Students' experiences of internationalised MSc programmes in Denmark

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Abstract

It is often assumed that the simple presence of international students and ubiquitous use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) are the main agents of internationalisation of higher education (HE), whereby English equals international education and inbound student mobility equals increased internationalisation. While there are perceived benefits of these two instruments at the institutional and national levels, students' experiences of internationalisation in a Danish context are under-explored. Using a digital ethnographic enquiry, empirical evidence draws on 126 hours of observation of online teaching and 38 semi-structured interviews with domestic and international students of MSc programmes in Denmark. This article contends that the meaning of internationalisation and self-perceived gains are experienced differently between Danish and international students. The disconnect between discourses and actual experiences of internationalisation reported in this paper highlights the need for further student-centred research to inform institutional policies and practices, challenging long-held views of what 'international' means. Internationalisation practices that foster international spaces in which diverse groups of students can engage in meaningful interactions require those working in HE to realign institutional activities with humanistic values for the common good.

Introduction

It is often assumed that the simple presence of international students and ubiquitous use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) are the main agents of internationalisation of higher education (HE), whereby English equals international education and inbound student mobility equals increased

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internationalisation (Beelen and Jones, 2015; de Wit, 2011). In Denmark, English had been used as a medium of instruction since the late 1990s, and many higher education institutions increasingly provided a number of EMI courses, especially at the postgraduate level in the natural sciences and business programmes (Jensen et al., 2013). However, in 2018, universities were required to cut up to 25% of their programmes offered in English through new governmental initiatives.[1]

Driven by the Bologna Agreement in the late 1990s, as European institutions sought to internationalise their programmes, internationalisation is not a homogenous process and has evolved through a range of economic, political, and normative motivations that have shaped institutional and national policies over the years (Knight and de Wit, 2018). In this paper, internationalisation is conceptualised thus:

> The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (de Wit et al., 2015: 29)

In this sense, higher education institutions increasingly acknowledge the importance of expanding student learning and development outcomes that include intercultural, international and global competencies (e.g. Brown and Jones, 2007; de Wit, 2018; Lee et al., 2012; Soria and Troisi, 2014). In the context of a global knowledge economy, internationalisation of HE has brought about increasingly bold statements about the skills, knowledge and attitudes students should bring to their lives and work in a globalised and interconnected society (Leask and Bridge, 2013). However, whilst instruments of internationalisation (e.g. EMI, student mobility, staff mobility) may provide intercultural and international opportunities for students, these are not necessarily automatic or explicit outcomes of internationalisation (e.g. Lantz-Deaton, 2017; Spangler and Adriansen, 2021). Thus, research on students' attitudes towards recognising and valuing the purpose of internationalisation through their experiences has become progressively explored (e.g. Mortensen and Fabricius, 2014; Nada et al., 2018).

In the Danish HE context however, student-focused research is rare, and this study thus seeks to contribute to the literature by specifically focusing on the views of Danish and international[2] students concerning their experiences of internationalised Master of Science (MSc) programmes in Denmark. This paper is part of a larger project exploring six instruments of internationalisation: inbound mobility, outbound mobility, EMI, international specialisation, internationalisation at home and mobility of researchers and how they affect perceptions of quality, relevance and learning in HE (Adriansen, 2019). The qualitative research reported here uses a spatial lens (Lefebvre, 1991), and empirical data is analysed through Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) focusing on two instruments of internationalisation: EMI and inbound student mobility.

To contextualise the arguments in the paper, the first section outlines the context of Danish internationalisation of HE, and then internationalisation specifically related to EMI and inbound student mobility. This is followed by the methodology section about how this study was conducted, followed by discussion of the findings.

Context of the study

In the past decades, Danish universities have moved from a largely national agenda to a more international one, undergoing profound political and socio-economic transformations centred on internationalisation, marketisation and competition (Gregersen et al., 2014; Hultgren, 2016). In the process, they have expanded their use of English, as reflected in research publications, EMI programmes provision, and recruitment of international students and staff (Hultgren et al., 2014).

