RICHARD CLOUET

Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
richard.clouet@ulpgc.es

Richard Clouet: Internationalising Spanish Universities to Increase Intercultural Understanding: the Challenge of an Island University in Europe
Alkalmazott Nyelvtudomány, XVII. évfolyam, 2017/2. szám
doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.18460/ANY.2017.2.011

Internationalising Spanish Universities to Increase Intercultural Understanding: the Challenge of an Island University in Europe

Viele spanische Akademiker sind sich darin einig, dass eine Internationalisierung der Universitäten nicht ausreicht und demzufolge eine gezielte Internationalisierungspolitik auch in den Lehr- und Lern-, Forschungs-, Unterstützungs- und Dienstleistungsbereichen durch Aktivitäten umzusetzen ist. Darüber hinaus ist es an der Zeit, dass auf all diesen Ebenen eine interkulturelle Dimension integriert wird. In diesem Artikel ist das Konzept der Internationalisierung der Hochschulbildung in der Literatur skizziert und beschrieben, wie die Internationalisierungspolitik an spanischen Universitäten und exemplarisch an der Universität Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, eine Insel-Universität, die bereits eine umfassende Strategie zur Internationalisierung verwirklicht hat.

1. Introduction

As with all higher education institutions in Europe, Spanish universities are strongly committed to internationalisation, seeing it as the opportunity not only to enter the global education market, but also to achieve international academic standards and to reap greater financial benefits (Woodfield, 2010: 170).

After being isolated from Europe and the rest of the world during most of the 20th century, Spain's higher education institutions have faced several challenges since the 1980s, including Europeanisation; economic globalization; a continuing decline in the number of 18-year-olds in the population; the adaptation of the country's regulations to the specifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA); the need to enhance quality and efficiency; soaring competition at national and international levels and cross-cultural communication issues related to the necessity to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of students. All this has obliged Spanish universities to become more international in their outlook and their activities (Lunn, 2008).

Although Spain's higher education system has been deeply involved in a process of internationalisation for the last two decades, which has led to significant changes in higher education policies, many academics believe that the level of internationalisation is still not high enough. They agree that Spanish universities fully support internationalisation in their strategic plans, but argue that many institutions have not yet developed plans on how to implement internationalisation into the teaching/learning, research, support and service

areas of activities, let alone integrating an intercultural dimension in all these areas.

2. Outline of the concept of internationalisation of higher education

Although international education has been viewed as important for several decades, the internationalisation of higher education is a rather recent development and has only appeared in literature in the past twenty years. In practice, we can say that it is a twenty-first-century phenomenon.

There is still a lack of agreement about the concept of internationalisation and what it means in the context of higher education. Is it about bringing large numbers of students to study in the home university or organising extensive exchange programmes? Is it a process or a goal?

For the purpose of this paper, I have used Knight's (2003: 2) definition: internationalisation is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education". Knight was actually updating one of her widely quoted definitions that described the internationalisation of higher education as "the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution" (Knight, 1997: 8). Elkin and Devjee (2003: 11) further expanded the definition by suggesting internationalisation should "aim to create values, beliefs and intellectual insights in which both domestic and international students and faculty participate and benefit equally. They should develop global perspectives, international and cultural and ethical sensitivity along with useful knowledge, skills and attitudes for the globalised market place".

De Wit (2002) is another important scholar to refer to when discussing internationalisation. Analysing internationalisation from a historical perspective, he studied the development of today's higher education market using examples from the US, Australia and Europe and highlighted how internationalisation is largely being driven by economic priorities. In the wake of de Wit, Sidhu argued that "American universities are motivated to enrol international students for two major reasons: as a form of cheap academic labor and as a strategy for maintaining enrolments in disciplines such as science and engineering where domestic interest is waning" (Sidhu, 2006: 77).

