

A postgraduate marketing programme's journey towards internationalisation

Dr Mazia Yassim

University of Greenwich, UK

Abstract

Internationalisation has been a significant focus of educational institutions for some time now and yet many institutions are still grappling with the most effective way to achieve it. This case study provides a critical review of steps taken within a marketing postgraduate programme towards internationalisation. Three key steps are outlined here, with a view to sharing lessons learnt at each step: module-level approach, optional virtual exchange and programme-level approach. The paper concludes that internationalisation at home is a more inclusive way forward and that faculty development, use of technology and clearly defined learning outcomes are critical elements in securing effective internationalisation.

Keywords: internationalisation, virtual exchange, internationalisation at home

1. Introduction

Internationalisation in its broadest sense is defined as the relationship between two or more nations for the purposes of trade, political alliances and treaties. (Bernardo and Mercher, 2019). From an employability perspective, the ability to understand, adapt to and work with different nations and cultures has emerged as a key skill over the years (Bhagra and Sharma, 2018). This has meant that 'internationalisation' has been a buzzword within business educational settings for some time now (Loveland *et al.*, 1987). Individual schools and programmes within the business disciplines have been, along with all other disciplines, trying to find effective ways by which internationalisation can be achieved not just by themselves, but holistically by their institutions, some of which have embraced it as a key strategic target; it is now quite widely identified in and across institutions as a key graduate attribute and learning outcome.

Despite this, effective internationalisation has been a somewhat elusive concept, largely because disciplines and their subject specialisms individually adopt their own strategies to achieve it. Higher education institutions (HEIs) have recently been criticised for making unfounded claims about their internationalisation. For example, for claiming to produce global citizens, often on the basis only of a marketing dimension (Baker and Fang, 2021); for using

internationalisation as a means of increasing revenues by a focus on developing trans-national education partners and recruiting more international students (Stein *et al.*, 2019). Programmes and institution-wide internationalisation therefore need to become more holistic and effective.

This paper provides a critical review of the steps taken to internationalise a postgraduate-level marketing programme based within a United Kingdom (UK) business school. The perspective provided here is that of the programme leader, who designed and implemented these approaches over two academic years. I outline and critically examine each stage, with the intention of learning lessons from the experience.

2. Background

Internationalisation is a result of the increasing globalisation of our world (Killick, 2015). Student experiences at HEIs accordingly need to change to reflect this, whether viewed from either a practical or a moral perspective. Practically, all graduates must be able to compete in an increasingly global workplace (Haigh, 2002) and, morally, business graduates must be better equipped to address social justice agendas (Sebastianelli *et al.*, 2021). A sharper understanding of the world and its issues, of inter-cultural awareness and acceptance can help to address social justice agendas and promote tolerance and inclusion. Both practical and moral perspectives clearly demonstrate that HEIs, including business schools, have an obligation to equip all graduates for the global workplace.

Such widely varying terms for internationalisation as 'global competence', 'cultural intelligence', 'global citizenship education' and 'cultural competence' illustrate well a general lack of consensus about what it is. Ceo-DiFrancesco *et al.* (2019) account for this as the inevitable result of widely varying terminology across disciplines. However, there is agreement about the value of viewing the world through different lenses and from different perspectives (Deardorff, 2006), for to do so encompasses both the practical and moral aspects of internationalisation. Thus the postgraduate programme under discussion here adopted Deardorff's (2006) definition of internationalisation for its approach.

Business schools and programmes, with the aim of achieving effective internationalisation, incorporate – into the learning outcomes, content, teaching methods and assessments (Leask, 2015) of their curriculum – international, inter-cultural and global dimensions. As Simm and Marvell (2017) aver, there is little doubt of the need to internationalise the curriculum, but it is vital to consider the nature of its implementation. An added dimension to consider is the impact of internationalisation on sustainability. Global student mobility is not always the most sustainable way by which to internationalise the curriculum (Sierra *et al.*, 2022). Given the

complex nature of international skills, to incorporate considerable flexibility into provision of opportunities and methods would prove more effective (Fernhaber and Hines, 2021).

