

# Internationalization, Mobility and Englishization in Higher Education Across OECD Countries

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## Abstract

Although the European Union policies explicitly support the notion of multilingualism, the impact of increasing internationalization on the linguistic landscape of the European higher education system has been dramatic. In the post-Bologna period, the desire of higher education institutions to attract a more skilled and diverse body of students seems to turn English into the medium of instruction of a significant number of higher education institutions based in the continent. Particularly, competitiveness in the academic market that leads to bottom-up and top-down pressures within universities to become more international may have caused many higher education institutions to directly associate internationalization with Englishization. As this situation reinvigorates the status of English as the lingua franca, the present article investigates the links between internationalization, language policies, and Englishization through having a closer look at the OECD international student mobility data. The article also points to several practical and pedagogical considerations involved in implementing language policies in higher education.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, Language policy, English-medium instruction (EMI), Student mobility

## OECD Ülkeleri Yükseköğretiminde Uluslararasılaşma, Hareketlilik ve İngilizleşme

### Özet

Avrupa Birliği politikalarının açık bir şekilde çokdillilik kavramını desteklemesine karşın, uluslararasılaşmanın Avrupa yükseköğretim sisteminin dil topoğrafyası üzerindeki etkisi gittikçe artmaktadır. Bologna sonrası süreçte yükseköğretim kurumlarının daha uluslararası ve yetkin öğrenci ve araştırmacıları bünyelerine çekme isteği, İngilizcenin Avrupa kıtasındaki çok önemli sayıda yükseköğretim kurumunda eğitim dili olmasına sebebiyet vermiştir. Özellikle, akademiye rekabetçiliğin yol açtığı baskılar pek çok yükseköğretim kurumunun uluslararasılaşma ile İngilizleşme kavramı arasında doğrudan bir bağlantı kurmasına neden olmuştur. Bu durum, İngilizcenin dünya ölçeğinde ortak dil olarak pozisyonunu güçlendirmiştir. Bu makalede, uluslararasılaşma, dil politikaları ve İngilizleşme hususları OECD uluslararası öğrenci hareketlilik verilerine dayanılarak eleştirel bir bakışla irdelenmektedir. Bunun yanı sıra, mevcut makalede, yükseköğretim kurumlarında uluslararasılaşmayı sağlamak amacıyla yabancı dil politikalarının uygulanması halinde dikkat edilmesi gereken çeşitli pratik ve pedagojik hususlar ele alınmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Uluslararasılaşma, Dil politikaları, Eğitim dili olarak İngilizce, Öğrenci hareketliliği

## 1. INTERNATIONALIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

While students become more cognizant of the concept of quality in higher education and resort to university league tables prior to making significant decisions about their lives, policymakers and governments engage with various activities to promote the internationalization of higher education institutions. Even though the meaning of internationalization could vary from one institution

to another, internationalization requires a set of activities, procedures, and services that bring an international and intercultural dimension to the instruction, research and service functions of the institution at hand (Knight, 1994). These activities, procedures, and services might impact the performance, rankings, and reputation of higher education institutions. To illustrate, curricular development and innovation activities, student and faculty exchange services, intercultural education practices, collaborative research projects, area studies and education of international students would contribute to the internationalization and development of higher education institutions (Knight & de Wit, 1995). Thus, it could be concluded that, over the years, internationalization has turned into a strong indicator of the success and excel-

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lence of higher education institutions (Llurda, Cots, & Armengol, 2014).

As noted previously, the term internationalization does not have a strict definition, yet different conceptualizations proposed in the relevant literature have some features in common. For instance, Back, Davis and Olsen (1997), in their study on the Australian context, scrutinized higher education institutions regarding several issues and features such as international study programs, internationalization of instruction, internationalization of research, and organization strategies for internationalization. Moreover, Hughes (2008) maintained that three main factors that foster and accelerate internationalization process could be student mobility, faculty and staff mobility, and offshore delivery. Knight (1997) identified a set of strategies and activities that could internationalize an institution, among which are academic programs (e.g., student/faculty exchange programs, foreign language study, an internationalized curriculum), research and scholarly collaboration (e.g., international research projects, and publications), extra-curricular activities (e.g., international and intercultural events, student clubs), and external relations and services (e.g., offshore/distance education, community-based partnership). Based on these conceptualizations, it would be safe to posit that international study programs, instruction, and mobility constitute a substantial part of internationalization activities.

