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GLOBAL

Creating humane graduates for a liveable world

Thushari Welikala 27 July 2019 Share

Internationalisation of higher education is increasingly being defined and discussed in relation to its wider benefits to society. There is an acceleration of a rich range of diversified perspectives of the emerging purposes, meanings and functions of internationalisation, implying the need for considering new strategic directions for internationalisation of higher education.

The current direction

The complex relationship between internationalisation and neoliberalism has significantly shaped the ways in which universities currently articulate the purpose and values of internationalisation.

While some universities are opening up space for critical dialogue about new ways of thinking about internationalisation, the key strategic focus of international research partnerships, collaborations and international student recruitment within higher education is heavily driven by the logic of commercialism.

Producing employable graduates for the knowledge economy and increasing international student recruitment are at the centre of institutional policy on internationalisation.

But national policies on internationalisation are focused on the export ambitions of education. The United Kingdom government, for example, expects to increase the number of international students hosted in the UK to 600,000 per year by 2030 and increase the value of education exports to £35 billion (US$43 billion) per year.

The social-cultural collaborations promoted under the label of internationalisation are mainly informed by corporate cosmopolitanism. In fact, this consumerist agenda has contributed to creating a certain knowledge hegemony, in particular, within the global centres of higher education.

How universities advocate the benefits of geopolitical border crossing for higher education intricately normalises the linear flow of knowledge from particular parts of the world to the rest of the world. How internationalisation is used to project soft power and the centric nature of internationalisation do not necessarily contribute to developing genuinely internationally-minded, humane citizens.

Internationally-minded citizens

Internationally-minded, humane citizens are open to multiple perspectives of the world and are concerned about the common humanity of all people. They are capable of respecting diverse world views and knowledge systems while at the same time critically interrogating them in the process of developing new knowledge.

Such individuals have access to a multitude of ways of knowing the world. Their non-centric approaches to knowledge creation are transformative and therefore may offer feasible and more equitable strategies to address the increasingly profound social, economic and cultural challenges the world is facing today, such as increasing inequalities across societies, growing fear of the unknown, ethnic and religious tensions and multiple losses from disasters.

However, for decades, internationalisation has aimed at developing graduates who are capable of perceiving the world through Eurocentric views and values framed within neoliberal ideologies, influencing the university curricula and pedagogy to ignore different and alternative knowledge systems that are effectively being used across cultures to address socio-economic and environmental challenges in a context-friendly manner.

This restricted view about the ‘global’ world inevitably and systematically results in dispossessing our younger generations of other knowledge systems (or epistemicide as Boaventura de Sousa Santos notes).

Internationalisation should instead open up spaces for students and staff to critically complicate their familiar knowledge and understandings about the world with other unfamiliar ones.

Moving forward

Approaches to economic development and cross-cultural understanding that are in stark contrast to the self-serving practices valued by neoliberal ideology should be introduced via institutional internationalisation agendas.

For example, Buddhist philosophy which offers sustainable practices for intellectual development, peace and harmonious living; Ubuntu, the concept commonly believed in African societies that promotes the interconnected nature of human beings; and the sustainable agricultural and forestry practices of indigenous people, based on their holistic knowledge about environmental and socio-cultural factors, could effectively contribute to improving cross-cultural knowledge and skills.

Combating the increasing distrust between individuals, xenophobia and ethno-nationalism, addressing urgent environmental challenges and contributing to the achievement of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 could be embedded within the process of internationalisation.

Embedding a moral responsibility towards the self, nation and wider humanity within internationalisation policy and practice at an institutional level can effectively be used for

enhancing human lives by contributing to developing graduates for a successful, sustainable and liveable world.

The idea of creating graduates for a liveable world offers a sustainable parallel to the notion of creating global citizens for the knowledge economy.

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