By and large, internationalisation within business schools has relied on student and staff mobility exchanges to educational institutions based in different countries, as facilitated very considerably by the Bologna Agreement and Erasmus funding (now replaced in the UK by the Turing Scheme). These physical exchanges have their own challenges, rendering them unsuitable for all programmes, contexts and students. I explore these challenges below within the context of the postgraduate marketing programme under discussion here.

2.1 Internationalisation challenges for the postgraduate marketing programme

Like many postgraduate business programmes in the UK, this marketing programme lasts twelve months and has a very diverse international student cohort. Although internationalisation is an established key graduate attribute of the Business School and of the wider institution within which the Business School is based, there was very little previous active effort within the postgraduate marketing programme to internationalise the curriculum. Some degree of complacency caused it to be taken for granted that the international student and faculty body would provide sufficient levels of internationalisation and, in consequence, little had been done to use co-creation strategies in order to exploit effectively the cultural capital of students within the cohorts.

Physical student exchanges were never part of this programme, largely because of its relatively short duration. First, funding for student exchanges such as Erasmus was traditionally provided for students spending a term/semester in another country; this has never been feasible within a twelve-month programme and now, additionally, students' caring commitments limit time away from their home base. Second, shorter visits to educational institutions or practitioner bases in different countries usually need to be self-funded by students, so excluding those who cannot afford to take part in these learning experiences. Such hindrances as both of these to the widening of participation within this programme exclude students from certain backgrounds or responsibilities.

Accordingly, this postgraduate marketing programme has had to find a way to internationalise the curriculum and student experience without the need to travel, viz. 'internationalisation at home' (Wachter, 2003; Harrison, 2015). This is the approach whereby the curriculum is internationalised through the use of case studies, global perspectives, interactions with international students and faculty (within the institution) and virtual exchanges with faculty and students from different countries.

2.2 Steps towards internationalisation at home

In its efforts to internationalise at home, the marketing postgraduate programme undertook three steps, for each of which, once implemented, student and faculty feedback was sought to assess that step's effectiveness in order to develop and implement the following step.

Step 1: Module level internationalisation

Step 2: Optional virtual exchange

Step 3: Programme level internationalisation

3. Method of evaluation

A qualitative approach to feedback and evaluation was used in this case study. At each stage, student feedback was sought via a focus group. Fifteen students in all took part in the feedback sessions, with four or five students providing feedback after each stage. Staff provided their feedback during focus group discussions held during programme committee meetings. Both students and staff shared and discussed their opinions of what worked well, what the limitations were and how things could be enhanced. Below, I provide discussion and critical review of each stage.

3.1 Step 1: Module level internationalisation

This was the initial stage of internationalisation of the programme, intended to ensure that each module's content was international so that students would gain different perspectives of the subject and see how practices differed in different cultures and contexts. There were two stages within this step.

First, all module teams were asked to review their recommended reading and ensure that it included sources from different countries – not a new request, in as far as this was the institution's guidance, provided in line with its strategies and with graduate attributes. However, as is the case with any strategy or plan, if not measured, it is unlikely to be made a priority. This lack of monitoring and evaluation meant that the internationalisation of the content and resources used in modules was very sporadic and ineffective. Even in cases where sources from different countries and contexts were included, the specific learning from these, in terms of developing competencies of international knowledge, were not actively explored. Consequently, students did not notice any specific internationalisation in their modules. Faculty feedback indicated some challenges, to do with attitude and knowledge.

Case Studies

Some faculty felt that they used the sources considered best for their specific subjects and hence they did not see why there was a need to seek out content from international sources. Others felt that they did not have sufficient knowledge or resources to investigate international content and sources “and, anyway, isn’t it easier in some subjects than in others to find international sources and content?”