More recently, Elkin, Farnsworth and Templer (2008: 242–243) identified nine dimensions of internationalisation in higher education, including: (1) enrolment of undergraduate international students; (2) enrolment of postgraduate international students; (3) student exchange programmes; (4) staff exchanges programmes; (5) staff interaction in international context/attendance at international conferences; (6) internationally focused programmes of study; (7) international research collaboration; (8) supplementary support for international students; (9) international institutional links. They also presented

five questions universities should ask themselves when pursuing international strategies. These have to do with: (1) whether they identify internationalisation as a strategic objective; (2) whether internationalisation appears in their mission statement; (3) whether internationalisation features in their strategic planning; (4) whether they have a campus abroad; and (5) whether they have customised programmes for international students.

Another strategy some universities have pursued to achieve internationalisation is to switch to English as the language of instruction. The growing interest in using English in teaching and research is part of the aspiration of many universities to become 'world class' institutions. In a large survey of English-medium instruction (EMI) programmes across European countries, Wachter and Maiworm (2008) revealed the increasing number of universities that have adopted EMI over the last decade, particularly at the postgraduate level. It is debatable whether this move is purely driven by economic factors (Bolsmann and Miller, 2008: 79–80), however there can be little doubt that the adoption of a *lingua franca* brings additional benefits, such as creating understanding among universities in the world; facilitating student and faculty exchange programmes; carrying out joint education and research programmes; creating easier course equivalence and course transfers; preparing students to study abroad; and promoting intercultural interactions in the academic world.

Within the general context mentioned above, in recent years, much research has been done on the internationalisation of academia in different countries and regions. Locally, the internationalisation of higher education seems to cover a wide range of methods and approaches, but it is generally perceived as crucial in achieving international academic standards. Among the rich crop of recent research, I would like to highlight the valuable studies carried out by Tamás Kozma in Hungary (2008), Mosneaga and Agergaard in Denmark (2012), Warwick and Moogan in the United Kingdom (2013), Bijedic, Gaspar and Pasic in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2015), Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera in Ghana (2015), Stukalova, Shishkin and Stukalova in Russia (2015), Fuhui in Japan (2016), Gallego-Balsà and Cots in Catalonia (2016), or Svetlik and Braček Lalić in Slovenia (2016).

Globally, the internationalisation of higher education has become a priority, but academic institutions must assume a key role in the local and international context, far beyond student and staff mobility. In the wake of terrorist attacks and the recent migrant crisis, when the Schengen agreement is under threat, internationalisation must be understood as a way of responding quickly to new challenges and as an opportunity to resolve conflict and create cohesion.

3. Internationalisation policies in Spanish universities

Internationalisation is probably one of the most powerful forces for change in Spain's contemporary higher education. Although Spain's tertiary education system consists of both university and non-university institutions –including post-secondary higher vocational education and specialised tertiary education– for the purpose of this paper I have chosen to focus on the university system only.

According to the latest report of the Ministry of Education concerning the state of Spain's universities in the 2014-2015 academic year, the Spanish university system is made up of 83 universities (50 public and 33 private), all enjoying certain autonomy, from the development of their own statutes to their organisational rules and functions, both at internal and external levels. The total number of students enrolled in Spanish universities in the 2013-2014 academic year was 1,532,728, of whom 1,412,673 were pursuing undergraduate programmes (92.2% of the total) and 120,055 were Master's Degree and doctoral students.

One of the major challenges facing Spanish universities in the second decade of the 21st century is directly related to public funding. This is mostly the responsibility of Spain's autonomous communities, which leads to differences between communities depending on the approaches of each autonomous government toward higher education. The funding systems of the autonomous community of the Canary Islands, for instance, combine formula-based basic funding (typically related to student numbers, costs per field of study and some performance-based indicators) and project-based targeted funding. The three major sources universities derive their revenues from are government subsidies from the autonomous community, student tuition fees and external sources of income (e.g. research contracts, provision of services, industry training).

At a time when the economic crisis carries on imposing severe restrictions on government spending and has driven the government to rationalise public spending on education (Royal Decree-Law 14/2012 of April 20th), Spanish students have witnessed a substantial rise in tuition fees. This has happened despite the fact that Spain's student financial aid system was already relatively modest in comparison with that of other European countries, with a single public scholarship scheme in place at the national level and complementary scholarship systems in autonomous communities (Santiago et al., 2009: 33–34).

