

Fostering Global Citizenship in (despite?) Internationalized Higher Education*

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Abstract

'Global citizenship' as an objective of internationalized higher education can be a contentious, political issue in certain sectors. In this brief commentary, I reflect on the challenges to fostering global citizenship that I believe were indirectly addressed in a recent panel in London on dealing with the politics of teaching in higher education. Panellists held a position on initiatives linked with the internationalization of higher education, arguing that such initiatives present obstacles to freedom of teaching – the kind of teaching that embraces criticality and debate, but perhaps in contentious ways – that I see directly linked with efforts to foster global citizenship.

The global citizenship initiative: internationalization or marketization (and Englishization)?

As higher education sectors continue to promote various internationalization policies, how to achieve the objective of fostering the global citizenship of university graduates has remained unclear. This is certainly in part due to the lack of clarity around key concepts such as internationalization, as well as the constantly changing ideas of global citizenship and what makes graduates employable (Kraska, Bourn, & Blum, 2018). The linking of global citizenship with internationalization is a relatively recent phenomenon, as noted by Knight and de Wit (2018). In the past, the emphasis of internationalization “was on scholarships for foreign students, international development projects, and area studies”, whereas more recently, that emphasis has shifted to “branding, international programs and provider mobility, global citizenship, internationalization at home, MOOCs, global rankings, knowledge diplomacy, world class universities, cultural

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homogenization, franchising, and joint and double degree programs” (p. 2). With this shift, the understanding of the internationalization of higher education is different depending on the level at which it is intended to function. At the institutional and departmental level, there are initiatives for ‘internationalizing the curriculum’, such as efforts to address issues of equality, diversity, and inclusivity; decolonization of education; and graduate employability frameworks. At the regional level, marketization and Englishization are two key focus areas with the strongest influence on universities’ capacity to foster graduate global citizenship.

The marketization of higher education has been highlighted as a threat in recent research to the relationship between teaching and research practices, also known as the teaching-research nexus (McKinley et al., 2021). In the UK, with the higher education sector’s recent focus to enterprise (i.e., quantifiable output and impact), we are experiencing a shift away from a teaching-research nexus to a research-enterprise nexus, in which measurable outputs are valued above all else. This inevitably usurps teaching and the direct efforts to foster students’ global citizenship. Instead, students’ global citizenship development is assumed to be indirectly supported by research and enterprise initiatives. While such support is understood, because “the enterprise ideology seeks to harness the economic potential of research, the value attributed to a teaching-research nexus is unclear” (McKinley et al., 2021, p. 1038).

In higher education sectors elsewhere, the exponential growth of English medium instruction (EMI) sees English taking the place of instruction in local languages, also known as the Englishization of higher education. The economic value of English is the impetus, and with the understanding that English is a global industry, neoliberalism of higher education has led to the growth of EMI (Gray et al., 2018). This growth occurs despite staff and student proficiency in English, further hindering efforts to foster the development of global citizenship. As stated recently by Sahan et al. (2022, p. 1), because “top-down policy to improve the English proficiency of university graduates in line with a neoliberalist agenda to (theoretically) meet modernization and economic development goals”, universities around the globe are demanding teaching and learning in English. This is based on the Englishization agenda, which relies on the assumption that ‘English means global’. As Englishization “can be seen as either a ‘threat or opportunity’ in internationalized higher education” (Galloway & McKinley, 2021, p. 1), its role in fostering the development of global citizenship needs to be taken into careful consideration, so as not to further exacerbate social inequality and injustice by favouring more affluent stu-

dents who have had more opportunities of exposure to English and may be prone to particular ways of thinking. Another assumption that presents an issue is the one around the stipulation of some internationalized higher education policies that by fostering 'global citizens', they create 'critical thinkers' (e.g., "Go Global Japan" policy – Rose & McKinley, 2018). However, there are no concrete ways proposed for higher education to do this.

A controversial panel on university teaching in the UK

With this understanding about internationalized higher education policy and global citizenship, I attended a panel event in London in May 2022, *Taking the Politics out of University Teaching*, hosted by Politeia, "a forum for social and economic thinking". This panel was invited in response to developments of decolonization of UK higher education curriculum in the so-called *cancel-culture* climate that witnessed the destruction of historic statues and changes to the way history is discussed and taught—ideas presented in a recent report published by Politeia, in which it was argued "the demand to decolonize is a move to politicize university study and, as such, a grave threat to academic aims and values" (Marenbon, 2021). Although global citizenship was not the focus of the panel, I found myself framing the talks by all four panel members with questions of how their arguments about internationalization support or hinder global citizenship development. In this section, I summarise each panellist's main argument.

The panel discussion opened with a question of how universities can develop if 'free speech' is hindered by a neoliberal political agenda that favours ultra-progressive thinking. I took the question not just as "Can universities develop", but "Can they develop global citizens?". The argument presented was that while UK universities are not restricted by government, and law does not decide content, which is ultimately shaped by political views, academics are invariably liberal and can therefore challenge certain free speech (Lawlor, 2022). The problem proposed was that in practice, academics do not challenge such assumed structures – whether this is an act of self-preservation, or a response to divisive politics, inevitably such resistance to challenging political views challenges the ability for students to develop as global citizens.