Second, and as a result of the above feedback, the concept of ‘international week’ was introduced as a way to consolidate the international content and experience students received in each of their modules. One week per term, usually in the middle, was designated as international week. Each module ensured that the teaching and learning activities taking place would have an international focus during that week: for example, discussing a case from an international context during the seminar, inviting an international guest speaker and setting students tasks encouraging co-creation and sharing of international experiences. After two terms of trialling, this approach received similar responses to the previous one. As previously, this one largely relied on the motivation and ability of the module’s teaching team to make it effective: whereas some modules had international practitioners as guest speakers (something well received by students), others simply used one or two examples from international contexts during their delivery of content. Students’ feedback showed that they were disappointed with the international week. They expected to have found more emphasis on internationalisation with a variety of interesting activities and discussions. However, they failed to notice any difference between a normal teaching week and the international week.

One of the key lessons from this approach was that it was what Grossman (2017) refers to as a ‘fuzzy’ application of rhetoric when it comes to internationalisation. This approached internationalisation with a narrow vision and expected that just adding some international names of authors and companies would suffice to achieve the aim. Specific internationalisation-related learning outcomes were not developed at module levels and so neither the faculty nor the students were clear about what they were expected to achieve. Added to this, the issues of faculty training and resources were not taken into account. It was assumed that all faculty members were equipped with international perspectives and skills themselves and were well versed in developing this in their students. The time and effort required by faculty to research and embed international elements into their modules were also underestimated.

3.2 Step 2: Optional virtual exchange

Recognition from step 1 that a more active and focused approach was needed led to this step’s intention to enhance the internationalisation experience of students by providing them

Case Studies

with an opportunity to engage in a virtual exchange with students from an international institution.

'Virtual exchange' refers to the use of online formats whereby students engage with peers from other educational institutions to achieve a common learning outcome or purpose (Sierra *et al.*, 2022; Ceo-DiFrancesco *et al.*, 2019). Virtual exchanges are increasingly proving popular as an inclusive curriculum model for internationalising the curriculum (O'Dowd and Lewis, 2016). Thanks to their interactive nature, virtual exchanges help to address the challenges of internationalisation discussed previously in terms of widening participation.

The virtual exchange for this postgraduate marketing programme involved students working with students of an HEI based in Spain. This was an inter-disciplinary exchange involving students from different levels of study. Students from Spain were undertaking studies in public policy and were in the final year of their undergraduate programmes. The project required the postgraduate marketing students to take on the role of communications consultants who would enable the 'clients' to launch a public policy communications campaign. From the perspective of the postgraduate students, the project provided them with the experience of liaising with a client to understand the brief and requirements, apply communications theories in practice, share their communications and marketing knowledge with others outside the discipline and also explore how the application of theories needs to be adapted to fit different cultural contexts. As with any study exchange project, learning was not limited to the formal elements outlined above. Working informally with students from a different cultural context allowed them all to learn about each other's ways of doing things within both educational institutions and another country more generally.

Students' feedback on the virtual exchange was very positive: they found the sharing of both discipline-related and cultural knowledge to be very insightful. From the perspective of the programme teams, there were two key challenges and lessons learnt from this approach. First, as semesters and assessment periods work differently at different institutions, aligning the optimum time of exchange proved difficult. Second, this was a stand-alone exchange that did not directly relate to any of the taught modules within the postgraduate marketing programme. Students were asked to opt for this exchange if they wished to expand their global skills. Although one third of the programme cohort opted to take part, there were dropouts and lack of engagement during the project.

3.3 Step 3: Programme level internationalisation

As a result of the first two steps outlined above, a programme-level approach to internationalisation was designed, combining elements from both steps. A dedicated programme-level international week was organised, with all timetabled learning and teaching activities suspended. Instead of their regular timetabled activities, all students took part in a range of activities and sessions specifically designed to enhance their international skills and perspectives.

