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Internationalisation of teacher education in Sweden

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Introduction

Sweden has as a strategic goal the development of a knowledge based society. The creation, transfer and application of knowledge are assumed to be of prime importance for a process of further social and economic development. The Swedish Government (2005) recognises that a knowledge society is characterised by international cooperation and increased competition across national borders. The internationalisation of higher education is expected to contribute to raising its quality. Undergraduates, doctoral students, researchers and teachers from other countries or with international experience are considered as an asset for the development and quality of educational and research environments. The experience of internationalisation (including studies of foreign languages) can broaden a person’s worldview and help to promote understanding and respect for other perspectives, cultures and traditions.

In order to bring about continuous and systematic work on the internationalisation of higher education, the Swedish Government has developed a policy that universities must conduct active internationalisation efforts (Swedish Government, 2005). Together with other European countries, Sweden participates in the Bologna Process, the aim of which is to promote mobility and employability and make Europe a more competitive continent for higher education. The Bologna Process aims to establish a structure of three cycles for higher education (bachelor, master, and doctorate) that Sweden began to implement gradually in 2007. Sweden also emphasises the international openness of higher education and aims to strengthen its global attractiveness and competitiveness.

The Swedish context and internationalisation

In total, there were 9,256,300 people living in Sweden in 2008 (SCB, 2009). It is a rather small country with an export oriented economy that justifies the importance of international contacts for successful trade relations. Historically, being a country in the far north of Europe, Sweden has experienced a kind of geographical isolation, but there has always been an interest in and cultural attraction to continental Europe. The cold climate has also forced the majority of Swedish people to travel to southern Europe and other warm countries for their holidays. Hence, these factors are strong contributing motives for the internationalisation of the Swedish society in general.

Swedish schools also provide effective foreign language education which, in combination with the immersion of youth into an international culture through modern media, assures a good proficiency in English for the majority of the population. This becomes an important precondition for internationalisation activities at higher education level. However, there is also a competing national policy concerned with promoting the teaching of home languages for national minorities and immigrant children. Officially, Sweden has five national minorities: Jews, the Roma, the Sami, the Swedish Finns and the Tornealeders and the five corresponding minority languages are Yiddish, Romany Chib, Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli.
In addition, several major immigrant group languages are used in the processing of information in the Swedish civic society. Thus, the National Agency for Higher Education (http://hsv.se/) that has a central responsibility for higher education in Sweden provides information in nine minority languages including Somali, Bosnian, Turkish, and Spanish. Information about high school opportunities provided by the Swedish National Agency for Education (http://www.skolverket.se/) is presented in 15 different languages (http://www.modersmal.net/) as well as in “easy Swedish”. This information targets the almost 20% of school age children who have other home languages than Swedish.

Over the last decades, Sweden has been profoundly transformed through the impact of immigration. In total, about twenty percent of residents have an immigrant background. Sweden is officially declared to be a multicultural society where cultural diversity is expected to enrich the country and make it more competitive on a global market. Since the 1980s most of the immigrants have come from the Middle East as asylum seekers. Although the asylum policies in Sweden, as in the European Union in general, have become much more restrictive in the past decade, a considerable increase in immigration continues through family unification. In 2008 101,200 persons immigrated into Sweden. This is the highest figure ever recorded (SCB, 2009). In some Swedish schools, children with more than fifty different mother-tongues are represented (Rabo, 2007). Having such a significant immigrant population within the country makes domestic internationalisation work very important.

The internationalisation of higher education

Universities and higher education institutions in Sweden are public authorities that enjoy a great deal of autonomy. They decide how to organise their programmes and what courses to offer and their contents. The operations of higher education institutions in Sweden are largely funded by state grants based on the numbers of students and their performance. There are 14 state universities in Sweden and 22 state university colleges. Many of the higher education institutions offer programmes – often at master’s level – with an international focus. Nearly three hundred master’s programmes are offered in the medium of English (HSV, 2005).