Historically, the Bologna Declaration, which was signed in June 1999 by the ministers from 29 European countries responsible for higher education launched the establishment of the European higher education system and concretized the notion of internationalization. The Bologna Declaration (1999) aimed to form a more unified higher education system within the continent, ensure compatibility and transparency among educational institutions, boost graduates' employability and reshape education in line with the economic needs of the European countries. Since then, higher education institutions in Europe have embraced the notion of internationalization enthusiastically, regarding it as an opportunity to become a part of the global education market, improve their reputation and increase their financial benefits by attracting non-EU students (Garrett & Gallego Balsa, 2014). These joint efforts resulted in the introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and exchange programs such as the ERASMUS and Nordplus Higher Education Program. The ERASMUS program serves mobility and networking purposes that aim to foster collaboration and sharing practices between European institutions. The adoption of the ECTS scheme is particularly significant in that, thanks to the ECTS, the courses that Erasmus exchange students take another university abroad can be recognized by their home university.

As to student mobility, which is one of the most effective and concrete strategies used by higher education insti-

tutions as a part of internationalization efforts, it offers several benefits especially to host countries. According to OECD (2004), these benefits can be grouped into four categories. These categories are the growth in mutual understanding, migration of skilled labor, increasing income and capacity building. For instance, attracting international students, particularly if they stay permanently, could be a way of boosting the development of innovation and production and overcoming the undesirable effects of an aging population (OECD, 2016). Although it takes a longer time to observe and track aforementioned benefits, the economic outcomes of mobility could be more noticeable even in the short run. Of interest, the report released by the Australian Productivity Commission demonstrated that international education services contributed about \$17 billion to the Australian economy in 2014.

## 2. INTERNATIONALIZATION, LANGUAGE POLICIES AND ENGLISHIZATION

To date, education and language policies in the European tertiary education system have mainly been reshaped by the highly influential Bologna Process (1999). The impact of increasing internationalization on the linguistic landscape of the European higher education system has been dramatic, and although the EU policies support the notion of multilingualism within the higher education system, English-medium instruction has been in use particularly in the north of Europe (Kuteeva, 2014). In the context of Europe and the Bologna Process, internationalization has become a synonym for Englishization (i.e., a phenomenon referring to the impact of English over other languages and its intensive use) and English-medium instruction (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Phillipson, 2009). Thus, throughout the continent, the Bologna Process has both triggered and motivated the reformation of university programs and strengthened the status of English as the medium of instruction. Following these developments, the urge for internationalization has received various reactions from the higher education institutions at a macro level. These reactions, according to Risager (2012), may include using a monolingual, only English policy; a bilingual, English plus the national language policy; and a trilingual, English plus the national and the regional language policy. Risager (2012) concluded that especially the extended or monolingual English language policy has been quite popular in graduate programs.

From a micro perspective, the European higher education systems have taken different approaches to implement these policies. To be more specific, while some universities have opted for English-medium instruction, others have made modifications to their existing programs, by increasing the number of the courses offered in English and/or adding variety to the existing programs (Smit & Dafauz, 2012). This situation could influence the efficiency of exchange programs positively since exchange students would have more course options to select when they

attend a program at a university abroad. The link between internationalization and English was also put forward by Coleman (2006), who maintained that the inclusion of English-taught courses in universities provides students with increased chances of participating in exchange programs, along with opportunities to obtain a higher status in the society and competing for economic sources.

Consequently, the number of higher education institutions that offer English-medium programs and courses has proliferated in the post-Bologna Europe. This increase has specifically been evident in the northern part of Europe and the Nordic countries (i.e., Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark) that have the highest percentages of courses at undergraduate and graduate level offered in English. To illustrate, even in the first decade of the century, the number of German, Dutch and Scandinavian higher education institutions providing English-medium programs was around 2,400 (Wächter & Maiworm 2008).

Furthermore, the societal status that English provides students with and its role as the lingua franca, i.e., the global language, the language of international research and academia (Seidlhofer, 2011), boosted the popularity of English at higher education institutions all around the world. For instance, since the 1950s, English has reinvigorated its status as the language of academic publications and research in the Scandinavian universities (Kuteeva & Airey, 2014). Moreover, due to the fact that English has become the common language of communication among the EU member states, it seems that the need for English will not diminish, but will grow overriding. Paradoxically, the more languages come into contact, the more English will be used (de Swaan, 2001).