In their valuable study on the far-reaching consequences of the changes in the funding system of Spain's higher education system, Cecilia Albert Verdú and José Manuel Roig Cotanda (2013: 22-23) provide a better understanding of what the challenges of Spanish universities might be in the future:

We can expect [universities] to differentiate their product and adjust tuition fees, within the range established, according to their quality. Although each autonomous region fixes their own tuition fees, the fact is that the Royal

Decree-Law 14/2012 has left open the possibility of price differences between universities within the same region (…). This means that universities must differentiate themselves, not in the degrees they offer but also for the prestige they have. If you set a tuition fee range based on public service costs, institutions will be at the upper limit of this range only if their prestige guarantees a sufficient demand that does not threaten their existence, something that will only occur if their quality is recognized by society at large.
This increased competition between centers and their differentiation is consistent with the objective that some Spanish universities are placed at the top of the college rankings (as produced by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University). (…) [This may result] in some Spanish universities advancing further up the international rankings.

Undoubtedly, a key challenge facing Spanish universities in becoming more attractive to both national and international students and in justifying the tuition fee system is to become more competitive and to improve their global ranking. While there are 34 European universities among the top ranked one hundred, according to the *Academic Ranking of World Universities 2015* of the Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, none are Spanish.

Indeed, Europeanisation and internationalisation are already playing key roles in most European countries and could bring considerable benefits to higher education in Spain, both financial and in terms of prestige.

In order to meet such challenges and the requirements stipulated by the European Commission in 2006 about the need to modernise Europe's universities; and as part of the dialogue and reflection that the European Commission had initiated with the Member States and the academic and scientific community to face the new millennium's challenges, the Spanish Ministry of Education presented an initiative to modernise universities through the coordination of the autonomous regional university systems and the development of a modern Spanish University System under the name *Estrategia Universidad 2015: Modernizar la Universidad* (Strategy University 2015: Modernising the University), issued in June 2010. One of its priorities was quality assurance in teaching, through the assessment, certification and accreditation of institutions, teachers and programmes, carried out by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (ANECA). One of the objectives of *Estrategia Universidad 2015* was also to foster holistic internationalisation strategies as an integral part of Spanish universities' overall mission and functions.

A Committee of International Experts, established by the Ministry of Education, was then invited to evaluate and comment on this strategy. Building on this document and others, such as *La contribución del talento universitario en el futuro de la España 2020: Internationalización, Excelencia y Empleabilidad*, issued in June 2011, the Committee proposed a series of

recommendations in a document entitled *Daring to reach high: strong universities for tomorrow's Spain*, published in September 2011. It considered "internationalization, defined most simply as a comprehensive openness to the world at all levels of the higher education system, to be still insufficient, despite recent efforts, especially if Spanish universities are to meet the challenges posed by the EU2015" (2011, 2).

Following the same line and aware that one of the main challenges facing Spanish universities is to compete with other European universities and to improve their global ranking, in October 2014 the Ministry of Education approved a document entitled *Estrategia para la Internationalización de las Universidades Españolas 2015-2020* (Strategy for the Internationalisation of Spanish Universities 2015-2020), in which it states that "higher education universities and institutions must contribute to the increase of Spain´s attractiveness and competitiveness within a framework of worldwide competition for talent (students, professors, researchers, professionals, entrepreneurs) and for investments", highlighting the fact that "internationalisation contributes to the improvement of education, learning, research, innovation, increase in regional socio-economic development and the social extent of universities" (2014: 4).

Following the European agenda and in response to economic difficulty the country has been undergoing for the last eight years, various strategies have been adopted by universities to reposition themselves in the international arena, the government initiatives being the starting point for the development of a quality management scheme that involves all higher education institutions, from the governing boards to teachers, students and administration. The ultimate objective is to place Spain at the forefront of knowledge and to strengthen the international dimension of its universities.

If we look into the internationalisation process in Spain's higher education system since the beginning of the 21st century, it is obvious that internationalisation has become a prominent theme in university policy. This has particularly been the case after the country started adapting its regulations to the specifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2003, which resulted in efforts by Spanish universities to comply with the Bologna standards in the fields of mobility; the design of programmes and degrees so that these can be recognised all over the EU; and quality assurance (Santiago et al., 2009: 131).