Studies on Danish HE internationalisation (e.g. Jensen, 2014; Mosneaga and Agergaard, 2012) have shown how universities navigate between passively 'being internationalised' and actively 'doing internationalisation' through discussions of how they envisage, strategise and adjust to the increasing pressures within both national and supra-national policy circles. Nationally, this is manifested in reforms making universities accountable for meeting national objectives of international student recruitment, associated with Denmark's competitiveness agenda (Mosneaga and Agergaard, 2012), whereby English has been accepted as a natural, albeit contested, consequence of internationalisation (Hultgren, 2017; Wright and Zitnansky, 2021). While there are perceived benefits of EMI and inbound student mobility at the individual, institutional, and national levels, with an assumption that EMI can enhance access to intercultural learning opportunities for students (Galloway et al., 2020b), what this means in practice is less clear.

Inbound student mobility and EMI in the Danish context of HE internationalisation

Internationalisation has been an important agenda in Danish higher education (HE) since the 1990s, and Denmark has been relatively open and willing to embrace structural reforms supported by institutional and national policymakers. Since the Bologna Agreement of 1999, and the Lisbon Strategy (Teichler, 2012) later named the enhancement of student mobility between various European countries as a major strategic purpose, Danish universities witnessed a steady increase in the number of international students, and more recently, the Danish Ministry of Education has shown that the number of international students in the past 20 years increased from 5503 to 14,547 (MOE, 2018). As noted by Kjærgaard (2009: 30), 'foreign students and researchers are an important weapon in the global battle for knowledge and Denmark is ready to join the fight'.

Denmark's HE expenditure is among the highest in Europe, and well ahead of its peers in Northern Europe (OECD, 2020), and other factors such as English as a medium of instruction (EMI), tuition-free education and eligibility to a stipend have made Denmark a popular education hub (Wright and Zitnansky, 2021). Tuition at Danish public and most private educational institutions is free for both Danish and EU/EEA students, as well as for students participating in exchange programmes, provided by the State Educational Grant and Loan Scheme (OECD, 2020). In the context of the present study, within Science, Technology and Mathematics (STEM), postgraduate (e.g. MSc and PhD) students are recruited through international advertisements and, in 2019, 19% of the overall master's degree enrolment was made up of international students, which was above the EU countries' average (OECD, 2019).

Before experiencing exponential growth of EMI programmes, driven by the Bologna Agreement of 1999, the Nordic countries were pioneers in adopting English in university programmes during the 1980s. In this context, national policy initiatives towards internationalisation have often led to a top-down transition towards EMI, and trends have led to increased acceptance and normalisation of English as a necessity in internationalised programmes in the eight Danish universities and other HE institutions (Airey et al., 2017; Werther et al., 2014). While the relationship between internationalisation and EMI is a complex one, the extent to which the simple presence of international students and ubiquitous English language use contribute to 'meaningful intercultural interactions' remains unclear (Galloway et al., 2020a, 2020b; Leask and Carroll, 2011: 655). As noted by Tange (2021), expectations on lecturers and students' ability to seamlessly switch to English in Danish HE are largely taken for granted. Thus, while the interaction between Danish and English languages in internationalised study programmes has been the topic of polarised academic debates, mainly focused on lecturers' ideologies and perceptions of parallel language use (e.g. Gregersen and Ostman, 2018; Hultgren, 2017), students' views of internationalisation as related to EMI in Danish universities is an under-researched topic.