The popularity and extensive use of English in higher education institutions can also be explained by the increasing staff and student mobility, the number of international research programs, and students' desires to study abroad. For instance, although the ERASMUS program was created with the intention of fostering language learning process of students and enriching their cultural experiences, it seems that it has also strengthened the status of English throughout the continent. The number of students visiting English-speaking countries or the countries whose institutions offer courses in English has been on the increase over the years (Cots, Llorca, & Garrett, 2014; Mackiewicz, 2001). Directly related to this issue, the OECD data on the internationally mobile students obtained from the OECD 2018 report on education are presented and discussed in the next section.

### 3. INTERNATIONALIZATION AND MOBILITY: EVIDENCE FROM OECD 2018 REPORT

Students may usually study abroad or participate in exchange programs in hope of that studying abroad may provide them with increased opportunities for obtaining quality education, developing skills that would offer them

higher returns both in their education and labor market, honing their intercultural skills and improving their language proficiency. Therefore, it is no surprise that within the past few decades, the number of international students participating in tertiary education programs increased dramatically, from two million in 1999 to five million in 2016, while the number of international or foreign students for study purposes was 3.5 million in the OECD area (OECD, 2018). Table 1 below demonstrates the share of international students by level of tertiary education and the number of international students in thousands.

**Table 1.** The Share of International Students by Level of Tertiary Education

	Total tertiary	Short-cycle tertiary	Bachelor/ equivalent level	Master/ equivalent level	Doctoral/ equivalent level	Number of international students in thousands
AU	17	9	14	46	34	336
AT	16	1	18	20	28	70
BE	12	7	9	20	44	61
CA	12	10	10	18	32	189
CL	0	0	0	1	8	5
DK	11	16	6	19	34	34
FR	10	5	7	13	40	245
DE	8	0	5	13	9	245
HU	9	1	7	16	12	26
IS	7	25	4	9	36	1
IE	8	2	7	15	27	18
JP	4	5	2	7	18	143
LV	8	2	6	16	11	6
LU	47	9	27	73	85	3
MX	0	0	0	1	3	13
NL	11	1	9	17	40	90
NZ	20	27	16	26	48	54
NO	4	1	2	7	22	11
PL	3	0	3	4	2	55
PT	6	2	3	7	26	20
SI	3	1	3	5	10	3
ES	3	2	1	8	15	53
SE	7	0	2	11	35	28
CH	18	0	10	29	55	52
UK	18	4	14	36	43	432
US	5	2	4	10	40	971

Source: OECD (2018), Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators

Note : Abbreviations of country names refer to Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively.

International students refer to the students who leave their home country and move to another one for study purposes. Table 1 shows that 47% of the students in tertiary education in Luxemburg are international students and 40% of the students in doctoral level in the USA are international students. A closer examination of the statistics would indicate that, overall, international students prefer studying in countries such as Luxembourg (47%), New Zealand (20%), Switzerland (18%), the United Kingdom (18%), Australia (17%), Austria (16%), Canada

(12%), Belgium (12%), Denmark (11%) and Netherlands (11%), mainly where English serves as either an official language or is widely used as the medium of instruction. Moving to the last column of the table which shows the number of international students in thousands, the statistics indicate that the number of international students is 971.000, nearly a million, in the US, 432.000 in the UK, 336.000 in Australia, 245.000 in France, 245.000 in Germany and 189.000 in Canada. Finally, when the proportions of international students in doctoral or equivalent level are examined, it is understood that Luxembourg (85%), Switzerland (55%), New Zealand (48%), Belgium (44%), the UK (43%) and France, the Netherlands and the US (40% each) rank as the most preferred countries.

These numbers clearly indicate that Anglophone countries in which English is the official language (e.g., the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) are the most popular destinations for students who have study purposes. This situation is not surprising considering the fact that one in four people use English (OECD, 2016). Apart from Anglophone countries, non-English speaking countries such as Germany and France, in which the number of institutions offering English-medium instruction has been on the rise, also seem to attract international students (Hughes, 2008).

Moreover, Table 2 below shows the distribution of international students who study in the OECD countries by region of origin and level of education based on OECD 2016 data.