In comparison with other European countries, Spain holds a key position on discussions on internationalisation with Latin America. As Sebastián points out, the relationships between Spain and Latin America are characterised by their "high intensity, demonstrated by hundreds of institutional agreements, thousands of post graduate activities, mobility and joint publications of scientific articles" (Sebastián, 2000). However, the OECD 2009 report about

tertiary education in Spain points out that Spanish universities should be much more than "useful bridges between Latin America and Europe as sources of knowledge and technology transfer" (Santiago et al., 2009: 132) and "given Spain's historical role in Latin America's higher education, it could be expected to play a bigger role in linking policies on both sides of the Atlantic, with Spain taking the lead in constructing an Ibero-American knowledge area. (Santiago et al., 2009: 94)

Coming back to the presence of foreign students in Spanish universities, it is obvious that it is rather limited, especially when compared to other OECD countries. According to the data provided by OECD in *Education at a Glance 2013*, only 2.5% of foreign students (that is students outside their home country) in the world were found in Spanish higher education, compared to 13% in the United Kingdom, 6.3% in Germany and 6.2% in France. One reason for this is that in Spain hardly any tertiary education programmes are offered in English, in contrast to, for instance, the Nordic European countries, the Netherlands and Germany. Along with France, Portugal and Italy, Spain lags far behind many European countries as far as offering English-medium courses in HE is concerned (Wachter and Maiworm, 2008: 39). One of the reasons presented by Wachter and Maiworm for not offering English-taught programmes has to do with the fact that some universities see themselves as the guardians of the home language and culture: "In countries with more widely spoken languages, such as Germany, France or Spain, the perception is often that there is no need to introduce programmes fully taught in English since foreign students already speak or want to learn the domestic language" (Wachter and Maiworm, 2008: 61). An added hurdle concerns the legal obstacles some countries have to face:

In some countries, the absence of ETPs [English-taught programmes] stems from the limitations imposed by the national or regional legislative and regulatory framework. For example, this seems to be often the case in Spain, where the curriculum depends on regional authorities and institutions do not have enough autonomy to design study programmes (Wachter and Maiworm, 2008: 62).

However, in terms of the EHEA, since 2000 Spain has received the largest number of ERASMUS students from the 33 participating countries. In January 2016, the European Commission published figures on the 2013-2014 academic year of the Erasmus programme, which covered higher education mobility and cooperation projects under the former Lifelong Learning programme (2007-2013), part of Erasmus+.

In the 2013-2014 academic year, 272,497 students went to another European country to study or train and, once more, Spain sent the most students abroad with 37,235 students leaving for another country, the main host countries being France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. On the other hand, 39,277 Erasmus students were enrolled in Spanish universities. Participants mainly

came from France, Germany and Italy. Spain was also the most popular destination for staff mobility, as well as the third most active country in sending staff abroad, behind Poland and Turkey.

Analysing the above statistics, it is obvious that the Erasmus programme is a central component of the internationalisation of Spain's higher education. However, despite these high numbers of Erasmus students, Spanish universities seem to lack attractiveness for what Knight understands by "international students", namely students of other nationalities who have travelled to the country where they intend to study a whole degree programme.

In response to this situation, various strategies are being adopted by universities in Spain to position or reposition themselves in the European and wider international arena. For the purpose of this paper, I have chosen to analyse the international strategies of my home institution, the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC), one of the many Spanish universities that has moved considerably to develop institutional strategies for internationalisation over the last few years and one that, due to its strategic geographic location, feels that strong commitment to internationalisation is necessary at all levels within the university.

4. A comprehensive strategy for internationalisation at ULPGC

The University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is located in the Autonomous Region of the Canary Islands (Spain), a significant centre for tourism, attracting visitors from all over Europe because of its mild climate and stunning landscape, not to mention its wealth of cultural and artistic heritage, stemming from its situation at the crossroads between the Ancient and New worlds. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is the largest city of the European Union lying outside the European Continent. Its location about 150 kilometres (93 miles) off the north-western coast of Africa within the Atlantic Ocean makes it an interesting destination for international encounters of all types. It was also the cradle of tourism development in the Canary Islands. The city has adapted itself to meet the demands of today's tourism by creating a growing leisure, congress, cultural and sports oriented tourism and by becoming home to major international festivals, including the festival of classical music, in winter and several artistic and cultural events such as the Jazz Festival, the WOMAD or the Theatre and Dance Festival in summer.

