchanging ideas with experts at other universities, and communicating in a common academic language – Latin during medieval times – was a regular feature of academic life. Boffo and Gioli (in this volume) refer to the pilgrimage of academics (de Ridder-Symoens, 1992) to pursue their academic interests and improve their knowledge. This only changed during the post-war period, when nation states emerged and the national language became the teaching language at universities. Lane (2015) identifies internationalisation during that time as a means of diplomatic engagement with developing countries. Varghese (in this volume) outlines the various internationalisation programmes in the academic field of adult education in different countries. Varghese emphasises the ongoing internationalisation of higher education in the context of economic globalisation, which he analyses as “major incentives to promote cross-border education in the context of globalisation”.

Focussing on students’ personal means of internationalisation in higher education, especially on a common international language of instruction, is another starting point for further research. To think of English as the new Latin in the academic context would surely be a simplification. But it is true for many students that studying in English means that they do not study in their native language. Studying in a foreign language creates a distance between students and their object of study. Distance becomes normal (Hunfeld, 2014), resulting in the possibility that students develop a distance to their own thinking. This allows them to take a

new perspective on their own thinking and understanding. Studying in a foreign language requires students to build interpretive bridges between their native language and the language of instruction. Ideally, an additional shared terminology of understanding will emerge during their studies. The shared terminology is always placed next to the one in students' native language and asks for interpretive bridges. Studying in a foreign language obviously includes the possibility of non-understanding and hence requires students to work on their understanding. This includes

[...] to continue the never-ending journey of personal efforts to try to understand each other. [...] to be aware of the always existing boundaries of our own understanding while developing an attitude of "constantly trying". [...] [It] [...] explicitly includes emotional and cognitive aspects of non-understanding. (Egetenmeyer, 2016, p. 19)

Studying in an international common language also creates an international network and a community of experts in a field. Participants of the *Joint Module COMPALL* have experienced this, according to their mid-term evaluation (cf. Lattke & Egetenmeyer, 2017). This promotes international openness and the awareness that there is knowledge that is not directly accessible via one's own mother tongue or via an international common language of instruction. This fact is valued not only by European students but especially by students coming to European universities from outside of Europe (Alves & Guimarães, in this volume).

Internationalisation in higher education means more than student mobility and teaching in a common international language, as Boffo and Gioli point out in this volume. It also means mobility of university lecturers, the development of joint study programmes, and joint research. In a discipline such as adult education, which is very interlinked with its local contexts, comparative research figures prominently from an international perspective (cf. Egetenmeyer, 2017). Varghese (in this volume) stresses that cross-border mobility is also a reality in online learning provision and in institutional internationalisation in higher education, realised through branch campuses and franchising agreements.

The examples in this volume support the stakeholder function of the European Union with its ERASMUS+ programme. Dang (in this volume) as well as Alves and Guimarães (in this volume) show that the programme is essential for Asian-European joint master's programmes, and Szuka and Garcua Blesa (in this volume) highlight an impressive example of the combination of e-learning and physical mobility in legal studies. International programmes that started as ERASMUS programmes seem to have a substantial impact on the way universities design their study programmes.

Internationalisation in adult education

Although adult education is a young academic discipline that was not found at most universities until the 1970s, the roots of cooperation between experts in adult education go back to the beginning of the last century (cf. Németh, in this volume). It seems that the early roots of cooperation also lay in an academic interest in and knowledge of the developments in other countries. International role models raised an interest in cooperation and exchange. The limited availability of experts and practical role models made the necessity for international exchange obvious. It is an interesting phenomenon that later on, countries that saw the establishment of a certain number of chairs and professorships in adult education (e.g. Germany, India, United States) seem to have seen times with a reduced international focus, unlike other countries with a more limited number of academic positions in the field of adult education. Some authors have claimed that this difference was justified by the lack of national adult education policies in countries with a weaker tradition in this field. As a consequence, these countries looked at internationalisation and international academic arenas as a space for discussions that could not be held in national settings (Lima & Guimarães, 2011; Lima, Guimarães, & Touma, 2016).