Furthermore, if intercultural, international and global dimensions are expected outcomes of internationalisation of HE, internationalisation and integration are closely related (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2019). In this sense, exploring students' perceptions of internationalisation articulates to wider debates on internationalisation 'at home' in different contexts (e.g. Brown and Daly, 2004; Kuteeva, 2020; Phuong and Nguyen, 2019; Ward, 2006), where, generally, domestic students are largely uninterested in initiating contact with international students for the purposes of fostering and developing cross-cultural interactions. Domestic students have their well-established lives and networks and may find little or no interest in purposefully meeting international students outside the HE institution (Arkoudis and Baik, 2014; Bethel et al., 2016; Fabricius et al., 2017; Montgomery, 2010). Research in similar contexts has indicated that it is not always easy to make friends with domestic students (e.g. Grayson, 2008; Sherry et al., 2010), for various reasons inherent in the host country's features (e.g. language, culture) and, conversely, the international students themselves can be perceived as a closed community (Deardorff, 2008, 2009). As a non-Anglophone country, it is well established that Danes are highly proficient in English, while international students may have a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. What is yet to be explored is whether internationalisation discourses are translated into educational practices, for example integrating international and intercultural dimensions, as expected and desired outcomes of internationalisation.

Situated within these debates, this qualitative study addressed the following research questions: (a) what are domestic and international students' experiences of internationalised MSc programmes in a Danish university? and (b) to what extent are EMI and inbound student mobility related to such experiences?

Methodology

This qualitative research study employed ethnographic inquiry (Mills and Morton, 2013), through virtual ethnographic fieldwork (Hine, 2000; Hjorth et al., 2017), including 126 hours of online teaching/learning observation and 38 semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996). Discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) was subsequently used to analyse the data through a spatial analytical lens (Levebvre, 1991).

A constructionist epistemological position was adopted to refer to the term 'experience', which is a complex and multifaceted concept with diverse philosophical underpinnings. In addition, a relativist ontological stance was taken, whereby 'human realities are apprehended in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially-based, local and specific in nature' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 110). This philosophical paradigm, which is aligned with the spatial analytical lens employed here, emphasised the contextual nature of the qualitative research findings, which were elicited in a hermeneutical (Heidegger [1889–1976], Heidegger, 1962) co-constructive manner between participants and the researcher.

A critical spatial approach to internationalisation

The present study used a critical spatial (Lefebvre, 1991) lens to explore how Danish and international students experience and perceive internationalised programmes in a Danish university. This is articulated with English as a medium of instruction (EMI) and inbound student mobility as producing internationalisation spaces, in a relational manner. Space is therefore both material and the product of social relations in places, a result of human actions. Thus, this analytical lens incorporates all interrelationships and coexistence of materialities, as well as social production of internationalisation of higher education (HE) (Larsen, 2016) through students' social relationships.

The spatial approach as analytical lens and interpretative perspective is transdisciplinary (Soja, 1996) and provides a new set of ontological assumptions (Escobar, 2007; Lefebvre, 1991) about how the social world is fundamentally spatial. In a globalised world where the flow of people and knowledge is fluid and relational, it challenges assumptions of internationalisation of HE as automatically providing students with the skills and cultural knowledge through intercultural engagement. In this context, a spatial approach has allowed the researcher to generate data about perceived 'international experiences', in the production and negotiation of spaces of internationalisation in Danish HE.

Research setting

The study was conducted at a research-intensive Faculty of Science at a Danish university. Three different courses, which are an integral part of eight Master of Science (MSc) programmes, were selected for virtual ethnographic fieldwork.

Post-Bologna, the MSc study programmes in Denmark are organised in closed 2-year Master-entities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018). However, some study-programmes are still considered a de facto 5-year programme (a 3-year BSc and 2-year MSc study-programme) by students, and other MSc study-programmes do not have a 3-year BSc-programme; hence, in the MSc programmes under study, all students are 'new'. All eight study-programmes are delivered in English and attract international students. Teaching staff comprise Danish and international academics.

Positionality

At the time of conducting the research, the author was a postdoctoral research fellow, at the *GeoInt* project (Adriansen, 2019). The researcher is Australian/Brazilian with international experience as a former PhD student in the UK, and a transnational teaching scholar in four continents to date. In the context of this study, their positionality has played a significant role as both an insider and outsider. For instance, it proved to be beneficial given the richness of data collected: while Danish participants relayed their accounts to a 'non-Danish scholar', international students seemed to feel at ease sharing uncomfortable and adjustment issues about their experiences of living and studying abroad.