The international vocation of the city has been at the core of the ULPGC's policy and development strategies since its creation in 1989. The current President's welcome address on the university website highlights that the ULPGC is "an institution that bases its ongoing improvements on the need for quality and innovation, always viewed from an interdisciplinary and international perspective". The ULPGC firmly backs internationalisation and is one of the most active Spanish universities in the development of exchange

programmes, as well as in international development cooperation programmes, both with Africa and Latin America. According to statistics published by the European Commission on the 2013-2014 academic year of the Erasmus programme, the ULPGC was number 55 of the top 500 higher education institutions receiving Erasmus students and number 14 of the 83 universities in Spain. It was also number 53 of the top 500 higher education institutions sending Erasmus students, number 18 in Spain.

In 2014-2015, the ULPGC received 539 Erasmus students and sent another 550. It also sent 64 students outside Europe and hosted 51 of them. In addition, 30 academic staff and 40 administrative staff had the opportunity to enjoy a one- to two-week stay abroad. The university's ultimate goal is for 20% of its more than 20,000 students and 1,500 lecturers to be able to go on exchange by 2020 and it states on its website that "the aim of mobility programmes is to enhance education quality and diversity".

Mobility programmes involve universities in the following forty-five countries:

Table 1. Mobility programmes at the ULPGC

Country	Number of partners	Country	Number of partners	Country	Number of partners
Argentina	9	Finland	14	Paraguay	2
Austria	9	France	52	Peru	10
Bangladesh	1	Germany	59	Poland	30
Belgium	8	Greece	6	Portugal	23
Brazil	6	Guatemala	2	Rumania	7
Bolivia	1	Hungary	2	Slovakia	2
Chile	18	Ireland	2	Slovenia	4
China	2	Italy	47	Sweden	4
Colombia	8	South Korea	8	Switzerland	9
Costa Rica	2	Latvia	2	Turkey	3
Croatia	1	Liechtenstein	1	United Kingdom	11
Czech Republic	5	Lithuania	2	United States	3
Denmark	4	Mexico	24	Uruguay	3
Ecuador	4	Netherlands	8	Uzbekistan	2
Estonia	2	Norway	10	Venezuela	1

The ULPGC's goal to promote the process of internationalisation throughout the university is clearly stated in the Strategic Plan for the 2015-2018 period.

La ULPGC ha interiorizado la necesidad permanente de internacionalizar toda su actividad. La prueba está en que la internacionalización ya no es un ámbito estratégico en sí mismo, sino que se le presupone como un elemento indiscutible desde cualquier ámbito de planificación y acción.
[The ULPGC has internalised the constant need for the internationalisation of all its activities. We can see evidence of this in the fact that internationalisation is not a strategic area in itself, rather it is a key element at planning and action levels.]

Under the chapter entitled *Internacionalización*, the Strategic Plan includes several aspects having to do with mobility and the attraction of international students and talent (2015: 48):
Implementar la vocación internacional de la ULPGC a través de acciones vinculadas a la oferta bilingüe y la formación en lenguas modernas. [To implement the international vocation of the ULPGC through actions linked to bilingual education and the teaching of modern languages.]
Promover programas de movilidad con universidades y centros de investigación de África y Asia. [To promote mobility programmes with universities and research centres from Africa and Asia.]
Aumentar el número de estudiantes internacionales. [To increase the number of international students.]
Promover acciones que repercutan en la matriculación de estudiantes extranjeros en la ULPGC. [To promote actions that contribute to the enrolment of international students.]
Promover la tricontinentalidad de la ULPGC con acciones académicas científicas. [To promote the tricontinentality of the ULPGC through academic and scientific actions.]
Promover acciones para la captación de talento internacional. [To promote actions in order to attract international talent.]

