Brief Peer Reviewed Essay

Inquiry on the Role of International Education in Future Diplomacy after Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The international higher education sector has been witnessing an economic and soft power competition by the nation-states and has become a part of global power competition. It is worth inquiring about the role of international education in future diplomacy after the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak as there are likely to be substantial changes in the forms of deliveries, operations and policies in the international higher education activities and global politics. This brief essay highlights the possible effects of Covid-19 pandemic on the relationship of international higher education with diplomacy and international relations. It provides food for thoughts for the researches in the area.

Keywords: future diplomacy, international higher education, international relations, internationalization, political science, post-Covid19 period, public diplomacy, soft power

There has been an increasing trend in the number of international students travelling to other countries for getting a higher education. Besides, there have been major emerging non-Western actors assuming different patterns of international student mobility. In a South-South mobility scheme, the motivations of those non-Western national states differ from the traditional Western hosting countries remarkably. They actively involved in the creation of educational hub regions along with other public diplomacy

channels such as cultural institutes abroad, worldwide TV broadcasting and, hosting mega-events. China and Russia, and in some regards Turkey and Qatar, can be examples of the countries that are heavily investing in public diplomacy including international higher education and other soft power assets for becoming major actors in international politics. These heavy investment and new international mobility patterns in international higher education has an effect on the new global power structure. This may also merely be a reflection of the new reality of the world order as the world phases from a unipolar power structure to a multipolar one, as many International Relations theorists suggest.

The international higher education sector has been witnessing an economic and soft power competition by the nation-states and it was a part of global power competition before the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, it is worth inquiring about the role of international education in future diplomacy after Covid-19 pandemic outbreak as there will be substantial changes in the forms of deliveries, operations and policies in the international higher education activities. The prevalent trends of digitalization of teaching and (re)discovery of online and distance education are accompanied by the considerations on reimagining the international education and virtual internationalization. Regarding the learning experience, where digital fatigue is very common across all stakeholders, in the student experience level, stress disorders and mood instability are typical psychological problems the students face.

Conceptual background

Traditionally, there have been three main scholarly perspectives to analyze the concept of international education: philosophical, pedagogical, and practical (Francois et al, 2016). In the last decades, the political science aspect has been added to the scholarly studies on international education as the indispensability of the very multi-faceted concept of 'education' in studies of political science domains such as democratization (Perry, 2015), economic growth (Barro and Sala-i Martin, 1995; OECD, 2001; Hanushek and Woessman, 2010), development, public diplomacy, foreign policymaking, international politics, and political power are very prevalent. Education indeed has a great 'constructivist' role in international development projects and humanitarian actions in the conflict and post-conflict zones (Davies, 2005; World Bank, 2005; Davies and Talbot, 2008; UNICEF 2011; Paulson and Shields, 2015; Gross and Davies, 2015). Education in emergencies, peace education (Tinker, 2016), and development education are important concepts in state-building or reconstruction periods.

Educational policy-making, specifically of international education, has always been a topic on the agenda of national governments for various motivations (Froumin and Lisyutkin, 2015; British Council, 2016). National educational policies (Apple, 1995) and international organizations or NGOs

in international development projects exert their values, norms, cultural influence, and hegemony (Monaghan, 2015; Portnoi, 2016) on the recipient societies. In the same manner, in regard to cross-border education, the countries would like to host more international students for they would like to create or 'construct' a nicer image of their country and culture on the minds of visitor students, who can later be potentially sympathizers of their country in a soft power framework, which would benefit the host countries in any global power competition. In power considerations, education, rather than being solely a pedagogical approach or discipline, has been utilized to exert influence on the foreign audience and never let be free from the realm of international relations and world order.