The Nordic dimension (exchange programmes and networks for the Nordic countries) was the most important international collaboration activity for universities before Sweden joined the European Union 15 years ago. After that, the European dimension started to dominate the national political agenda and practical internationalisation work at Swedish universities.¹

The most popular destinations for Swedish mobile students are the UK, USA and Spain, which together take 45 percent of outgoing students. A large proportion of incoming students to Sweden come from Germany, Finland and France, which together are responsible for almost a

¹ Currently, the Baltic countries are becoming an engine in the development of Nordic cooperation. For example, the recently launched programme: "Björk - study in the Nordic countries!" intends to include the whole Baltic region in Nordic cooperation. The core of the programme is the website www.bjork.norden.ee, which collects information about studying, living, financing and working in all the Nordic countries.
quarter of incoming students. In total, the number of incoming students is now almost as large as the number of outgoing and fluctuates around 27,000 persons per year (HSV, 2007).

In Sweden, funding for university teachers and students is available from different sources (government and private foundations, student unions, national and local internationalisation support programmes) for short term stay abroad, study and research visits. The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (http://www.stint.se/en) provides grants to invite foreign guests to Sweden and to initiate common research projects. It also provides scholarships for PhD students and researchers for longer stays abroad.

There has been an increase in recent years in the number of foreign doctoral students on Swedish third-cycle programmes. The proportion of foreign doctoral students increased from 15 percent in 1997 to 29 percent in 2007. About half of the foreign PhD students who took their doctoral degrees in Sweden in the period 1997-2001 remained in the country five years after taking their degree (HSV, 2009b). According to HSV (2009b), a higher proportion of foreign doctoral students take their degrees within a specific period, as compared with their Swedish colleagues (5 and 8 years, respectively). Traditionally, the internationalisation of research cooperation has been a strong component of academic work in Sweden.

**Challenges for the internationalisation of teacher education**

Teacher education in Sweden is part of the university structure and is offered at twenty six educational institutions. It is the biggest undergraduate programme. Student teachers comprise about 10% (36 000) of the total number of students. About 8,000 new students are admitted to teacher education each a year. About 5,000 faculty staff work with Swedish teacher education (SOU, 2008).

Teaching is not a profession with a high social status in Sweden, so many students with below-average grades are admitted to teacher training education. It is also an education dominated by women. On average 75% of teacher education students are female (HSV, 2009a). In the present Swedish teacher education, the study of subject and pedagogical practice are integrated and there is only one teachers’ degree. The teaching degree also includes training for research (Regeringskansliet, 2003). The teacher education programme is included in the Bologna process.

In the current reform of teacher education, four overall perspectives should run through all teacher education. These are:
- a scientific and critical approach
- a historical perspective
- an international perspective
- information and communications technology (ICT) as an educational resource.

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2 *Foreign doctoral students* are defined as persons born outside Sweden who have come to Sweden less than two years prior to starting third-cycle studies.
The historical and international perspectives are expected to broaden the students’ knowledge of education in time and space and to counteract a narrowly contemporary and national view of school and learning (SOU, 2008).

An outline of the new teacher education structure, according to current curriculum reform suggestions, is presented in table 1 below. This includes, among other innovations, different degrees for primary and secondary school teachers.

Table 1. Suggested structure of the new teacher education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional qualification</th>
<th>Primary school teacher</th>
<th>Secondary school teacher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialisation for:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preschool</td>
<td>preschool - year 3</td>
<td>grades 4–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preschool</td>
<td>grades 4–6</td>
<td>out-of-school centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preschool</td>
<td>grades 7–9</td>
<td>upper secondary +Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- year 3</td>
<td>grades 7–9</td>
<td>practical and artistic subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grades 4–6</td>
<td>years 4</td>
<td>vocational subjects, upper secondary and Adult</td>
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<tr>
<td>out-of-school centre</td>
<td>years 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>grades 7–9</td>
<td>years 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upper secondary +Adult</td>
<td>years 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practical and artistic subjects</td>
<td>years 1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocational subjects, upper secondary and Adult</td>
<td>years 1.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>alter-native entry</td>
<td>years 1.5</td>
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</table>

At present, an internationalisation perspective is included in the main policy documents of all teacher education institutions and is purposefully integrated into the curriculum. Universities develop study programmes and courses with international and inter-cultural profiles in order to prepare prospective teachers for work in multi-cultural classrooms. Future teachers need competence for meeting students with a variety of immigrant backgrounds. Teacher education also aims to increase the recruitment of students having different cultural backgrounds. School practice abroad and degree projects including comparative study elements are two popular forms of international activities in Swedish teacher education.