**Table 2.** Distribution of International Students in OECD Countries, by Region of Origin and Level of Education

Region	Total tertiary	Short-cycle tertiary	Bachelor/ equivalent	Master's/ equivalent	Doctoral/ equivalent
Asia	55	66	55	57	42
Europe	24	14	25	22	32
Africa	8	7	8	9	10
Latin America/ Caribbean	5	5	5	6	8
North America	3	2	3	3	4
Oceania	1	1	1	0	1
Rest of the World	3	6	4	3	3

Source: OECD (2018), Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators

Table 2 shows that more than half of the international students are of Asian origin (55%) while the second largest group comprises European students (24%). According to OECD (2018), two-thirds of Asian origin students, who constitute the largest group of international students, mainly opt for three countries to study; the United States (38%), Australia (15%), and the United Kingdom (11%). Along with language, perceived quality of education provided abroad, and the perceived value or reputation of host institutions can also determine the choices and inflows of international students (Abbott & Silles, 2016). Altogether, it would be fair to say that the majority of international students select higher education institutions

located in i) Anglophone countries ii) countries where English is widely used (e.g., the Nordic countries), and iii) countries which offer English-medium courses.

#### 4. ISSUES, PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The process of internationalization within higher education institutions has helped English to become the language of higher education. Consequently, the number of higher education institutions offering English-medium instruction is rising rapidly even in countries where English functions as a foreign language learned at schools and has a limited use (e.g., Italy, Greece, and China) (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2014). Moreover, the OECD 2016 data revealed that English-speaking countries, i.e., the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, seem to dominate the internationalization process since these countries deliver most of the programs in which international students participate especially at master and doctoral level. Even though these countries, specifically the US and the UK, require higher tuition fees and may have a relatively distant culture to that of incoming students, they have attracted thousands of students from Asian countries. This is the reason, according to OECD (2005), an increasing number of institutions in non-Anglophone countries such as Norway, Sweden, and Iceland have embraced English-medium instruction to attract more skilled international students and researchers. This trend is not only confined to the Nordic countries but can also be observed in China, Germany, and France which have launched English-medium instruction programs to attract high skilled international researchers and students and overcome language barrier for enhancing intercultural understanding (Hughes, 2008).

While Englishization process may offer considerable advantages to higher education institutions such as internationalization and increased opportunities for international research collaboration and dissemination, it may have obvious shortcomings as well. The most significant concern that higher education institutions may have about English-medium of instruction could be students' and academic members' lack of proficiency in English. In relevant literature, English-medium instruction has often been criticized for hampering the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning (Kırkgöz, 2014). To illustrate, students may have difficulties in using English skills for understanding lectures, producing written work and building a knowledge base. As a result, students' lack of English ability might affect their understanding of disciplinary knowledge and academic performance. Furthermore, academic staff may find it difficult to use English in academic settings and meet the standards or conventions of Anglo-American academic discourse to get published (Cots, Llorca, & Garrett, 2014). As a solution, in contexts where English is chosen as the medium of instru-

ction, policymakers and authorities could i) introduce explicit, clearly defined and consistent language policies; ii) adjust faculty hiring requirements in line with these policies, iii) offer in-service programs to foster English competences of academic staff and iv) inform candidate students about language requirements that must be met to be accepted into the program. Higher education institutions could also provide students with pre-degree language training programs or courses in which students can become equipped with language competence that is needed to get into and complete the program. For programs that implement a bilingual; native language plus English policy, courses targeting at English for academic purposes and English for specific/occupational purposes could be included to aid students in completing their programs.

Another issue that deserves attention would be the discrepancies between academic disciplines since previous research demonstrated that (e.g., Kuteeva & Airey, 2014) adjusting language policies by taking the disciplinary dynamics into consideration is essential. For instance, scholarly work on the relationship between academic disciplines and discourse (e.g., Bernstein, 1996, 1999) revealed that differences between epistemological factors within academic disciplines could manifest themselves in the type of discourse employed. That means language might be used for various goals and in different ways based on the nature and conventions of an academic discipline. To be more specific, in the humanities, knowledge is mainly formed by making the use of interpretations of phenomena and texts. On the other hand, in the natural sciences, the formation of knowledge depends on the previous knowledge acquired while the incoming knowledge is structured hierarchically (Kuteeva & Airey, 2014). Hence, it would be easier to establish a standard and generic language among scholars working in the natural sciences. Language used in such disciplines could be relatively predictable, more conventional and devoid of stylistic features. On the contrary, disciplines that can be grouped under the humanities (e.g., literature, philosophy, cultural studies, history) may involve a discourse which requires a more creative and flexible language. In such disciplines, language mainly functions as a tool to build knowledge apart from disseminating knowledge. Thus, prior to formulating and implementing language policies, higher education authorities need to address these differences between disciplines and adjust their policies and standards accordingly.

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