Participants and the ethnographic online space

Virtual ethnographic fieldwork (Hine, 2000; Hjorth et al., 2017) was conducted between April and June 2021 in Denmark, where the institution had adopted full online delivery due to COVID-19. Fieldwork comprised two components: firstly, the researcher attended daily online lectures, seminars and students' group work. With a focus on individual interactions in the classroom (as a whole and in breakout rooms), students' behaviour, activities, and interactions, including students' perspectives on their behaviour, were observed, totalling 126 hours. Initially a 'fly on the wall' (non-participatory observation), the researcher subsequently engaged in participatory observation when either invited or when questioning, for example language switch during students' interactions. During these exchanges, students eventually voiced their interest in participating in this study and, in a snowball fashion, they increasingly volunteered to take part in the research.

The second component comprised semi-structured online interviews: a purposive sample (Bryman, 2015) of 38 full-time MSc students (out of the poll of students under observation in the three courses) who had been living in Denmark for nearly a year or longer, volunteered for this

research. These students were enrolled in the final third of their first MSc year, and this final stage of their first MSc year was chosen for fieldwork because it is the taught element of their master's degree, after which they embark on their research-focused second year. The semi-structured interview guide, which was designed based on a thematic literature review, the research questions, and with the purposive sample in mind, was piloted prior to data collection. Participants were provided with an information sheet and a consent form prior to interviews, which lasted between 45 and 70 minutes, and were audio-recorded and transcribed. A good rapport had been built with prospective informants during the first stage of fieldwork, so the interviews were conversational and covered themes around personal and academic experiences of internationalisation within the institution and beyond.

Final sampling included 20 Danish students (15 male and 5 female) and 18 international students (6 male and 12 female): 11 European, seven non-European (American, Chinese and Brazilian). Most students were aged between 24 and 26 years old (24 informants), with 10 students aged between 20 and 23, and 4 between 27 and 30. Most Danish students in this research had at least one semester experience abroad as part of their undergraduate studies and, as most international students, claimed to be multilingual (speaking at least more than one language besides their mother tongue). International students' English proficiency required to enrol in MSc programmes is IELTS 6.5 (with no band below 5.5), unless they had undertaken a full undergraduate degree in Denmark, or one delivered in English in either European or Anglophone countries, or if they are native speakers. Finally, students from other Nordic countries were deliberately excluded due to similarities of the educational and welfare systems. While the region is not necessarily monolithic, nuanced variables would deserve another layer of analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper.

The following sections discuss prevalent themes and subthemes around how students experienced internationalised programmes, and how they negotiated and created spaces of internationalisation through their social interactions in the classroom. Commonalities and differences between international and domestic students are identified and discussed, incorporating both interview and ethnographic data collected during fieldwork. The excerpts in these sections are representative of most students (at least 80% of both the Danish and international participants) in the eight MSc programmes.

EMI makes the programme 'international' when international academics are involved

Danish student: *I think it's very international [. . .]the programme is in English and it feels like I am in an international environment, I don't think we miss anything because it's in English; throughout my courses we have had teaching assistants from different countries, and they often graded our lab reports very differently, I remember some friends who had some [international] TAs who had reviewed their lab report and it just came back with a million comments like 'do this.. do this. . .try to do this. . .' and my group had a Danish TA and our feedback was like '. . .it's fine. . .' [laughs]'*

Danish student: *The entire programme is in English, but I love the fact that professors come from different universities and different backgrounds [. . .] in this department, many famous physicists from different parts of the world are lecturing at this university, I think the international scene is totally relevant for this experience.*

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in itself was not perceived as a sufficient instrument of internationalisation. Danish students associated the use of English with a diverse academic body as relevant to an international education experience and, although they mentioned that learning was not compromised because of EMI, they sounded appreciative of varied pedagogical approaches.

