

# Internationalization as Westernization in Higher Education

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## Internationalization as Westernization in Higher Education

A commonly held belief is that the more international a university is, the better it is. The internationalization of higher education (IoHE) certainly has the potential to attract more students, improve an institution's programs and financials, heighten its prestige, and provide students with diverse opportunities to engage in intercultural dialogue in order to have a greater understanding of the world (AUCC 2014; Enders 2004; Knight 2001; Knight 2012). However, it can also be argued that there are negative implications associated with IoHE including the neoliberal emphasis on marketability and "academic capitalism" (Torres 2011). IoHE can also be critiqued for being equated with Westernization, the topic of this paper. Through a postcolonial lens, I critique the Westernization of higher education by examining curricular issues including the spread of Western pedagogy, English as a Medium for Instruction (EMI), and the pressure for academics to publish in English journals.

### Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory provides the framework for this paper to help interrupt accepted knowledges and ways of thinking, seeing, and doing. Specifically, it recognizes the history and legacy of European colonialism and how "it continues to shape most contemporary discourses and institutions, politically, culturally and economically" (Rizvi, Lingard, and Lavia 2006, p. 250). Postcolonial theory performs a valuable role as it shows continued cultural domination through the continued burden of power structures (Rizvi 2007), particularly in education. Further, Western knowledge, as Christina Paschyn (2015) discusses, has adversely come to be accepted as the ultimate mode of knowledge, even among the colonized.

### Spread of Western Pedagogy

There is evidence to suggest that, through the IoHE, curricula are also impacted as higher education institutions (HEIs) Westernize their courses and programs. One example is the implementation of

Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP), "perpetuat[ing] neocolonialism and Western hegemony" (White 2015, p. 115). By definition, LCP places the student at the forefront of educational practice and as an individual learner "constructing and assimilating knowledge" (Vavrus and Bartlett 2013, p. 5). But, whose and which knowledges?

LCP has been demonstrated and imposed in a variety of non-Western education settings. One case is Mwenge University College of Education in northern Tanzania (Vavrus and Bartlett 2012). Also, in similar contexts, Western "inspectors" (de Grauwe 2001) are often brought in as consultants to place value on the "currency, quality and relevance" (Gyamera 2015, p. 119) of education in the "non-West", also illuminated through Ghanaian universities of Ndebang and Mawuta.

Based on Western concepts like LCP, or additionally, communicative competence or learner autonomy (Ruan and Jacob 2009), requirements for English are also outlined specifically in syllabi across the world. Interestingly, in the case of South Africa as in other colonized African countries (Probyn 2005), indigenous traditions may actually be more student-centred in practice than Western pedagogy. Western pedagogy, in fact, is frequently teacher-centred. Still, many schools outside of the West continue to push for the adoption of Western ideals, negating "indigenous knowledge systems, values and beliefs" (Larsen 2016, p. 8) and failing to recognize local realities.

### *English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) Within Higher Education*

English is one of the most widely used languages around the globe and has become an important tool for international communication. The use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education, in particular in academic discourse, has become increasingly common in non-English-speaking countries (Larsen 2016; Lu and Ares 2015). Phan Le Ha and Osman Barnawi (2015) look at the "fast-growing role of English" in IoHE as a "product and a promoter of neoliberalism" (p. 545). It reveals itself in various EMI programs, which have been implemented in universities in non-English speaking countries globally.

In particular, there are numerous examples of EMI programs across East Asia, for example, including, but not limited to, The People's Republic of China [PRC] (Lu and Ares 2015), Hong Kong [HK] (Larsen 2016), Taiwan (Shih 2014), Singapore (Rudby 2005), and Malaysia (Lim 2015). More critically perhaps is looking at the reasons why EMI programs are spreading. In the PRC, for instance, EMIs are associated with the desire to improve economically (Lu and Ares 2015). This is due in part to their strong Confucian beliefs, which stress economic well-being and education because "the individual works not for self-benefits but for the entire family" (Nisbett 2003, p. 15). In Hong Kong's context, their postcolonial status and desire to "perform Britishness" (Yeoh and Willis 2005) in its own new way followed its changing status as a Special Administrative Region of the PRC. Moreover, students in HK, Singapore and Taiwan are driven to enroll in EMI programs so they can develop and gain cultural capital and better position themselves and their families for future success and entitlement (Larsen 2016; Leonard 2008; Nisbett 2003). In Malaysia, English has spread so it can "compete successfully in the new information technology industries" (Lim 2015, p. 3).