In general, it is easier to acquire money for external internationalisation actions in teacher education than for internal. For example, there are broader funding opportunities for mobility actions than for improving international work in home departments. Departments are expected to bear all costs for changes in academic routines, such as introducing programmes and courses in English, themselves. The programmes offered in foreign languages have the same state funding as the programmes in Swedish language but the introduction of such programmes demands substantial initial investment. To give a concrete example, a masters’ programme delivered in English in Science Education has lower state funding (per teaching hour) than an ordinary undergraduate Science programme in Swedish, as it is assumed that at masters’ level students will not do the same amount of practical activities. This situation slows the introduction of new programmes targeting foreign (exchange) students in teacher education.

Teacher education institutions are active in implementing Swedish educational aid policy for developing countries. The policy research organisation the Center for Global Development (http://www.cgdev.org/) ranked Sweden at first place as ‘the top contributor to helping poor
countries to develop, considering its size’ in 2009 (Daily Yomiuri, 2009). Normally, teacher education programmes at masters’ level and PhD training are organised within the country or using a “sandwich model”, where students’ study time is divided between Sweden and their home-country. These programmes are often sponsored by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (http://www.sida.se/English/). Special courses for guest students only are also organised under the Swedish Institute’s umbrella (http://www.si.se/English/).

An important aspect of the domestic internationalisation of the teaching profession is the employment of teachers with immigrant backgrounds. The teaching profession is a regulated profession in Sweden. When it comes to permanent employment in the public school system, priority is given to persons with academic degrees especially designed for the teaching profession. The National Agency for Higher Education is in charge of assessing foreign teaching degrees and authorized to grant certification for teaching posts on a permanent basis in Sweden. For certification to be granted, the foreign teacher’s training together with work experience must be assessed as corresponding to a Swedish teacher training qualification. The applicant’s command of the Swedish language must also be deemed adequate (HSV, 2001). Usually, immigrant teachers have to take some additional courses in Swedish teacher education (complement their foreign training) in order to be granted certification to work as a teacher in Sweden.

The internationalisation of research in teacher education is a priority area of work in Swedish universities. An important action was taken by the Government about ten years ago when Educational Work was established as a research discipline in Sweden. It made it possible to undertake postgraduate and research studies within teacher education. Currently, all graduates from teacher education with two years of teaching experience can apply for doctoral studies in this discipline. They can conduct research on general cross-disciplinary issues of pedagogical work in schools and teacher education or focus more on different school subjects and educational levels.

Umeå University hosts the National Postgraduate School in Educational Work that recruited the first bulk of PhD students in 2002. These doctoral students were lecturers from the different departments involved in teacher training and practicing school teachers. Most of them after acquiring a PhD degree in Educational Work got employment at teacher education institutions. Pedagogical research aiming to provide better knowledge for improving the performance of children with immigrant background in schools and their integration in Swedish society is actively supported by the Government.

**Actions to support internationalisation**

Swedish universities have developed a variety of actions to facilitate students’ mobility and domestic internationalisation. Some examples are given below from Umeå University:

- Faculty staff and community members are invited to become volunteers in the *host programme* for incoming foreign students (*Värdprogrammet*). This programme aims to introduce foreigners to Swedish lifestyle and traditions.
• **Intercultural study workshops** are organised for university teachers and administrative staff working with international students.