The international week activities consisted of guest speakers from different countries, an international-themed quiz, discussion and review of movie clips from different parts of the world and a student exchange project which lasted two days. An HEI from Finland took part in this international week, its postgraduate marketing students attending the workshops, seminars and also taking part in the joint student project to rebrand post-Brexit UK as a desirable destination for a chosen segment. The joint student project was held as a competition, with the three winning teams receiving recognition for their successful project plans.

Feedback from students and faculty on this was very positive. In contrast to step 1, students felt that there was a clear focus to this international week and they were pleased with the range of activities and choices available. This combination of passive (guest speaker sessions) and active (discussions and student projects) sessions enabled them to widen their perspectives. Also, in contrast to step 2, students' engagement was higher, on account of the shorter timeframes involved and of their having had their time freed up by the suspension of regular timetabled activities. Faculty feedback was also very positive in that they did not have the same pressures as when doing this at individual module levels; they were able to work together as a supportive team to develop the international week activities.

4. Discussion and recommendations

The three steps outlined above set out some of the benefits and challenges of the various internationalisation approaches within the postgraduate marketing programme. It was clear to see that a programme-level approach was much better received by both students and faculty.

It could be argued that internationalisation cannot be achieved to any great extent with only one week of dedicated activities. However, what this can provide is both a focused time for students to engage with and reflect on their global skills and a clearer sense of the need for continuous improvement of their international skills and perspectives. Within a very time-limited postgraduate programme of twelve months, one week of dedicated time is feasible.

Case Studies

Without this time limitation, in a three-year undergraduate programme for instance, this can easily be expanded to one week per level of study or year, with each year's international week focusing on a specific theme.

The key to achieving effective implementation is to ensure that, in addition to overarching strategic aims, specific learning outcomes for each aspect of internationalisation are set in an effective way. One-week of focused internationalisation, for instance, may not be able to deliver every aspect of internationalisation. Rather, it will enable the achievement of specific and focused international learning outcomes. Starting with clear learning outcomes will also ensure that student expectations are managed and communicated clearly, leading to student satisfaction. Models such as the Global Citizenship (Reysen and Katzarska-Miller, 2013), which offers outcomes of global citizenship, provide a good starting point to help educators with identifying and setting learning outcomes for internationalisation approaches.

Despite the benefits of the programme-level approach, effective internationalisation needs a variety of approaches, planned and executed holistically. Just one week of international focus, while the remainder of learning and teaching activities do not reinforce or make efforts to embed international skills and perspectives, will not be an immersive international experience for students. As Simm and Marvell (2017) argue, internationalisation of the curriculum is not solely about content but also needs changes to styles of teaching, learning and assessments. To enable this properly, it is crucial for institutions to focus on developing the skills, attitudes and knowledge of their faculty with regard to internationalisation. As Schuerholz-Lehr *et al.* (2007) maintain, effective internationalisation is very much dependent on faculty's understanding of its scope and benefits as well as their willingness for, and capacity to implement, curriculum change. So, as part of the process of internationalisation of any institution, there must be sufficient resources to develop and support faculty internationalisation.

Although student mobility programmes have played a huge role in providing students with international experiences, the number of students who have engaged in study abroad programmes remains relatively low (O'Dowd, 2017). The reasons for this can be linked to widening participation remits, discussed previously as being part of the challenges of the programme. Additionally, the increasing importance of the sustainability agenda of HEIs may also conflict with the reliance on large-scale travel to internationalise students. Both internationalisation and sustainability agendas need to go hand in hand to ensure that HEIs meet both these highly important agendas (Dvorak *et al.*, 2011). Internationalisation at home, and virtual exchanges in particular, can aid in this.

Given that the first examples of online collaborative projects started within a few years of the emergence of the internet (Tella, 1991), virtual exchanges have not developed at any significant pace over the years. O'Dowd (2018) cites the general lack of awareness of its educational value as being one of the main barriers. The Coronavirus pandemic, which forced learning and teaching to be online, has meant that most HEIs are more willing to engage with virtual learning initiatives. Research and academic practice within various disciplines has shown the effectiveness of virtual exchanges in developing global skills and inter-cultural knowledge (Orsini-Jones, 2018; Lenkaitis and Loranc-Paszyk, 2021; Bowen *et al.*, 2021). The use of technology, such as virtual reality, can further enhance virtual exchanges in particular and virtual international learning experiences in general, by providing students with real-life experiences of contexts and cultures (Bowen *et al.*, 2021) without the need for physical travel.