While many universities may have to rely on a small group of staff to meet the needs of their internationalisation policies, the ULPGC relies on the work of an International Office consisting of administrators, professional officers, faculty and staff, as a forum to enhance discussions of internationalisation, develop plans for resource sharing, identify needs, and develop programme initiatives.

Numerous programmes have been developed and established, all of them carried out with the financial support of the Spanish Body for European Education Programmes (OAPEE, in Spanish), and with specific contributions from Bancaja Bank, the Santander Bank, the Spanish Ministry for Science and Innovation, the Island Councils of the Canary Islands, the Canary Islands Regional Government, MAPFRE Guanarteme Canary Islands Foundation and the ULPGC. Apart from mobility programmes such as LLP/Erasmus; Sicue/Séneca, programmes with Latin America; bilateral programmes with

Russia and the USA or Unamuno II, the ULPGC has set up four lines of mobility for teaching and research staff, including teaching, training, setting up relations with other universities or higher education institutions with a view to paving the way for future agreements for exchange students, and research.

There are more than 1,500 lecturers at the ULPGC carrying out important research work under the auspices of the University's numerous research groups, some of which are leaders in their field at an international level. ULPGC research includes cutting-edge projects in such wide-ranging subjects as oceanography, marine science, aquaculture, computer robotics, nutrition, cancer, ITC, renewable energies, transport economy, business organisation, town planning, translation and the history of the Canary Islands, among others.

Apart from all these programmes, the ULPGC carries out development cooperation activities through the University Centre for Development Cooperation (CUCID, in Spanish), which was set up as a reference centre for development cooperation both in and organised from the Canary Islands. The main activities of the CUCID are: to promote volunteer actions supporting the university community and the Canary youth population; to increase education and awareness in the field of cooperation development within the Canary population; to contribute to the improvement of and participation in Development Cooperation projects in developing countries organised from the Canary Islands; and to promote the relations between the various entities involved in Development Cooperation within the region.

The ULPGC's potential as an agent for University Development Cooperation is considerable, drawing on its significant experience in designing and implementing projects in Africa and South America, in areas such as Education, Ecotourism, Economics, Business Science, Marine Technologies, Aquiculture, Rural Development, Veterinary Medicine, Health, Environment and IT, as well as the actions which have been carried out through its four UNESCO Chairs in this field.

Internationalisation is definitely a key issue at the ULPGC and has led to important changes in policies and practices. However, it seems that the focus of existing efforts has mainly been on international student and scholar exchanges, as well as international collaboration and cooperation with universities abroad. Like most Spanish universities, the ULPGC fully supports internationalisation in its Strategic Plan, yet it has less developed plans for implementing internationalisation into the teaching, support and service dimensions of the university. Despite the high numbers of international students and international exchanges, there are still many challenges to be met.

As explicitly stated by the Internationalisation of Universities Working Group in the *Strategy for the Internationalisation of Spanish Universities 2015-2020*, "the concept of internationalisation goes far beyond the mere mobility of students and signing of international agreements" (2014: 4). Other important

aspects of internationalisation such as tuition syllabuses, internationalisation of research, joint qualifications with foreign partners, or internationalisation at home should be developed. But one of the major challenges, in my opinion, is to strive to attract international students, especially from outside the EU, to come and study in undergraduate or postgraduate programmes. There is considerable potential for the ULPGC to increase its numbers of foreign students, but to meet this challenge, the stakeholders of international policies should not only carry on building up a culture of exchanges amongst students, academics and administrative staff, but also develop on-campus internationalisation, including specific courses for foreigners, in particular taught in English. The more we diversify the range of international activities, including the provision of English-medium courses, and the more we turn our campuses into international student magnets, the more likely we will be to integrate an international and intercultural dimension in higher education curricula, and to develop the language and cross-cultural skills of students, academics and administrative staff. Developing intercultural competences amongst students, teaching and administrative staff is, I believe, fundamental to any strategic internationalisation initiative which aims to make the university truly international in its approach. The ULPGC has started considering this issue at various academic and institutional levels, but it still deserves closer attention in the future.