As the panel discussion shifted to challenges of the Humanities amidst the internationalization of higher education, I found I could frame these as the challenges for fostering global citizenship. Two primary challenges were raised: linguistic – the rise of *woke English* (or socially aware/socially sensitive English), and intellectual – the inability to convey the field in

education, or the failure to believe in the area. It was argued that we are experiencing a phenomenon of activist scholarship, in which teaching and learning in higher education has become influenced by political culture. The argument presented was that justice and equity are being used to distort studying the past, and the language we use reflects a destruction of the past in favour of refreshing it (Butterfield, 2022). Based on this argument, the concept of *decolonization*, which had been raised as a current initiative intended to diversify the curricula, was targeted as meaningless, nothing more than a superficial tactic. The panellist concluded that the value of the Humanities is being lost due to a lack of clear transferable skills (perhaps ones we would see in a global citizen) for employability.

The concept of self-censorship (and what I interpreted as the panel's suggestion as a major threat to global citizenship) was elaborated by the next panellist, which added to the previous panellist's challenge to the internationalization policy initiative of decolonization. The argument was that the decolonization agenda is authoritarian and inimitable, with no allowance for objection. This idea was proposed as an example of self-censorship, where it was asserted the current climate of *cancel culture* results in self-cancellation (with reference to the recent firing of a UK academic for expressing controversially unpopular views about gender identification – see Badshah, 2021). The proposed solution was to bring politics to the surface as a model for students, to make moral and political commitments, and to show humility in accepting opposing views (Biggar, 2022). The panellist insisted universities could create better opportunities for students to develop (as global citizens) by learning to handle dissent, to attest and correct common sense, and to give space to dissenting views.

The panel discussion closed with an argument about the importance of diversity of thought, which I attempted to frame as I listened as the diversity of thought for global citizenship. The argument drew on examples from UK's *Advance HE* charters that aim to address race and gender issues and promote equality to argue that they further support groupthink and are invariably problematic. The old saying "Freedom of speech means freedom to teach" was cited to support the panel discussion of the risks of self-censored teaching in UK higher education leading to a depreciation of critical thought. Decolonization was argued as a "battle ahead" that will be "baked into the curriculum" (Orr, 2022). The argument was concluded with the imperative that it is a democratic obligation of universities to inform future generations of voters (i.e., by engaging with controversial dissenting views), and that universities are failing in this obligation.

Reflections

The panel was ironically comprised of like-minded people, contrary to the arguments being made of the importance of promoting dissenting views and debate in UK higher education. It was only in the Q&A that followed where audience members raised concerns around the panellists' arguments. While the panel was not focused specifically on the role of global citizenship in all of this, I could not help but see it inextricably linked to their arguments. If a global citizen is meant to be a critical thinker, then certainly the importance of what initiatives such as decolonization have for their education cannot be underestimated, nor should it be dismissed in the way it was by the panel. Upon reflection, the controversial positions held by the panellists left me with four questions, which I will address in turn.

Does the internationalization agenda inherently hinder the development of global citizenship? An internationalization agenda that is based on the promotion of equality, diversity, and inclusivity certainly should not hinder such development. However, if this promotion is done at the cost of forgoing critical thinking through debate and addressing dissenting views, as suggested by the panellists as part of what they described as a *cancel-culture* climate, then the development of global citizenship would seemingly be hindered. But this is just one argument, and certainly not inherent to the internationalization agenda. If the internationalization agenda is based on marketization and Englishization, it would seem there is a clearer hinderance to the development of global citizenship like the ones described by the panellists, as universities viewing students as customers and adhering to a kind of standard English ideology does not promote debate and engaging with dissenting views.

How can the internationalization agenda support employability of global citizens? It seems a balance needs to be achieved for this to work. Certainly, students engaging with dissenting views and debate is an important part of addressing critical thinking in higher education. So, internationalization initiatives may be best promoted along these lines. However, dissenting views need to be handled carefully, not promoted by university lecturers, of which panellists argued in favour. As a university lecturer, my personal opinions on matters need not be a part of my teaching. Raising opposing views about various topics, however, does need to be a part of my teaching, lest I present one-sided views. The importance of dissenting views, not personal views, should be the primary focus in such situations.

Are curriculum efforts such as decolonizing the curriculum inherently problematic? While the panellists as well as the report writer for Politeia seem to agree that decolonization initiatives are inherently problematic, the dissenting views to this position were not sufficiently addressed by the panel. The decolonization agenda carries with it the importance of aiming for global perspectives by highlighting controversial elements in existing curricula and higher education structures including racism, xenophobia, gender inequality, homo- and transphobia, and so on. These elements are much more difficult to address without frameworks to help shape them. Again, if the internationalization agenda is one of equality, diversity, and inclusivity, rather than marketization, efforts to decolonize the curriculum will help to broaden people's thinking and embrace global perspectives from which they can learn and change their own way of thinking about not only teaching, but all higher education structures, from research agendas to hiring policies and beyond.

Does fostering global citizenship mean taking risks and challenging certain ideologies? There is quite a lot of discussion of risk-taking as a solution to stagnant thinking. The risks the panellists promoted involved the inclusion of dissenting views in university teaching, which is indeed a risk, as well as important. But it is *how* these views are included where risk can be mitigated. The claims made by panellists about self-censorship of dissenting views, and therefore failing to serve as good models for students to develop as global citizens, are off the mark. Truly global citizens can take into consideration a wide range of views and should develop their own understanding about those views without any pressure from their lecturers as to how best to do that. The only self-censorship by university teachers that should be happening is when challenging certain ideologies is coming from a personal viewpoint, rather than an academic one.

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