International education indeed can be considered as both reflection of and affecting agent on the world power structure. For many decades, cultural imperialism was relevant in a Western-dominated unipolar world (Carnoy, 1974). The North-South student movement was a reflection of the world order and international politics (Guruz 2011; Malete, 2016). Currently, the world is in a potential phase of going from unipolar to a multipolar system (Jules, 2016) and 'regionalization' resembles the new focal aspect in the new South-South student mobility reality (Kondakci, Bedenlier and Zawacki-Richter, 2018). Mercantilism over international education by national governments (Asteris, 2006; Trilokekar, 2010; Walker, 2014) turned into soft power competition (Stetar et al, 2010) among world powers and more interestingly, 'sharp powers' (Walker, 2016; Walker and Ludwig, 2017; Walker, 2018) manipulate it, just as they do in other instruments of public diplomacy such as worldwide media broadcasting, cultural diplomacy institutions, and nation branding activities. Sharp powers' involvement (Nye, 2018) in international education both in international student mobility and humanitarian assistance poses an interesting case to be explored as 'idealistic and normative' nature of education has been exploited and replaced with 'realist and power competition' notions by some countries. According to Nye, soft power is neither realist nor a liberal concept, but it is just a form of power. Although, looking at the situation as another realm of power struggle would make more sense and be realistic for further analysis, calling it in a more normative framework of 'knowledge diplomacy' (Knight, 2018) may also take place in future diplomacy.

Nevertheless, what is important is to focus on the international students' learning and cultural living experiences, and what happens in the classroom and on the campus for the sake of genuine internationalization (Knight, 2014). This point seems to be failed by some emerging educational hub countries. As they don't prioritize the satisfaction (Wiers-Jenssen et al, 2002) and experiences of international students (Williams, 2005; Appleton-Knapp and Krentler, 2006; Bartram, 2007; Kondakci, 2011; Root and Ngampornchai, 2012; Soria and Troisi, 2013; Wright and Schartner, 2013;

Ozoglu et al, 2015; Ding, 2016; Kawamura, 2016; Watanabe, 2016; Streitwieser and Light, 2018) and the quality of teaching, they instrumentalize international education in a global power struggle. They set ambitious target numbers to reach, form initiatives to create world-class universities to be included in world ranking tables to attract more students. However, lacking the intercultural competence and genuine internationalization aspects, this trend may potentially end up the exploitation of incoming international students financially and politically. Student-centered internationalization and cultural experience-focused international education activities, rather than quantity, will gain importance in the future diplomacy. It is very worth to investigate how this trend will be shaped in the post-pandemic globally.

Considerations after the covid-19 pandemic

After the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, there assume to be substantial changes in the mobility patterns as there will be possibilities on new delivery methods such as online education as a form of transnational education. The new situation may alter the internationalization plans of higher education institutions to a great extent. The health and safety regulations will be of utmost importance which may indeed limit the volume of international educational exchanges and mobility in the future. The employment forms and operations may shift to digital mediums and the provision of labor from universities to industries can affect to a great extent. All those developments will serve an interesting situation for the interplay between international higher education and soft power and public diplomacy visions of the nation-states, as they traditionally see international education and physical movement of students from one country to another, as an essential element in their foreign policy and diplomacy. The role of international education in future diplomacy after the Covid-19 pandemic will deserve a great deal of research in both perspectives of Western and non-Western.

Particularly, the scholarship of international education- and also in international relations, will have to investigate the place of international education in future diplomacy by asking very essential questions below:

i) What are the implications of international education in international relations and future diplomacy, especially in the post-Covid19 period?

ii) What are and will be the determinants, modalities, trends, and issues in the global student mobility before and after the post-Covid19 period?

iii) How are the national government strategies for international higher education and internationalization being shaped in the world in the post-Covid19 period?

iv)   What will be the nexus between the international education and global power structure in the future?

v)   What insights can be drawn from the cases of traditional Western destinations and newly emerged non-Western destinations in regard to international education's influence in global power influence and future diplomacy in the post-Covid19 period?

Conclusion

In summary, the main questions to explore in the post-Covid19 period would be on i) how international educational policies and activities are going to be operated by the hosting states over the foreign visitor citizens ii) how the genuine aspects of internationalization in higher education such as intercultural learning and intercultural competence development will be taking into account by the national governments of emerging education hub countries and iii) how international education will be handled in international relations and global politics during the post-Covid19 period in the future.

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