

International Higher Education

-Local Initiatives Enabling Global Citizens

Håkan Alm & Jonas Söderholm

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Abstract

Education at University of Borås is internationally connected to varying degree and form. This report looks at a selection of initiatives in order to explore the past, present and future role of UB internationalization. As a basis for the review, 7 students are interviewed on their international experience in their education – exchange studies and minor field studies (MFS) respectively. The participants stress the role of personal development and career enablement, and perceive their international experience as a distinct, unique element of their education. Possibilities and problems are then identified and related to the current literature on international education, learning and pedagogics. The study lands in a critical discussion on the future development of UB education. Key points of development: To meet the Bologna 20 percent commitment, more efforts need to be made on promoting and enabling internationalization to students, faculty and administrators. Curricular hurdles need to be removed as not to hamper students' programme progression for going abroad. Teachers' competency building efforts such as the *Teaching and learning in higher education* course could benefit from further elements of internationalization.

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1. Introduction

This report deals with internationalization in higher education through a case study with students in three programs at the University of Borås (UB). The aim is to identify opportunities and problem areas within the context of international exchange and cooperation, and discuss their implications for learning.

Today's world is one of unprecedented change that results in a sense of interconnectedness understood as globalization (Filipponi, Harris, Elley & Magolo 2015). We are living through times of rapid change. Change is all around us, and the rate of change is increasing (George, Gundry & Bradish 1999). As the world becomes ever more internationalized, companies need employees who can operate in the international market with insights into business culture across the globe incorporating knowledge of sustainable development. International education is a vital tool to accomplish this. Modeling internationalization based on social transformation calls for recognition of the reality that globalization leads to increased marginalization of significant groups of people around the world Hanson (2010). This is a much less attractive aspect and needs to be tackled accordingly. As Hanson further stresses, recognizing that significant groups of people everywhere are working to redress inequities, the model suggests that the activities should be guided by principles of mutuality and reciprocity and be established through networks or partnerships.

Demand from companies has changed to more general degrees that also include international experience. Going abroad to study or train helps people develop their professional, social and intercultural skills and increase their employability (EU 2016). A Swedish degree with parts of the education abroad with studies and/or practical working experience (e.g., internship) is the most appealing to the employers, especially the latter (George, Gundry & Bradish 1999). Companies need employees who can operate in the international market with insights into business culture across the globe and with knowledge of sustainable development (Andersson & Alm 2013). Societies as well as universities demand increased student mobility. Internationalization, nowadays, is an important indicator in global rankings. As a consequence, higher education providers are seeking to internationalize the curriculum and the student experience so as to promote a sense of global citizenship and professionalism in their alumni (Filipponi et al. 2015).

UB is currently working with internationalization. Specifically how this is done varies depending on faculty, discipline, program, and to a high degree international coordinators, program directors and lecturers. This work also varies over time and will be different from one year to another. Another important factor, naturally, is the students and their ideas, ambition level and preferences. This study treats the part of internationalization which entails UB campus students going abroad for some part of their education program. There are of course more facets of international work to consider, than only the high-profile activity of sending out students to often remote places of the world. For example, international connections can today relatively easy be setup without physical travel. Further, there is, of course, the reverse side of the dual concept of 'exchange': foreign students visiting Sweden. We have chosen however to focus on such initiatives which include longer travel where Swedish students go abroad to perform part of their program study. One reason this is relevant to investigate is that the portion of our students who actually go, is relatively low. In 2015 only 245 UB students

went on exchange (University of Borås 2016), i.e., roughly 5 percent of the total student body¹. This is the same levels as 2014 (245) and 2013 (241). This indicates that significant efforts needs to be done if UB is serious in trying to reach the Bologna 20 percent mobility goal, or even to be on level with Sweden's current 14 percent national average (UHR 2015). The 20 percent goal reflects EU's commitment to double the proportion of higher education students completing a study or training period abroad by 2020; support for mobility is a core focus of the EU programme for education and training (EU 2016). Social transformation models of internationalization suggest the need for a radical reform to curricula to foster engaged global citizenship (Hanson 2010).

In the following sections, relevant literature on internationalization in learning and higher education will be highlighted and discussed, and the interview study outlined and presented. The report concludes with a critical discussion on the present and future role of internationalization in UB education and learning.

2. Theory: Internationalization, higher education and learning

This section reviews some relevant entry-points of theory in previous research with central concepts such as: internationalization, international education, globalization, and global citizen.