However, during online teaching/learning observations, code switching[3] was quite frequent among Danes, who tended to form groups among themselves when they had the option to choose their online breakout rooms. When asked why, the common response was: *'. . .although the material and classes are in English, we prefer to check our understanding in Danish''*. This suggests that L1 may have a function in clarifying concepts and issues, whereby code-switching strategies presumably facilitate learning (Cook, 2001). Yet, code switching was not observed among international students during interactions, even in groups with students of the same nationality. Notwithstanding, while Danish students were fully proficient in English, it raises questions on whether their academic English skills were enough to comprehend deep knowledge, while challenging the pervasive deficit narrative of international students in terms of lacking language skills (e.g. Gautam et al., 2016; Khanal and Gaulee, 2019). Learning experiences through EMI in the Danish context, to some extent, creates similar challenges for Danish and international students.

In addition to language, most participants in this study seemed aware that internationalisation of HE goes beyond student and staff mobility, as intercultural and global dimensions of HE were highly valued. In this context, a prevalent subtheme amongst international students was how Danish pedagogy was perceived as domestically-oriented:

> **International student**: *My programme is not thaat international. . .as it doesn't feel like I am entering a master's degree where everyone comes from different places and the content is as international or as globalised as possible. . .it feels like I entered a Danish university, where the Danish professors are teaching Danish students. . . and you are allowed in. . .just because everything is taught in English.*

> **International student**: *I quite like one of the lecturers, sometimes I can understand foreign teachers better, and sometimes I don't understand Danish teachers. . .and I think international teachers are better than Danish teachers, perhaps because they know why we don't understand something. . .*

Having international scholars was important for international students in terms of learning and teaching styles, and these findings show that EMI does not necessarily translate into an 'international education experience' if pedagogical approaches do not meet the needs of a multicultural classroom. Based on observations and participants' accounts, their learning experiences (e.g. level of understanding and interactions) were not impacted by English proficiency issues (their own or that of the teaching staff), but by varied pedagogical approaches, suggesting that international scholars seemed to empathise with and respond to diverse students.

Within wider debates on issues encountered by academic staff in English-taught programmes in Europe (e.g. Beelen, 2011; Wächter and Maiworm, 2014), it has been found that even 'strong English proficiency of the teaching staff does not imply that they can readily handle the heterogeneous command of English, academic and cultural differences of the students in the classroom' (Wächter and Maiworm, 2014: 105).

As previously alluded to, although code-switching was observed during Danish students' interactions in classroom activities, their learning challenges were not associated with staff's proficiency levels of English, based on their accounts. This contrasts with findings of a large scale mixed-method study undertaken in Denmark, where both Danish and international students' ratings (*n* = 1707 participants) of the lecturers' general teaching competence were influenced by their perceptions of the lecturers' English skills (Jensen et al., 2013). Notwithstanding, similar to the findings in this paper, their study further indicated a 'not exactly international experience' of education, when taught by Danish staff, since international students perceived Danish academic pedagogical approaches as domestically-oriented, despite of EMI. This has also been reported in another European context of internationalisation at home, whereby an artificial character of education in English by Dutch teaching staff for Dutch students was observed (Beelen, 2011).

Overall, this (un)internationalised view of Danish pedagogy by international students suggests that students' perceptions of internationalisation go beyond the 'inter-national' level, whereby English as a medium of instruction is not enough to make their experiences *international*. Interestingly, regardless of EMI, it would naturally be expected that local academics would be their prime contact abroad, and would thus constitute an international experience in itself, as they have moved to a new country – however, that did not seem to be the case. This also raises questions around how 'internationalisation at home' is developed in practice, as domestic academic staff involved in internationalised programmes need to address not only a diverse body of students with varied cultural and learning experiences, but also provide an international education experience to domestic students.

Students negotiating international spaces

The presence of an international student body was highly valued by both domestic and international participants as being part of an 'international' experience. However, Danish and international participants created international spaces differently, judging from the interviews and the ethnographic observations:

> **International student**: *In my experience thus far, I have had colleagues from different parts of the world, and I wish I heard more from them during the classes, I feel it's pretty much 'black and white' when teachers are lecturing or giving the seminars, where not all voices are invited to participate in a full class.*

This under-utilised (re)source of diverse voices in the classroom was another aspect associated with pedagogical practices not meeting multicultural classroom needs, whereby internationalisation might be taken for granted by institutions assuming that the simple presence of foreign students makes it international. In fact, during observations, these participants' views were vouched for by the diverse presence of students in the classroom and the rare interactive exchanges with academic staff during teaching and learning sessions.