5. Intercultural aspects of internationalisation at ULPGC and implications for the future

In the following paragraphs, I have focused on the concept of 'intercultural dialogue' and 'intercultural competence' in the development of internationalisation policies. This informs my analysis of policy documents and institutional initiatives of the ULPGC, the objective being to make recommendations emphasising the need to develop "more metacultural sensitivity on the part of university academics" and "greater appreciation by home universities of diversity in stakeholders' perspectives on teaching and learning" (Dobinson, 2015: 363).

'Intercultural competence' describes the ability (and opportunity) for all those involved in international education to go beyond their own culture and interact with individuals from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. They must continually develop intercultural communication skills that will help them to participate in 'intercultural dialogue' on equal terms.

(…) College students need to be better equipped to function effectively in a diverse environment. Mixing, communicating and living with people from different cultures involves a certain amount of preparation and competence (...). To have a good command of a language does not only mean understanding and knowing how to use its grammatical structures, but also understanding the

culture in which the language is immersed and learning how to place one culture in contact with the other, the major objective of this being to foster social justice and the equality of opportunities (Clouet, 2013: 140)

The implications of this for universities involved in international education are that they need to face the challenge of diversity, respond to the increase in cultural heterogeneity and be ready to transform the experience of teaching and learning, since multicultural environments create a heightened need for intercultural communication and metacultural sensitivity on the part of university academics, administrative staff and stakeholders.

When embarking upon the internationalisation of higher education and providing international education programmes, many considerations should be taken into account, starting with what the literature about intercultural communication says about successful intercultural contact situations.

As early as 1994, Byram and Zarate (1994) proposed a model of intercultural competence around four sets of skills, attitudes, and knowledge, which they describe using the French term *savoir* ("knowing"). These *savoirs* are:

- *savoirs* ("knowings") or "knowledge of self and other", of interaction: individual and societal;
- *savoir comprendre* or "knowing how to understand": skills for interpreting and relating information;
- *savoir apprendre/faire* or "knowing how to learn/to do": skills for discovering new knowledge and for interacting to gain new knowledge;
- *savoir être* or "knowing how to be": attitudes involved in relativising the self and valuing the other.

To these four, Byram (1994) added a fifth component:

- *savoir s'engager* or "knowing how to commit oneself": education involving the development of critical and political awareness.

This approach was further developed in the work of Meyer (2000), who argues that intercultural competence is a combination of social and communicative skills, including: empathy; ability to deal with conflict; ability to work collaboratively; flexibility; foreign language awareness; awareness that culture causes different discussion styles; speech speeds; interpretation and thought patterns; techniques for handling interactional difficulties; reflection on one's own cultural background and tolerance of ambiguity (Clouet, 2013: 143). As such, intercultural communication involves the ability to mediate between cultures, to cope with one's own cultural background in interaction with others. It requires readiness to see other cultures with curiosity and an open-mind and the creation of premises for authentic and respectful dialogue so that all those involved in international education may see 'intercultural dialogue' as a way of expanding their cultural knowledge and transforming their understanding of otherness. This is precisely what Sanderson means when he states the need for

"transformative encounters" in universities, and learning which is "mutually engaging and interculturally inclusive" (Sanderson, 2003: 150).

Such an approach promotes shared understanding between the participants and the context and sees intercultural learning as a transformation process at several levels: the transformation of the participants; of their ability to communicate and to understand communication; of their skills for ongoing learning through observation and participation inside and outside the education settings. This will help them to acquire a deeper understanding of the concepts of culture, cultural adaptation and intercultural communication; to develop strategies for dealing with cultural differences in communication; to become more autonomous in the process of learning and to position themselves at an intermediate intercultural place between the native and the foreign cultures; and finally to acquire greater metacultural sensitivity. It will also increase "respect for diversity in educational discourses; the formation of communities of practice across borders; the alleviation of culture shock or dissonance" (Dobinson, 2015: 365).