### ***Publishing in English Academic Journals***

The emergence of English as the dominant language in academia also extends into scholarly publishing (Curry and Lillis 2004; Di Bitetti and Ferreras 2017; and Kirkpatrick 2009). Many non-native English speaking (NES) scholars feel the pressure to publish in English. For example, academics in Latin America often publish in English-language international journals rather than in the vernacular languages, and also lean heavily toward publishing in journals that are "major" and "privileged for resource allocation and academic advancement" (Torres 2011, p. 185). Other research demonstrates similar pressures academics in European countries are facing (Curry and Lillis 2004), as well as in East Asia (Lo 2009). This is evidence of the sociolinguistic domination of English. We see that, as English spreads outward, its language users inhabit a "third space" (Kramsch 1993) when it comes to academic writing and publishing interests.

Publishing in English is what Smeyers (2014) deems one of, if not, the most important driver of educational research in terms of being rewarded by one's institution. One particular Spanish professor problematizes this notion. "After six years of research, you have to select 5 things but the unwritten rule is if in those 6 years, the 5 things you present, 2 of them are in English language medium, you get the research promotion . . . the scholarships . . . projects . . . that sort of things [sic]. That's part of the pressure" (Curry and

Lillis 2004, p. 676). Publishing is often tightly linked with research funding, career advancement and promotion, rivalry among individual colleagues and parent institutions, global ranking, etc. to build "world class" institutions (Lo 2009).

Moreover, compared to English language papers, non-English papers are read and cited less frequently (Dinkel, Berth, Borckenhagen, and Brähler 2004). Non-English language journals are also usually ranked below English-language journals by the Institute for Scientific Information. Journals with a comparatively low impact factor are considered unattractive for researchers aiming to publish high-quality research. Problematically, researchers who do not have English as their first language are under more immense pressure to not only publish their research findings but to also do so English (Curry and Lillis 2004; Lillis and Curry 2010; and Swales 2004).

### **Discussion**

Internationalization of higher education is promoted as a vehicle for enhancing cross-cultural relations and for understanding of difference. However, as I have argued in this paper, the influence can also be negative under the guise of Westernization citing examples as the spread of LCP, the promotion of EMI, and the publication of articles in English language journals.

Through the global diffusion of Western ideas, thinking about education has become universal, dominated by a set of Western assumptions grounded in the broader discourse of neoliberalism (Samoff 1999; Spring 2015). These assumptions include that those in Other (non-Western) societies are homogeneous, lack free will, and are deficient (Andreotti and de Souza 2008), while the West is heterogeneous and encourages people's freedom to "craft" their own lives (Tawake 2000). Thus, the assumption is that Western values, pedagogies, and English language is best, or at least better than the "rest", continues to reinforce the binaries between the East and West.

In the context of English and association with the West, it has not developed at random. Economic, political, and sociocultural success are equated with English and LCP pedagogies in today's globalizing world has thus come to be equated with the West. Internationalization has become a one-size-fits-all approach with the "one-size" being Western and local contexts are ignored or minimized. For example, Vavrus and Bartlett (2012) note with respect to LCP in Tanzania, the initial "inequality in the distribution of pedagogical and content knowledge...due in part to teachers' differing opportunities...and their unequal access to textbooks, journals, and the internet" (p. 653).

Moreover, scholars in settings where English is not the mother tongue also face challenges with the imposition of English. Di Bitetti and Ferraras (2017) suggest that the phrase “*publish or perish*”, should be rephrased as “publish in English or perish” (p. 123), given that those who do not publish in English are at risk of being “punish[ed]” (p. 123) or not be cited at all. Thus, we can see how the imposition of LCP and EMI ignore the well-known fact that educational “directions, aims and practices, are shaped by a host of social, cultural, religious and ideological influences” (Diallo 2012, p. 175).

The imposition of English and Western pedagogical approaches does not take the local implementation challenges into account, particularly in resource-poor settings. The fact that local cultural contexts are not taken into account with the spread of LCP and EMI demonstrates how “postcolonial powers are simply imposing their views on other nations” (Spring 2015, p. 11). Clearly, the spread of LCP, EMI, and English language journals is a current manifestation of colonization. Dominant colonizing discourse depicts the West as “more knowledgeable, consummate, older, wiser” while the Other is reduced to the “naïve, younger, and inexperienced” (Kulpa 2014, p. 431). As Battiste (2004) claims, academic and pedagogical attitudes are, in fact, inherited from colonialism (i.e. Western, Eurocentric).

## Conclusion

Moving forward, it is important to take a step back and reflect. The role of the university is “to produce new knowledge in...cultural, economic and social spheres, but also to preserve the knowledge historically accumulated by civilizations, societies, communities and individuals” (Torres 2011, p. 179). Unfortunately, through the institution, Western epistemologies have been “produced and reproduced in such a way as to engineer other non-Western epistemic forms to be non-existent” (Paraskeva 2013, p. 1). The purpose of universities and the role of academics are under challenge (Blackmore 2014). As researchers, we must be aware of the systematic and continued privileging of certain knowledges, and particularly in global settings that have historically been colonized and continue to be Othered in the present.

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