Internationalization strategies in Portuguese Higher Education Institutions – time to move on and to move beyond

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Abstract

In recent decades, under the pressures of globalization and within the framework of the European Union education policies, Portuguese Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have undergone an intense process of internationalization, with rising figures in the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge and research as well as student and staff international mobility and real academic cooperation amongst HEIs. Despite these indicators, other issues such as the internationalization of curricula content, student development of intercultural skills, and institutional foreign language learning policies, require attention in the debate on internationalization in Higher Education (HE) and open the challenge to the broad strategic area of "Internationalization at Home" (de Wit et al. 2015b).

In this paper, which is a part of ongoing research on the introduction of the Content and Language Integrated Learning approach in Portuguese HEIs, we present an overview of the national internationalization policies in Portuguese HE over the past decade and focus on just how these policies have been transferred and transformed institutionally. We start by reviewing the different definitions of *internationalization in HE*, both abroad and at home, and then focus on national policies, specifically a recent Resolution of the Portuguese Council of Ministers (78/2016). Finally, we conclude arguing for the need to not only move on with these efforts but also to move beyond to broaden the scope of action of internationalization strategies in Portuguese HEIs.

1 Introduction

Internationalization, put into action using a variety of formats and approaches, has been fundamental to universities throughout the centuries (de Wit, 2010; Amaral et al., 2013; Engwall, 2016). Over

recent decades, however internationalization has been included on the agenda for higher education (HE) and individual higher education institutions (HEIs) (de Wit, 2009; Brandenburg et al., 2009), moving "from a reactive to a pro-active strategic issue, from added value to mainstream" (de Wit, 2015a: 4) and becoming a recurrent term in the rhetoric of politicians and supranational organizations. Both stakeholders and policymakers in HE place internationalization at the forefront of strategic planning, as one of the pillars for sustaining the success of their HEIs within the new global educational and economic context (Wadhwa, 2016). Data from the International Association of Universities (IAU) Internationalization Survey Reports (2003, 2005, 2010 and 2014) demonstrated HEIs believed internationalization was a high priority issue in their institutions (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014). Another large scale survey, Trends 2015: Learning and Teaching in European Universities, also identified internationalization as highly important, reporting that it is the second most important development after quality assurance (Sursock, 2015) and is characterized as "rising in strategic importance" in a "trend [which] is expected to continue" (Sursock, 2015: p. 30).

Whether linked to political, economic, cultural or academic rationales (Knight, 2004; de Wit, 2010; Hudzik, 2011), internationalization is no longer seen as a goal in itself but rather as a multidimensional process to achieve different goals (Gao, 2014). It has become the driving force behind some of the changes in HE at the beginning of the competitive and knowledge-based economy of this 21st century.

In Portugal, under the pressures of globalization and within the framework of the European Union education policies of the recent decades, HEIs have also undergone an intense process of internationalization, with rising figures in the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge and research as well as student and staff international mobility and real academic cooperation amongst HEIs (Mourato, 2014; Heitor & Horta, 2012). In this paper, which is a part of ongoing research on the introduction of the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach in Portuguese HEIs, we start by reviewing the different definitions of internationalization in HE, both abroad and at home, and then identify the predominant internationalization policies in Portuguese HEIs over the past decade to provide a brief presentation of part of the data collected on how these policies have been transferred and transformed institutionally. We conclude arguing for the need to not only move on with these efforts but also to move beyond to broaden the scope of action of internationalization strategies in Portuguese HEIs.

2 A survey of the literature: the concept of internationalization in HE

The expression international education, which described any school-related activities abroad, was substituted in the 1990s by the term internationalization to reflect the multiplicity and growing importance of the respective interpretations, motivations and outcomes across HEIs (de Wit et al., 2015a). The widely used definition of internationalization as the "process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2004: 11) remains relevant to the comprehensive activities of HEIs, more than a decade later. While justifying the proliferation of the processes for articulating internationalization across university management, it simultaneously includes the essential curricular dimensions of international and intercultural realities.

Comprehensive internationalization (CI), another related concern, includes aspects of high-level "commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education" (Hudzik, 2011: 6). A number of sustainable practices have been identified for strategic partnering, including building academic networks and strengthening not only mobility exchanges but also the exchange of

knowledge and practice itself (Sandstrom & Weimer, 2016). Given the potential for promoting respect for others and intercultural understanding, intercultural learning requires institutional backing through clearly defined strategies and partnerships, constant networking and reliable funding as well as mechanisms for greater recognition of credits that support mobility.

To deal with curriculum development that can prepare and support students, faculty, staff and community members who interact and deal with greater diversity, in-house development of the teaching and learning processes and of the curriculum at the respective HEIs must accompany the perceived needs of internationalization (cf. ICCAGE project). Nevertheless, for current scholarly debate using Knight's (2004) definition, a missing link is the absence of the role of the learner and the learning process itself. Instead, global rankings are generally measured through mobility numbers and the existence (or not) of institutionalized mobility parameters.