As Hellstén and Reid (2008) states, whatever the social and political movements driving the international education agenda are, the collective consequence for educators and learners is related to the objective of effective learning possibilities for all. As a consequence, higher education providers are seeking to internationalize the curriculum and the student experience so as to promote a sense of global citizenship and professionalism in their alumni (Filipponi et al. 2015).

Today, students do not rank academic aspects the highest. Instead, more personal and social aspects of going abroad, such as making friends, language learning, cultural understanding and personal skills, are seen as most beneficial (Orr, Gwosć & Netz 2011; Rodrigues 2012; Sifo 2008). The ability to draw upon the knowledge and skills developed of other cultures, along with changes in attitude that occur as a consequence of working and learning through such experiences. Such intercultural competences promote a person's ability to understand the other person, to learn and to work with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds (Filipponi et al. 2015). The "academic and professional requirements for graduates . . . include not only academic and professional knowledge, but also multilingualism, and social and intercultural skills and attitudes" (Qiang 2003, p. 248). Such requirements can be seen as a consequence of *globalization*.

Internationalization is not the same thing as globalization; they are two distinct concepts (Altbach & Knight 2007), though of course interrelated. Indeed, globalization is one of the key dimensions that make internationalization relevant, and it is "perhaps the most fundamental challenge faced by the Universities in its long history" (Scott 2000, p. 3). This could potentially mean a mind-set change for the academic sector; internationalization should be driven by

¹ Based on ~14 000 UB students divided over 3 years average length of study.

global perspectives and the understanding that we live and work in rapidly changing, globally connected realities (Filipponi et al. 2015). Internationalizing the curriculum is a key tenet of strategies, for reasons relating to income generation and enhancing the employability of graduates (Sutherland, Edgar & Duncan 2015).

To say that globalization implies a need for *more* internationalization, is a simplification and not necessarily true. One might even argue the contrary: just because of globalization, the need of internationalization actually decreases. The argument then would be that diminishing cultural borders and increasing integration, means that learning and education is becoming international by definition. 'Internationalization of education' then, becomes a tautology. The obvious counter-argument is that these changes and developments do not simply happen by themselves; they are processes in which universities must be progressively active and driving, not merely reactive. The "movements of transnational students (and academics), and their imaginings about moving, constitute a key feature of the current transitions in the practices of globalization" (Singh 2005, p. 11). Further, in a historical perspective, these processes have only just begun. Education and research are equally and inseparably vital to this role of universities, and (Ninnes & Hellstén 2005, p. 3) argue that "there needs to be an increased emphasis on the academic study of international education as a practice and of the diverse processes of internationalization".

This is one of the challenges of the new century which has seen the narrowing of educational borders and the widening of transnational mobility to an extent previously unimaginable. In the past 20 years, the international education industry has grown at a phenomenal speed. Questions of quality and efficacy of teaching and learning academic achievement have been actively debated by scholars addressing the diversity that international students bring to all aspects of scholarship (Hellstén & Reid 2008).

In responding to literature that suggests a reluctance among teaching academics to embrace internationalization it is feasible to draw on explanations from theories of adaptation. The rhetoric claims that any shift in traditions that are firmly set in time is at first uncomfortable, due to its introduction of the unknown.

3. Study design

Seven interviews with students (four female and three male) were carried out during the period of February to April 2016. The selection of participants was aimed at exploring a few different, somewhat heterogeneous scenarios, while still focusing on students who undertake major travel in their studies. The purpose was to obtain a range of accounts and thus expressions, pertinent to such particular types of international components of education, rather than presenting a proportionate sample of the entire UB student population.

Five of the students studied abroad covering Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America as follows:

- Two students who went to Seychelles to write their thesis as an MFS (Minor Field Study) project.
- Three students went to study in Thailand and among these:
 - One also went to Brazil for thesis work
 - Another went to France, also for thesis work and

- One student is originally Chinese and studied in China before joining UB.
- The sixth student is planning to go study end of this year either to Scotland or Brazil, and,
- the seventh respondent was offered to study in China, but decided not to go. This respondent was useful to the data as she belonged to a program where a year in China was a compulsory part of the program, yet she decided to not go and actively made the decision to change to another program instead.

3.1 Case background and participants

Three of the respondents were from the International Business Engineering (IBE) Program which embraces a multi-national and multi-cultural outlook and an education that enables work for a sustainable development, integrated in the global economy. They were informed throughout the education (and of course before even applying to the program) about what was to come. It starts with three semesters in Sweden. They were then given two opportunities to study abroad. The fourth semester was located to Campus Thailand and the last semester gave the students an opportunity to do their thesis work in a number of countries around the world. In the case of the respondents all three went to Thailand in year two and two of them went to France and Brazil respectively for thesis work in year three.