Nowadays, internationalisation in the academic discipline of adult education may not only be understood through an international perspective of disciplinary needs and interests. Moreover, adult education as a discipline is integrated into international higher education developments on the one hand and internationalisation in the field of practice on the other hand (Egetenmeyer, in this volume). Adult education as field of practice is highly interlinked with international and European educational policies, the internationalisation of societies, the rising diversity of target groups, and the development of an international market for continuing education. The GLOBALE curriculum (cf. Popovic, in this volume; Avramovska & Czerwinski, 2017) represents an activity that is growing out of adult education practice for the qualification of teachers in the field. It outlines the need for professionalisation in adult education practice, but it also outlines the internationalisation in adult education by identifying global joint perspectives of professionalisation in the field.

The Joint Module COMPALL

The *Joint Module COMPALL* reflects these aspects of internationalisation in higher education and in adult education. By developing a comparative research approach in adult education, it is supporting joint research between partner universities (Egetenmeyer & Fedeli, forthcoming). It is designed as a joint teaching

programme, carried out by a consortium of international universities. Even if recognition is handled somewhat differently at each institution, students at all partners are prepared at their home universities concerning the content but also concerning English as the language of instruction. To that end, students use online tutorials and online guidance developed and provided by the consortium. During the subsequent winter school, students and university lecturers meet for two weeks on the Würzburg campus to study European policies in lifelong learning and comparative research in adult education together. The recognition of the *Joint Module COMPALL* as part of the curricula of partner universities can be understood as a first step towards the institutionalisation of the joint teaching offer (cf. Tino et al., in this volume).

A central aspect of the *Joint Module COMPALL* is the non-profit perspective, where background funding is understood as an issue to ensure a higher quality of teaching in adult education study programmes. Another important aspect is the mission of bringing young people together for exchange and the development of an international community of adult education students to contribute to the next generations of international open-minded experts in the academic, practice, and policy fields of adult education.

The analysis of students' motivation to participate in the *Joint Module COMPALL* (cf. Alves & Guimarães, in this volume; Lattke & Egetenmeyer, in this volume) outlines participants' interest. One key motivation, of course, is students' interest in international exchanges and intercultural experiences. This is found to be the case in other studies on student mobility, too. But the evaluation of the *Joint Module COMPALL* shows that students are also motivated by a serious academic interest in the internationalisation of adult education and by academic insights into the situation and discourse in other countries – insights they cannot get in equal quality without the international setting of the joint module.

During the development of the *Joint Module COMPALL* and the open and critical discussions between the partners, the different backgrounds of participants became obvious. These differences are not limited to differences in academic level (master's, doctoral) but also include different experiences in using English as the language of instruction, differences in students' disciplinary backgrounds at the bachelor's and master's level, and differences in their practical insights into adult education and in their peer learning possibilities during the preparation period (cf. Tino et al., in this volume). This is why preparation using the online tutorials is a central element of the *Joint Module COMPALL* – because it can be adapted to the individual needs of participants (cf. Fodorné Tóth, in this volume).

Overview of this volume

This volume is divided into three chapters addressing the key topics outlined above.

Internationalisation in higher education

The first chapter comprises four contributions that outline the context of internationalisation in higher education.

Varghese analyses new ways of cross-border education, which has formerly been understood mainly as student mobility. He argues that “cross-border higher education, institutional and programme mobility have become important modes of trade in this century”. As a consequence, economic globalisation plays a crucial role in the internationalisation of higher education.

Kovács and Tarrósy reflect on the internationalisation of higher education in the context of a global world. They provide a critical analysis of the academic and cultural benefits of internationalisation. But they also discuss the difficulties of internationalisation in the context of an economically driven understanding of globalisation.