The more recent and complementary concept of Internationalization at Home (IaH), understood as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015: p. 70), reflects "the assumption that not all students will have mobility opportunities and that, while mobility can bring additional benefits for the mobile few, this should not be at the expense of internationalization for all" (p. 69). Practicing IaH "aims to develop international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes for all students regardless of whether they also take part in mobility opportunities" (p. 71), which translates into more opportunities to engage in improving competences that had been previously measured primarily, if not exclusively, through mobility (Morgado et al. 2015).

Overall, comprehensive internationalization, beyond policy and on a holistic level, shapes the ethos and values of participating HEIs and will necessarily be accompanied by innovation and inclusion of international and intercultural practices in the curriculum that combine the affective with the cognitive and metacognitive, simultaneously engaging heart and mind (cf. Hudzig, 2011; Newton, 2014).

2.1   European Perspectives on Internationalization in HE

The European Union views and recommendations on internationalization in HE have been extensively documented in a number of strategic documents, more recently covering the modernization of higher education (OJEU, 2011/C 372/09), language competences to enhance mobility (2011/C 372/08) supporting growth and jobs (OJEU, 2011/0567) and investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes (OJEU, 2012/0669), among others. In general, the European Commission solicits the cooperation of all member countries to facilitate the development and implementation of HE internationalization in Europe by creating and adhering to legal and administrative conditions for its development and implementation.

The construction of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) set forth by the 1999 Bologna Declaration represented a real challenge to national governments and particularly to HEIs, at last seen as key partners in the implementation of the European Union's strategy to enhance economic growth. Stimulus for internationalization in Europe has been notable through the European Commission's ERASMUS Programme launched in 1987, into the Socrates action programme, specific for higher education, in 1995. In 2007 another new phase began, when ERASMUS was integrated into the Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013). The new ERASMUS+ Programme (2014-2020) focuses on the support and promotion of transnational cooperation programmes aiming at bridging the gap between academia and the world of work. The exchanges and partnerships of previous decades have found greater value in the HE context of increasing needs to be competitive, commercial and involved in the international delivery of HE.

3 A survey of the policy: Portuguese internationalization policies in HE

The overthrow of the dictator in 1974, known in Portugal as the "25th of April" (in Portuguese, *25 de abril*), launched a profound change in education in this country. The democratization of access to education and a new network of HEIs (universities and polytechnic institutes) brought the number of students in HEIs from 81,582 in 1978 to 349,658 in 2015 (Pordata, 2017).

At the turn of the century, faced with the need to implement the harmonizing orientations of the Bologna Declaration of 1999, the country "did not have a consistent policy for internationalizing higher education" (Sin et al., 2016: 177). Governmental instability and a lack of adequate legislation meant that internationalization strategies in Portuguese HEIs almost exclusively involved student and teacher exchanges within the pre-set, imposed format of existing European mobility programmes and a small number of students from countries where Portuguese is or was an official language (in Portuguese, CPLP). International exchange was even discouraged, for example, with governmental measures like the non-recognition of Portuguese degrees awarded cross-borders. However, for both public and private HEIs now faced with less money and fewer students, the economic crisis of the past decade "created a new interest in the recruitment of foreign students […] and the government came under increasing pressure to create more attractive conditions for the internationalization of educational activities" (Sin et al., 2016: 179).

In a decade-old survey, Veiga et al. (2006) found the main obstacles to the internationalization of Portuguese HEIs to be linguistic barriers and the lack of financial resources and support from the government. This support would come only in 2014, with the publication of the government's strategy for the internationalization of Portuguese HE (MEC, 2014), and a few years later with the Resolution of the Portuguese Council of Ministers (78/2016), which established a few principles to build on the aforementioned 2014 policy, including an emphasis on action and policy evaluation, recommended at four year intervals, and a new theoretical framework which is expected to be expanded. While recognizing the essential symbiosis of internationalization with the threefold mission of the university – from research to education and world citizenship – the financing of these strategies continues to be a concern.

3.1   Defining the stakeholders in Portuguese HE internationalization

The 2015 European Commission/Council of Europe report on the Internationalization of HE (de Wit, 2015a) clearly described the requirement for an overall strategy for internationalization, involving careful positioning of HEIs, students, researchers and staff, along with their national systems, so that they can participate in relevant research and innovation activities across the globe .