5. Conclusion

Internationalisation is an integral part of HEI strategies. This case study provided an outline and critical discussion of the approaches undertaken by a postgraduate marketing programme in its quest for effective internationalisation. This is not presented as a suggested approach. The experience of and the lessons learnt by this programme may help others in exploring different approaches to internationalisation, which must go beyond mobility and strongly emphasise teaching and learning in a culturally diverse setting (Wachter 2003). To enable this, HEIs need to focus on faculty development. The advance of technology has provided a more inclusive way to develop global skills in students as demonstrated by steps 2 and 3 outlined above. In addition to this, there are many differing ways by which internationalisation can also be achieved. As O'Dowd (2017) concluded, no one model can exclusively claim to be the only way to engage in intercultural exchanges. A multi-level and more holistic approach, with clearly defined learning outcomes, is fundamental.

Reference list

Baker, W. and Fang, F. (2021) 'So maybe I'm a global citizen: developing intercultural citizenship in English medium education.' *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 34(1), 1-17. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07908318.2020.1748045> (Accessed: 30 May 2020).

Case Studies

Bernardo, G. and Mercher, L. (2019) *Connecting Ideas: What is Internationalisation?*

Available at: <https://cris.unu.edu/what-is-internationalisation>

(Accessed 18 January 2023).

Bhagra, A. and Sharma, D.K. (2018) 'Changing paradigm of employability skills in the global business world: a review.' *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 12(2), 7-24.

Bowen, K., Barry, M., Jowell, A., Maddah, D. and Alami, N.H. (2021) 'Virtual exchange in global health: an innovative educational approach to foster socially responsible overseas collaboration.' *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 18(32).

Available at:

[https://educationaltechnologyjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41239-021-00266-](https://educationaltechnologyjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41239-021-00266-x)

[x](https://educationaltechnologyjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41239-021-00266-x) (Accessed: 15 August 2022).

Ceo-DiFrancesco, D., de Paris, C.M., Mora, O.K., Oyarzabal, X.L., Bastidas, E.R.S., Mena-Bohlke, M. and Bohlke, O. (2019) 'Bridging the cultural and linguistic divide through virtual exchange.' *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal*, 9(1), 18-31. Available at:

<https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol9/iss1/4/> (Accessed: 18 June 2021).

Deardorff, D. (2006) 'Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalisation.' *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1028315306287002> (Accessed: 30 December 2020).

Dvorak, A., Christiansen, L., Fischer, N. and Underhill, J. (2011) 'A necessary partnership: a study abroad and sustainability in higher education.' *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 21(1), 143-166. Available at: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ991089> (Accessed: 30 December 2020).

Case Studies

Fernhaber, S.A. and Hines, L. (2021) 'Integrating social justice and diversity discourse into existing classes within the business school.' *Journal of Education for Business*, 96(4), 260-268. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08832323.2020.1805397> (Accessed: 30 December 2020).

Grossman, D. (2017) 'Global Education.' In: Manfra, M.M. and Bolick, C. (eds.) *The Wiley Handbook of Social Studies Research*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 518-568. ISBN: 9781118787076

Haigh, M.J. (2002) 'Internationalisation of the curriculum: designing inclusive education for a small world.' *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 26, 49-66. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/1418036/Haigh_M_J_2002_Internationalisation_of_the_curriculum_designing_inclusive_education_for_a_small_world_Journal_of_Geography_in_Higher_Education_26_1_pp_49_66_ISSN_0309_8265_ (Accessed: 30 December 2020).