Dang discusses two ERASMUS Mundus Joint Master’s Programmes involving Asian and European universities with regard to their contribution to internationalisation in higher education. She argues that “university consortia construct a ‘third space’ where these programmes shift the boundaries between regional, national and institutional regulatory environments in order to sustain the partnerships and improve learning and teaching experiences”. Thereby, she stresses the important influences of European programmes on the realisation of internationalisation in higher education.

Szuka and Garcia Blesa present a highly complex approach for internationalisation in legal studies programmes at three European Open Universities. Due to their students’ limited opportunities for physical mobility, these programmes combine e-learning and short-term physical mobility. The short-term mobility programme, which evolved from an ERASMUS+ strategic partnership, is offered at all three academic levels (bachelor, master, doctorate).

Internationalisation of higher education: The case of adult education

The second chapter looks at internationalisation in adult education. *Boffo and Gioli* frame internationalisation in adult education as part of internationalisation in higher education. They analyse master’s courses in adult education, arguing for

internationalisation as a “central strategy for the construction of a global scientific community and labour market” in adult education.

Németh provides an overview of milestone aspirations and innovative actions of higher education institutions to open up to the development of modern adult education. This author focuses on the internationalisation of adult education and its influence on higher education by pointing out the impact of specific historical phases of this particular evolution, enhancing research and development collaborations for professionalisation in an emerging internationally organised environment (Németh, 2017).

Popovic discusses the GLOBALE curriculum, which was developed by DVV International for the professionalisation of teachers in adult education. As the institute for international cooperation of the German Adult Education Association, DVV International supports the development of adult education worldwide. The GLOBALE curriculum can be understood as a professionalisation activity to not only improve the quality of teaching in adult education but also to support the identification of adult education teachers through joint professionalisation.

Internationality of higher education: The example of COMPALL

In the last chapter of this volume, the development of the *Joint Module COMPALL* is analysed against the background of these internationalisation frames. The contributions show the reflections guiding the *Joint Module COMPALL* and provide a detailed analysis of its development.

Egetenmeyer presents the overall structure of the *Joint Module COMPALL*. Her contribution integrates this structure into internationalisation trends in higher education and adult education. For that purpose, she analyses the competences developed as part of the joint module, shows how they are supported by the module’s structure, and identifies the lessons the partner consortium has learned during its development.

Alves and Guimarães discuss participants’ motivations for attending the *Joint Module COMPALL* and compare them with general findings on student mobility. The results of the evaluation of the *Joint Module COMPALL* show academic, intercultural, career-related, and personal reasons for participating in the joint module.

Tino, Guimarães, Frison, and Fedeli analyse the diversity of participants and the curricular implementation of the *Joint Module COMPALL*. The analysis shows that a high degree of flexibility is necessary for adapting the curriculum to the diversity of participants’ backgrounds and to institutional needs for curricular implementation.

Fodorné Tóth discusses the blended learning pathway implemented in COMPALL, referring to it as a flipped learning classroom process. Besides learning possibilities, the *Joint Module COMPALL* also offers possibilities for open learning and professional networking.

Lattke and Egetenmeyer analyse the benefits and potential of an international intensive programme. The contribution is based on the data of the external evaluation, which is carried out by the German Institute for Adult Education. Based on the insights from the *Joint Module COMPALL*, the authors stress competence aspects situated between a motivational, cognitive, and social-communicative dimension on the one hand and between a subject-specific and generic dimension on the other hand.

Conclusion

The development of joint modules has to be reflected against the background of internationalisation in higher education and against the background of the disciplines involved. Developing a joint study programme allows for making synergetic use of the expertise of stakeholders in the disciplines involved. Using this approach, all universities improve their teaching quality by broadening their teaching and research perspectives.

Realising and implementing joint modules requires a high degree of institutional support and trust. The framework of the ERASMUS+ programmes, especially the strategic partnerships, is essential to ensure not only sufficient funding but also the institutionalisation of the projects and the sustainable transformation of teaching in higher education.

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