Below a few examples of what these three students did when in Thailand:

- From the very first day the students were briefed and guided by resident teachers and staff, and given assignments in order to acquaintances themselves with the area and to build confidence that they can manage on their own.
- Students were blogging with fellow students back home sharing experiences and answering questions.

Out of over 60 U. Borås students who went to Thailand only two students returned home before schedule, one of them for family reasons and one was sent home.

Cooperation with the Thai-Swedish Chamber of Commerce and its many member companies enables the students to carry out internships with global companies such as SAS, ABB, Volvo, Electrolux and Husqvarna etc. It has also given the students the opportunity to network with the Thai and international business community in the many Events arranged by the Thai-Swedish and other chambers of commerce in Thailand and sometimes even in other countries in the region

According to the president of Thai-Swedish Chamber of Commerce, also Husqvarna Thailand (both internship hosts), "It's so important that Swedish students get international work experience and Asia is the fastest growing market in the world. This also gives us as employers the opportunity to work with talented young potential future staff".

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

The focus of the interviews is on the participants' own experiences of internationalization. The discussion is guided towards relating their direct international experience (or lack of) to their actual education and learning, and to their university, fellow students, teachers, employers, and so on. The interview guide (Appendix A) suggests some specific questions to aid this

discussion. Avoid only talking in general terms about the participant's view on internationalization as a phenomenon. However, general speculation may provide good opportunity to ask the student to give examples from their own studies. Focus throughout the interviews is on the participant's lived (or planned) activities, situation, history and future. As both researchers who carried out the interviews are representatives of UB, it is possible that the respondents gave answers to please the interviewers. There's also a risk that the interpretations of the results will be biased as one of the researchers have been working with internationalization for many years and can be assumed to have an overly positive attitude towards the positive aspects.

4. Results

4.1 Past – Former students' international experience

In this section, interviews with students who had part of their education located abroad are presented. The main themes discussed during the interviews are summarized in the following.

4.1.1 International experience in the context of education and being a student

Several participants mention that being abroad puts them in a unique position, compared to students who remain in Sweden. This was seen to have been mostly positive, but also to have challenging sides. The MFS students mention that it was not quite feasible to follow a thesis course on the same terms as, and in parallel with, their fellow students in Sweden.

You can't just stay in and isolate [for thesis work] [...] You are in a new place, new people, new culture, new language, new climate. You have to deal with that at the same time as collecting material and writing a thesis. [...] I think there's a big difference. (Karen)

Further, in their particular case, poor internet connectivity made it difficult for them to fully interact during group supervisions and forced them into a more passive role of just tagging along and listening in as best they could. Thus, in the views of the students, a number of factors (technical, cultural, environmental) hindered them from fully immersing in the course. In this case, time difference was luckily not an issue. Otherwise that could be a further hurdle for participating in parallel with campus students in scheduled learning activities. An IBE student also mentions the difference, in positive terms for those who went with the exchange program:

I think it's a real big difference [...] It felt like we had more energy, there was a whole other spark to those who had been abroad. [...] If you look at the representation of who finished the education, there was a clear over-representation of us who studied abroad. (George)

On the less positive side, George said that one of the administrators (the international coordinator at the time) was not very helpful and gave wrong and/or no information numerous times when he was going to France for thesis work. The person was also slow in replies and repeatedly said 'it's not my job' even though George had confirmed with superiors that it actually was.

According to this view, the problems with the different experience affects the students who stay rather than those who go, as in the MFS case. George again,

It segregated the class quite a lot. Those who had remained here, and us who had been away.

There were also practical differences which further increased this gap. The students who went would miss at least one mandatory course, which they had to take on top of their regular curricula when they came back. Dora mentions the same issue in her case.

4.1.2 Career development

The participants emphasize the importance of the international experience for their career, in particular the three IBE students who claim the international experience have greatly benefitted them in their careers and when applying for work. The MFS students do not see the international experience as having significant impact on their current or future work with regards to its tasks and content. They do however hold that it is decidedly positive when looking for employment:

I have made a few applications and they have always wanted to talk about it [...] It shows you are interested in your area [...] It gives a little edge to your CV [...] You took an opportunity, not everyone does that. You did something more than just get the education. (Karen)

Further, while not contributing directly to any work-specific 'skills', they still see themselves as strengthened and more capable by the experience.

I'd like to think that it has given me more layers, I've become seasoned, can tackle more things. (Karen)

This is of course tied into how they view their personal development, related in the following.