Harrison, N. (2015) 'Practice, problems and power in 'internationalisation at home': critical reflections on recent research evidence.' *Teaching in Higher Education*, 20, 412-430. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13562517.2015.1022147> (Accessed: 01 February 2021).

Killick, D. (2015) *Developing the Global Student: Higher Education in an Era of Globalisation*. Abingdon: Routledge. ISBN: 9780415728058

Leask, B. (2015) *Internationalizing the Curriculum*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 9780415728157

Case Studies

Lenkaitis, C. and Loranc-Paszylk, B. (2021) 'The role of intercultural virtual exchanges in global citizenship development.' *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 15(2), 222-234. Available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17513057.2021.1876241> (Accessed: 01 March 2021).

Loveland, T., Abraham, Y. and Bunn, R. (1987) 'International business study tours: practices and trends.' *Journal of Education for Business*, 62(6), 253-257. Available at:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08832323.1987.10772822> (Accessed: 01 February 2021).

O'Dowd, R. (2017). 'Virtual exchange and internationalising the classroom.' *Training, Language and Culture*, 1(4), 8-24.

O'Dowd, R. (2018) 'From telecollaboration or virtual exchange: the state-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward.' *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 1, 1-23. Available at: <https://journal.unicollaboration.org/article/view/35567> (Accessed: 30 December 2020).

O'Dowd, R. and Lewis, T. (2016) *Online Intercultural Exchange: Policy, Pedagogy, Practice*. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 9780367024291

Orsini-Jones, M. and Lee, F. (2018) *Intercultural Communicative Competence for Global Citizenship: Identifying Cyberpragmatic Rules of Engagement in Telecollaboration*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 978-1137581020

Reysen, S. and Katzarska-Miller, I. (2013) 'A model of global citizenship: antecedents and outcomes.' *International Journal of Psychology*, 48(5), 858-870. Available at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1080/00207594.2012.701749> (Accessed: 15 May 2021).

Case Studies

Schuerholz-Lehr, S., Caws, C., Van Gyn, G. and Preece, A. (2007) 'Internationalizing the higher education curriculum: an emerging model for transforming faculty perspectives.' *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 37(1), 67-94. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Internationalizing-the-Higher-Education-Curriculum%3A-Schuerholz-Lehr-Caws/69a5394a572fe94e445fd2195c196004a7a1090a> (Accessed: 01 February 2021).

Sebastianelli, R., Isil, O. and Li, Y. (2021) 'Using the social justice scale with business students: findings and recommendations.' *Journal of Education for Business*, 96(4), 210-222. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08832323.2020.1798331> (Accessed: 15 May 2021).

Sierra, J., Yassim, M. and Suarez-Collado, A. (2022) 'Together we can: enhancing key 21st century skills with international virtual exchange.' *Education+Training*, 64(6), 826-843. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/ET-05-2021-0171/full/html?skipTracking=true> (Accessed: 30 December 2020).

Simm, D. and Marvell, A. (2017) 'Creating global students: opportunities, challenges and experiences of internationalizing the geography curriculum in higher education.' *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 41(4), 467-474. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/34761984/Simm_D_and_Marvell_A_2017_Creating_Global_Students_Opportunities_challenges_and_experiences_of_internationalising_the_Geography_curriculum_in_Higher_Education_Journal_of_Geography_in_Higher_Education_41_4_467_474 (Accessed: 15 May 2021).

Stein, S., Adreotti, V. and Susa, R. (2019) 'Pluralizing frameworks for global ethics in the internationalisation of higher education in Canada.' *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 49(1), 22-46. Available at: <https://journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe/article/view/188244> (Accessed: 01 February 2021).

Case Studies

Tella, S. (1991) 'Introducing international communications networks and electronic mail into foreign language classrooms: a case study in Finnish senior secondary schools.' Available at: <http://www.helsinki.fi/~tella/95.pdf> (Accessed: 30 October 2021).

Wachter, B. (2003) 'An introduction: internationalisation at home in context.' *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 7(1), 5-11. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1028315302250176> (Accessed: 30 December 2020).