Chapter 10

The Accessibility of Internationalisation: Disabled Students – Experiences, Difficulties, and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the complexities associated with the genuine accessible and inclusive internationalised higher education (HE) practises. With the diversification of international student population, it is all the more necessary to ensure that the university policy and practice is compliant and responsive to the differing needs related to students’ multiplicity of identities. Practices, which may on surface appear to be inclusive of international students, in reality may not necessarily be accessible to those international students who also belong to one or more other minority groups. This chapter will therefore consider the application of some ‘inclusive’ practice insights that accommodate diversity of international students’ needs. The conclusion will highlight the benefits of all-encompassing inclusive practices and the resulting wider implications for the student population at large.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out to contextualise and discuss the inclusivity of university specific practices, mainly concerned with pre-enrolment issues, which claim to apply to ‘all’ students. The accessibility of such services as admission and speculative university visits in relation to disabled international students will be examined. By listening to a group of students’ voices, the chapter will comment on different aspects of inclusivity when exploring both areas and will share policy insights.

On a global level widening a diverse array of students’ participation in higher education (HE) has been high on governments’ policy agenda (Bista & Foster, 2015; HEFCE, 2010). Considering that globalisation of education has been a key effort in driving the widening participation agenda, this chapter begins with some comments on internationalisation and the benefits gained through transnationalisation.
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of education for countries, universities and individuals concerned. I will then explore a set of challenges that internationalisation of education presents for disabled students specifically. To unfold, firstly, the difficulties that non-disabled international students experience while studying abroad will be reviewed. Secondly, a set of barriers encountered by disabled students in their domestic setting will be briefly discussed. Thirdly and more significant to this chapter, the particular experiences of disabled international students, stemming from the intersectionality of their double or sometimes multiple identities will be highlighted and discussed. The multiplicity of barriers faced by this group of students often has a greater impact on their academic and social life and may reinforce their marginal position within the HE sector. Once barriers are identified, some inclusive and flexible practice insights that may help to accommodate a variety of needs will be shared.

MAIN BODY

Governments across the world have linked HE reform strategies to the concept of ‘globalisation’. Internationalisation of education has thereby become an integral part of the diversification programme (Naidoo, 2003). Given this, Gribble and Ziguras (2003) argue that transnationalisation of education is a significant feature of globalised HE, facilitating the operation of increasingly international, mobile, tradable and commercial programmes and services with high incentives for providers. In a university framework internationalisation has been referred to the integration of international and intercultural dimensions into a range of research and pedagogical projects affectively leading onto an expanded range of international activities for students and academic staff between universities and other educational institutions (Robson, 2011).

As a consequence, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the globe increasingly promote and welcome international students’ participation in their universities (Ramsden, 2009; Travis, 2011). Specifically, in the current economic climate, with ever decreasing public funds, transforming and commodifying education into services, and students into valuable customers has become all the more attractive proposition. The British HE sector, for example, has been known as a key export industry, outstripping the export value of textiles, clothing, publishing, cultural and media industries and even alcoholic drinks (Vickers & Bekhradnia, 2007). That said the impact on the British HE with regards to the recent result of the European Referendum remains to be seen. This may have a drastic effect on the number of incoming students, and also on the several thousand graduates who remain in the UK each year to live and contribute economically, compared to pre-Brexit period. A survey conducted by Hobsons, a student recruitment consultancy, reported that 30 per cent of international students surveyed have already expressed less willingness to come to live and study in the UK, whereas six per cent of the students were definitely against choosing Britain as a study destination; following the EU referendum they felt the country had a less tolerant political atmosphere (Aftab, 2016). That said, in general terms the presence of international graduates in host countries is in itself a notable economic advantage (Vickers & Bekhradnia, 2007). Therefore, universities globally approach internationalisation as a considerable source of income (Graf, 2009), as business opportunities with high financial incentives, which may be promoted to fulfil the desire for precious revenue, whilst designed to raise institutional profile to attract new students.

All these economic incentives are intertwined with the pedagogic benefits and the ‘cultural and intellectual diversity’ (Amos, 2015) that develops from the creation of multicultural learning campuses.