• Umeå University Centre for Teaching and Learning (UPC) in cooperation with the Department of Language studies organises *English Language Workshops* for university teachers working with courses in English. The content of four workshops is explained in the box below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1). Teaching in English - Challenges and helpful strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td>In this workshop the focus is on tips and strategies for dealing with information delivery and questions. Digital media tools are introduced as organizational help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2). Do I Really Have to Lecture in English?</td>
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<tr>
<td>This workshop discusses challenges that learners, who attend university courses in a second language face and ways instructors can modify their course format to adjust to learner needs. The focus of the workshop is on modifications that can ease the burden not only for the learner, but also for the instructor who must teach in a second language.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3). Tools for language help when teaching in English</td>
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<td>This workshop deals primarily with linguistic concerns such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and constructions. Useful pronunciations tools, dictionaries and language corpora are introduced. The focus is on individual pronunciation work and corpus work in the language lab.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4). Blended learning environments and language articulation</td>
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<td>This workshop is about the practical and pedagogical implications of blended learning i.e. the combination of online and face-to-face instruction and its effect on pedagogy, specifically when teaching in English. The workshop exemplifies blended learning in reality, including online self assessment and multi-modal examinations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• **The Buddy programme** embraced about 650 students and buddies in 2009. The programme activities include sport, social and cultural events and general support for incoming students (Studentcentrum, 2009).

• A group of *international students informers* for newly accepted students was created for the first time in 2009. 17 students from 9 countries were available during the summer via email or web-chat to answer questions about living and studying in Umeå (Studentcentrum, 2009).

• *Information Corners* were created at the airport and the bus station with *student guides* (local Swedish students) to meet newcomers arriving on planes and busses.

• A *web-based questionnaire* for the evaluation of the International Office activities is implemented annually during the Application Process period.

Such actions show the complexity of internationalisation work and aim to make the university campus more international.
Conclusions

This paper provides a short description of how work on internationalisation is taking place in Swedish higher education and in particular in teacher education. Some examples of activities are given from Umeå University in their practice of internationalisation. In quantitative terms, the internationalisation of Swedish teacher education is developing steadily and is regularly monitored by statistical data. Currently, greater focus is placed on raising its quality than increasing the number of activities. There is no absolute definition of quality in the internationalisation of teacher education. It is always related to earlier situations, practice, and outcomes. It is situated in local and international contexts and related to concepts of knowledge and culture and is strongly connected to the national context.

At present, Swedish teacher education is not only a national programme; it is also part of a European educational system. So, the policies and trends of the European Union significantly influence local developments in Sweden. One of such European trends is the enforcement of research based teacher education, and here internationalisation issues are of great importance. According to SOU (2008), the international dimension of the Swedish teacher education needs to increase, not least with regard to research-based course literature.

Teacher education tends to be marginalised within the Swedish academy, primarily because of its low international publication and citation index. One of the reasons for this could be that research projects in teacher education are often very small and domesticated (in medicine publications can include dozens of authors). Here internationalisation can also help to create bigger research projects in education, and as a result of these larger international research groups, more substantial research outcomes can be produced. Currently, more European funding is available in this field.

There are other related reasons that contribute to the low academic status of teacher education. For example, in Sweden 80 new students are admitted yearly to the veterinary programme and 40 full professors work in this department at the university of Agricultural Sciences. In teacher education the ratio of student/full professor is almost hundred times more. As a result veterinary studies have a higher academic and social status than teacher education. Another example is that less than 2.5% of the state research budget in Sweden goes to teacher education but over 40% to medicine. The attractiveness of programmes in higher education and the selection to these programmes is a sign of importance for society and the young students’. Swedish teacher education programmes, as in many other European countries, are not among the most popular among young people and nor are they considered prestigious in society.

There is a saying that a school cannot be better than the teachers working in it. Attracting the best students and academics to teacher education is a great challenge. Internationalisation can potentially contribute to this process. The European Union (2009) recognises this situation and suggests that open international recruitment is necessary to attract highly qualified teachers and researchers to higher education institutions. Bearing in mind that teachers are key players, career structures should be adapted to facilitate the mobility of teachers, early stage researchers and other staff. Currently, Swedish teacher education institutions are also placing more focus on faculty staff mobility and the recruitment of international scholars.
References