In Portugal, the new framework of reference set by the 78/2016 Resolution requires a clear identification of the different stakeholders involved in HE internationalization, since the scope of action of the Portuguese internationalization policy has clearly been broadened and is now calling for the active participation of other entities. Research centres, businesses and cultural associations, for example, are now vital as partners and stakeholders in the enforcement of the internationalization policies of HEIs in Portugal. Within this context the part played by associations such as the Association of Language Centres in Higher Education in Portugal (ReCLes.pt, http://recles.pt/), for example, representing 16 HEIs, polytechnics and universities (Morgado et al., 2015), or the European Language Council (CEL/ELC), presently run from the University of the Algarve, with Professor Manuel Célio Conceição as the President of the Executive Committee, can play a part and contribute to the future of Portuguese HE internationalization and necessary language policies (Conceição &

Urbanikowa, 2015).

3.2 A strategy for the internationalization of Portuguese HE

In 2014, almost four years after having been elected, the XIX Portuguese Constitutional Government took measures to enact one of its objectives – to reduce the proliferation of Portuguese HEIs and, simultaneously, promote the internationalization of HE. They appointed a study group with the mission of devising a strategy for the Internationalization of Portuguese HE. The final report was presented in May 2014 and concluded with a strategy proposal to correct the Internationalization system in Portuguese HE, which they characterized as "diffuse and fragmented" with only "modest results" (MEC, 2014: 17-18). The new national strategy is presented as a list of 40 recommendations across four key dimensions, namely institutional collaboration, mobility, institutional strategic partnerships and the development of more digital education resources. Institutional collaboration involves not only consortia and joint curricula but also co-operation between researchers and the design and implementation of projects built with other HEIs. Collaboration also covers international mobility of students, teachers and researchers, the development of International Student Law and an improved welcoming process for international students. Simultaneously, mobility aims to double the current number of visiting international students by 2020 bolstered by institutional strategic partnerships and the development of digital education, which include MOOCs and distance learning courses in Portuguese.

Attention to language issues is apparent in the 2014 Internationalization strategy report, where Portuguese is acknowledged as an attractive feature for students from CPLP countries and for those interested in developing their communicative competence in a fast expanding language that is currently spoken by 250 million worldwide (MEC, 2014). Foreign language proficiency is also recognized as an asset, such that "an increase in the number of courses offered in English is, therefore, highly recommended. The multilingual skills of Portuguese higher education students should also be significantly improved" (MEC, 2014: 17-18).

The year 2014 is also a landmark in Portuguese HE internationalization policies because of the publication of the Decree Law 36/2014, which defines an International Student Status (ISS). ISS students, who have to finance the full real costs of their education, have become a potential target group for the further financing of HEIs.

The consolidation of the policy of internationalization of HEIs in Portugal gained additional momentum in 2016 with the Ministerial Resolution 78/2016, defining the guidelines for the internationalisation of higher education, science and technology to promote public policies that value the development of knowledge and skills. As a result, the Portuguese Government has acknowledged the fundamental role of HEIs and research centres and their relevant participation in international networks while simultaneously enhances their ability to innovate and contribute to social, cultural and economic development. A recent outcome of the government commitment with this resolution was the launching in January 2017 of the Study & Research in Portugal platform (https://www.study-research.pt/), dedicated to students and researchers, companies and foreign institutes of Science and Technology in Portugal.

4 The future for the internationalization of Portuguese HE – Institutional transference and transformation

A documental survey of the 16 polytechnic institutes and 14 universities across Portugal currently being carried out will identify the specific objectives set by each local HEI in its academic plurennial Strategic Plans. This documental study method is designed to examine the fit between these local HEIs and broader policy or strategy for national growth that could promote the Portuguese HE system globally.

The following questions are being checked in each strategic plan to determine whether internationalization is deeply rooted into the national project for Portugal:

Q1: Is the international dimension included in the mission/vision of the HEI?

Q2: Is internationalization considered a strategic objective/guiding principle of the HEI?

Q3: How many and which actions are planned to enhance internationalization?

Q4: Is the expected impact of the actions in Q3 presented?

Preliminary results of the survey of Portuguese HEIs point to a very purposeful positioning and awareness of the relevance of their international missions. Despite considerable differentiation amongst their institutional options, there is a common trend towards internationalization and strategic development through partnerships, teacher and student mobility, and courses taught in English, among others. However, the singularity of each context, whether economic, political, cultural, social or academic, seems to require the adoption of tailored, innovative measures and approaches for each HEI. The final results obtained from this ongoing survey will allow for more specific conclusions at an institutional level, eventually revealing action-oriented international aspirations that mirror national and European policies.

Certain is the fact that Portuguese HEIs are now standing at a turning point of their future international careers: they are urged to action by governmental policies and pressured from within their own institutions to develop imaginative enactment of those policies. As they experiment new ground with the myriad possibilities of work now open to them with the integration of different stakeholders (businesses, language centers, community cultural associations), they are required to guarantee the financial sustainability of the institution and extra investment to develop it and to keep the pace with the fast moving 21st century technological society. Standing still is not an option. The dynamic view of ongoing efforts in internationalization must continue and even move beyond to broaden the scope of action of internationalization strategies in Portuguese HEIs.

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