4.1.3 Personal development

All five students who (already) went abroad (including Library & information science students that did not benefit as much, career wise) state that they have greatly developed as individuals thanks to the international experience. Several mention experiencing that you are more able to solve problems and take care of yourself.

I can handle more things [...] A mental boost. (Karen)

As one IBE student puts it, "Memories for life and a great opportunity to develop on so many levels and in so many ways".

The students developed a sensitivity, an appreciation, a greater tolerance and an ability to accommodate what was perceived as 'different' in their personal and professional lives.. Furthermore, the journey helped the students to mature and to develop a greater understanding and acceptance of different realities, broaden their views in life which enabled a critical introspective review translating, for some of them, in life change actions. The chosen

pedagogies reveal that, calculated risk taking, high expectations and the faith to give students real responsibility, facilitates personal and professional growth through the authentic experience of learning in practice. (compare Filipponi et al. 2015)

4.2 Present, Business and IT program

Business and IT program (Dataekonomiprogrammet) targets two thirds of students to go by 2018. Currently program directors are in contact with Universities in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Panyapiwat Intitute of Management (PIM) in Thailand and University of Santa Catarina (UDESC) have been visited and negotiations are under way. The plan is to send batches of 5-10 UB students per year to each University. Dora pointed out that the information from international coordinators was rather limited. It was also late; the application for exchange studies was due very shortly after they were given information about the different possibilities. She believes this is why one of the reasons that relatively few from her program opted for a semester of international exchange.

4.3 Future

When interviewing the Business and IT program student Dora (will go either to Scotland or Brazil, autumn of 2016), she states that the main reasons for going is to learn more about other cultures and how education work in other countries, but also to learn more about herself and to develop as a person. She also states that she is critical and disappointed in that the University of Borås has put a compulsory course (System Development course) in the semester that is designated for international exchange:

I feel that at the same time as University of Borås say they encourage us to go they punish those of us who actually do.

Currently the only way out is to leave University with a bachelor degree in IT or Business only (no certificate from Business and IT program) or to enter a fourth year to only study this course..

5. Conclusions and Further Discussion

Our main findings show that experience (and anticipation of) international experience is mostly positive. Being abroad put the participating students in a unique position, and there seemed to be a whole other spark to some of them. This has also benefitted them to different extents in their careers and when applying for work. They see themselves as strengthened and more capable and they feel they can tackle more things and that they have developed as individuals. They claim they have developed a sensitivity, an appreciation, a greater tolerance and an ability to accommodate what was perceived as 'different' in their personal and professional lives.

5.1 Challenges and solutions

A number of barriers were identified, presented in the following with suggestions on development.

Students would miss at least one mandatory course making students disappointed to have a compulsory course in the semester that is designated for international exchange. In effect, UB

was encouraging and punishing at the same time. Accordingly, curricular hurdles need to be removed as to not hamper students' programme progression for going abroad. Hanson (2010) stresses that emphasis in this model is on standardization rather than innovation in educational programs. Meaning that it is crucial to be flexible and mainstream to a certain extent in order to successfully cooperate with other universities and as Allen & Ogilvie (2004, p. 79) explains, "Internationalization [of curriculum] therefore needs to occur in a critically conscious manner".

In some instances administrators, international coordinators and a small number of teachers and program directors were not very helpful, gave the wrong information, or no information, and were generally slow in replies. There also seemed to be a discrepancy in what students were informed that coordinators would help with, and what these staff thought were in the scope of their work. Information about international studies was close to non-existent and came very late in year two. Thus, more stringent, reliable and timely support from the university is needed and UB needs to be clearer with the students what they can and cannot assist with. International coordinators need better training, a more precise job description, and possibly the staffing or hours allocated for such functions need to be increased. Teachers, students and international coordinators are important when aiming to over-come academic barriers to mobility. Also, Teachers' competency building efforts such as the *Teaching and learning in higher education* course could benefit from further elements of internationalization.

Another educational challenge to consider deals with the uniqueness that students ascribe to studying abroad. The participants describe it as something distinct from the rest of their program study, and one student even termed it as 'segregating' the class. Therefore, in the case of program curricula where international study is optional – such as those discussed in this report – we arguably need educational, even pedagogical, strategies for dealing with such division of our students into subgroups. It is critical that students who stay should obviously, too, have access to the same quality education. This calls for better integration of the international component in the education as a whole, and not just manifested in the activity of sending students abroad.