Concerning student engagement and interactions, international students further shared their challenges in negotiating international spaces with domestic students in the classroom and beyond the institution:

> **International student**: *I think my experience is international, but there is a very obvious divide between international students and Danish students in the classroom. I hang out with international students a lot, and even though they have different cultural backgrounds, we have faced challenges together and learned new things together, our friendship grew so fast, but not with Danes: they are very friendly, very polite, we work together sometimes in groups, but nothing beyond just being good colleagues.*

> **International student**: *I have noticed that there are lots of international students in Denmark, nearly not enough in my programme though, which is kind of disappointing. . .because I think Danish people are very friendly, but they are difficult to approach, so I do get along very well with all my Danish classmates, but we don't hang out during the weekends, and I have tried it.*

Amongst international participants, there was a clear sense of the importance of international student life as whole, through both personal and intellectual transformations, as well as meaningful and culturally diverse relationships. Building meaningful relationships was a prevalent subtheme amongst international students, who expected it to go beyond the classroom and the institution. The importance of interactions between domestic and international students has been reported in a number of studies (e.g. Colvin et al., 2014; Fabricius et al., 2017; Marginson, 2012; Montgomery, 2010).

These authors discuss how engaging relationships among students from diverse backgrounds can potentially lead to increased feelings of belonging, increased awareness and understanding of varied perspectives, and better preparation for the workplace. However, the findings in this paper suggest that while international students desire greater contact with domestic students and, as agentic individuals, attempt to create and negotiate spaces of internationalisation within and beyond the institution, this is not necessarily reciprocated by domestic students. By the same token, in a global and interconnected society, students have increasingly been required to develop both personal and professional understanding of the international and intercultural aspects of their field of study (Beelen and Jones, 2018), which are also expected outcomes of internationalisation of HE.

As evidenced in this research, to Danish participants, the presence of an international student body was valued as part of an international education experience, but these international spaces were limited to classroom interactions, based on most accounts:

> **Danish student**: *I think it's very international, I think I've been around almost 50 – 60% of students from different places, and I really like people coming from other places. . . it's a way to get information from other countries by talking with them, so. . .I like working with international students.*

International students seem to offer a 'window to the world' to domestic students, but predominantly within the educational institution: *I'm very happy that in this programme nearly 70% of students are international, which is a rich diversity and I think they bring something extra to my education, that I wouldn't be able to achieve in a Danish classroom.* Interestingly, while most Danish participants valued the presence of international students as adding to their educational experiences, ethnographic observations showed that this does not necessarily translate into practice, as Danes tended to form groups amongst themselves when they were not randomly grouped. This disconnect between discourses and practices raises questions about the extent to which domestic students benefit from internationalisation, or even if they are interested in fostering relationships as part of their 'international' education experience.

Furthermore, the differences reported in this section concerning international and Danish students' negotiations of international spaces contrast with the body of literature (e.g., Deardorff, 2008, 2009; Galloway et al., 2017, 2020a; Grayson, 2008; Osmond and Roed, 2010; Sherry et al., 2010) on the main challenges associated with social interactions in internationalised HE contexts. In those studies, mostly in Anglophone countries, language and culture have consistently been shown as barriers for international students in bonding with domestic students, while the international student community can be perceived as 'closed' by domestic students. In Denmark, a non-Anglophone country, it could be assumed that both Danes and international students would be equally challenged and/or encouraged to initiate interactions, where English in itself would not preclude motivation for social interactions, but that did not seem to be the case. Moreover, although the international student body was multicultural and multilingual, participants accounts show that they did not cluster in terms of common backgrounds or similar cultural knowledge.