Heat humidity and lack of proper infrastructure (e.g., access to reliable and fairly fast internet) can make it difficult to follow a campus course on the same terms as, and in parallel with, fellow students in Sweden. In a new place with new people, culture and language, you have to deal with all that on top of regular coursework. One important strategy then, when identifying suitable countries and universities to work with, is to draw upon the previous experience of students and staff who have been on-site earlier years. This way, some of these problems may possibly be avoided and better preparedness achieved. Further, the courses and even individual teaching/learning activities may need to be reviewed to establish whether they are suitable at all for this type of fragmentation of the participating students, or if some other solution is called for.

Lastly, the participants made little mention of the debilitating barriers of funding or language. These may otherwise be more or less severe obstacles for many other countries and their students to fully participate in internationalization (Orr, Gwosć & Netz 2011).

5.2 *The globalized education context: Response and flexibility*

Following the general challenge that universities need to progressively respond to globalization through internationalization, an even more pressing specific challenge emerges. What is the actual concrete form of such response, on the level of specific programs and individual courses? To converse with Biggs and Tang (2011), what does it imply for intended learning outcomes and teaching/learning activities in our coursework, and consequently our pedagogical competency as teachers? Hanson (2010) suggests a few ways in which educational curriculum may be developed, centered around the notions of *inter disciplinarity*, *engaged learning* and *reflexivity*. Among other things this entails critical self-reflection on the practices of one's own culture and context. For the development of learning outcomes, this could include having students use their experience of other contexts of practice (e.g., the organizational culture of a workplace in another country) to reflect upon, analyze and better understand a local 'home' context. This is an example of how experiences which otherwise might be regarded 'only' as personal development – however enriching that might be for the individual student – could be lifted and generalized to a higher level of academic reasoning and become a more obvious part of the formal educational content.

Evidence also suggests teaching and support staff are ill-equipped to deal with diverse cohort challenges relating to varying degrees of understanding evident across teaching teams on the differences between students' educational background, expectations, cognitive maps of education pedagogy and the impact of culture shock on the pace of international student learning (Sutherland, Edgar & Duncan 2015). Students from diverse cultural backgrounds with different experiences and cognitive minds seek value from others through informal, yet memorable, information exchanges within the learning environment in their quest for knowledge. Ad hoc interactions with culturally diverse colleagues, inherent in the process of completing group tasks and assignments (where diverse nationalities are deliberately brought together) (ibid.).

5.3 *Concluding remarks*

To make a serious attempt to meet the Bologna 20 percent commitment, more efforts need to be made on promoting and enabling internationalization to students, faculty and administrators. As noted earlier, in 2015 only 245 (5%) of UB's students went on exchange. Universities or colleges supporting social transformation models of internationalization in turn will need to institutionally support and celebrate innovative shifts in educational practice that facilitate learning outcomes beyond the walls of classroom learning, professional practice, and the halls of the institution Hanson (2010).

Future points of development could center on further and better integrating the different aspects of international work, such as those mentioned in the introduction. We should investigate the potential of interplay between the high-profile 'premiere' activity of allocating part of ones' studies in remote locations for longer periods of time, with other international elements including home campus (activities) as part of the global context.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

Themes for discussion in semi-structured interviews with students. Most interviews were conducted in Swedish, but the English version interview topics are listed here.

Version 1, for students who have been abroad as part of their programme

The interview begins with some lighter background questions. They will then be asked a rather big, open question to probe their experience and view:

Please freely describe your experience of going abroad as part of your studies.

Depending on how the discussion goes, the following types of follow-up questions can be asked:

Why did you choose to go?

What role does it play for your education?

What did you learn?

Was it as you had expected? Did you experience any surprises or changes?

What role did UB play? What support did you need? Did you get it?

Were there any negative aspects or problems? If so, how could this be improved?

What would you say to a junior student who is considering going? (pros and cons?)

How did it affect you as a person?

How did your international experience impact your ability of getting a job?

How did it impact your work, and for your professional career?

Version 2, for student who chose not to go

-Why did you choose not to go?

-What role does it play for your education?

-What role did UB play?

-What support did you need?

-Did you get it?

-If so, how could it be improved?

-What would you say to a junior student who is considering going? (pros and cons?)

Version 3, for students who are considering or planning to go

-Why did you choose to go?

-What role does it play for your education?

-What do you expect to learn?

-Did you experience any surprises or changes so far?

-What role did UB play / What support did you need so far?

-Did you get it?

-Were there any negative sides or problems?

-If so, how could it be improved?

-What would you say to a junior student who is considering going? (pros and cons?)