These findings show that expanding access to international programmes does not automatically provide students with the skills and cultural knowledge needed to take advantage of available opportunities (Eiras and Huijser, 2021; Oleksiyenko, 2018), nor does the presence of foreign students and scholars guarantee spontaneous cross-cultural interactivity and enrichment (Oleksiyenko, 2018).

Conclusion

This paper has explored domestic and international MSc students' perceptions of internationalisation, and to what extent these are associated with EMI and/or inbound student mobility, in a Danish

university. This research has provided insights into how internationalisation impacts domestic and international students differently in Denmark. For international participants, an international education experience includes diverse pedagogy, and meaningful interactions with multicultural students within and outside the classroom, through engagement both as individuals and as students. For domestic participants, international experiences were expressed in terms of classroom interactions and activities, which were observed to be quite limited in their actual practices.

Empirical evidence in this paper raises questions as to whether 'internationalisation at home' actually benefits Danish students, or even if the internationalised programmes (as advertised in the institution's marketing material) target international students, as an isolated group that could benefit from such an education. The findings show that while inbound student mobility and EMI are instruments to promote internationalisation in Denmark, there are several pedagogical practices that do not seem to be aligned with discourses of internationalisation. This paper further sheds a light on a range of institutional (e.g. pedagogical approaches; language of instruction) and individual (e.g. language, culture, and motivation) challenges associated with negotiations of international spaces both amongst students, and academic staff and students. Engagement and integration of students in the classroom require pedagogical preparation and effort, so the intentional diversity brought by recruitment of international students can be translated into intercultural, international and global dimensions of education, from which both domestic and international students could benefit.

Finally, the disconnect between discourses and actual experiences of internationalisation reported in this paper, which echoes broader European contexts of internationalisation, affords three main contributions of this research: (a) it contributes to the literature on internationalisation of HE 'at home' in the Danish context from domestic and international students' perspectives; (b) it engages with wider debates on instruments of internationalisation of HE and how they impact on students' experiences; and (c) it highlights the need for further student-centred research to inform institutional policies and practices, challenging long-held views of what 'international' means. Internationalisation practices that foster international spaces in which diverse groups of students can engage in meaningful interactions require those working in HE to realign institutional activities with humanistic values for the common good.

While the research reported in this paper can only imply causal factors underlying the differences identified among students' experiences, it is important to highlight the complexities of their experiences. The fact that evidence was based on one Danish university demonstrates one of the limitations of generalising these research findings to other internationalised programmes in other HE institutions in Denmark, but it potentially offers implications for future research on how international spaces can be created and negotiated. It may also further inform educational policies on more diverse pedagogical approaches to preparing citizens for a globalised society.

Data availability statement

Research data are not shared.

Declaration of conflicting interests

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Ethical guidelines

This research was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines produced by Aarhus University (where the research was based during the data collection phase).

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Notes

1. The Danish student grant (SU: Statens Uddannelsesstotte) is a type of direct financial support, non-returnable grant, that the Danish government offers to students, regardless of their financial status. The underlying rationale is to provide equal education opportunities and enable social mobility of students whose parents could not support them while studying (MOE, 2021). In 2013, the European Court of Justice decided that EU and EEA students who work part-time in Denmark are eligible for the same student grant as Danish students, and a ceiling for net spending for SU on EU/EEA students was agreed upon. In 2018, that gross ceiling had been exceeded (OECD, 2020), and the only legal way to prevent EU/EEA (non-Danish speaking) students from applying for SU was to limit English taught programmes, which also affected fee-paying international students (Wright and Zitnansky, 2021).
2. For the purposes of this study, 'international' student is defined as non-Danish students. Although the author acknowledges that the single category '*the* international student' does not account for the diversity and the complex spatial vectors socially and historically constructed (Beelen and Jones, 2018), the main arguments here are focused on two collective (geographical) groups: Danish and non-Danish students, which is also aligned with the (legal) Danish MOE definition of international students studying in Denmark (MOE, 2014).
3. Code switching is a bilingual-mode activity, the alternation between languages or linguistic codes during interactions, typically speakers' native language (L1) and second/foreign language (Cook, 2001).

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