The intercultural dimension of education is present throughout the ULPGC syllabuses and policies. A key postgraduate programme delivered at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting is the Master's Degree in Professional Translation and Intercultural Mediation that has been attracting students from several European and African countries since its creation in 2011, thus becoming a forum of intercultural dialogue with a heightened metacultural sensitivity. The same Faculty proposes another Master's Degree in Spanish as a Foreign Language, whose programme includes a subject called "Interculturality in business settings: conventions and strategies". This is not surprising in a Faculty with a purpose to train translators and interpreters whose role is to mediate and facilitate the process of intercultural communication.

The ULPGC goes further with the organisation of courses and professional development programmes for all their staff in order to reflect on notions such as culture shock and dissonance, as well as to promote ongoing discussion about educational and cultural discourse. These include the activities promoted and organised by the Centre of Globalisation, Peace and Intercultural Studies (*Aula de Estudios de la Globalización, Paz e Interculturalidad* in Spanish) or encounters fostered by the Vice-Chancellor of International Relations and Cooperation, such as the annual Conference between Spanish and African Universities or the Ibero-American Congress of Higher Education. In concert with the Dean of the Faculty of Economic and Business Sciences, the Vice-Chancellor of International Relations and Cooperation has also reached an agreement with University College Birmingham to set up a Joint Honours Degree in Business Administration and Management as of September 2016. Setting up joint qualifications with foreign partners is another aspect of internationalisation considered to be of utmost importance for the ULPGC, as it

is a way of increasing the number of foreign students and developing on-campus internationalisation and intercultural encounters.

The ULPGC also hosts two important institutes that serve as bridges between Asia and Europe: the Confucius Institute and the King Sejong Institute, respectively promoting Chinese and Korean languages and cultures in the Canary Islands. Both institutes regularly organise forums and encounters to reflect on intercultural issues between Spain, China and South Korea.

Such initiatives contribute to the development of communities of practice (Wenger 1998) in which participants can learn from each other. Following Wenger's line of reasoning, these communities are easier to develop when people work together in the same physical space, however they are also possible through online programmes, such as those set up between ULPGC, the State University of New York and the Institut Catholique d'Études Supérieures, France (Clouet, 2013), as well as a series of modules and degrees offered in e-learning mode, which students from all over the world may take through the e-learning platform. Foreign students may "enrol in these courses because they want to experience a curriculum with an international perspective" (Dobinson, 2015: 367).

The moment of the academic year when intercultural dialogue is at its peak is during the Welcome Week organised for international students at the beginning of September. Not only do incoming students enjoy a fun and informative week to help them find their feet in their new university life, but they are also encouraged to engage in a series of activities that promote awareness, understanding and sharing among the diverse cultures they come from. This intercultural contact occurs in what cultural theorists name the "third space" or "contact zone" where transcultural crossings, mixings and exchanges take place. Leask (2004) suggested that experiencing the "contact zone" is one of the keys to intercultural learning, and that formalised sessions such as the ULPGC Welcome Week can provide opportunities for all participants, including students, academic and administrative staff, to work together as a team (Seah and Edwards, 2006).

Now the question is whether the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is fully aware of the diversity of teaching and learning experiences amongst its international students, lecturers and administrative staff. Does it value the knowledge that all these participants bring to the teaching and learning process? Is it doing enough to prepare its students, lecturers and administrative staff for international education and intercultural encounters? The ULPGC has attempted to address some of these issues and has focused its international policy on cross-cultural diversity and the creation of "contact zones" to facilitate intercultural encounters. However, there is still a long way to go, especially regarding the provision of English-medium courses, which I consider one of the most important steps to take if we wish to attract more international students to our

campuses and, consequently, to integrate an international and intercultural dimension in our curricula.

Moreover, culturally and linguistically diverse students seem to be able to enter the "third space" more easily than most lecturers and administrative staff. Students studying in cultures significantly different from their own are able to compare their culture with that of others and also develop a better understanding of their own culture through interaction with others. This ability to work effectively in cross-cultural contexts is increasingly recognised as important in today's globalised world – it should concern all educational professionals too, including academic and administrative staff.

Indeed, in order to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of students, the support services of the ULPGC must be directly involved and should be trained in-post to face up to issues around intercultural encounters and assist international students adequately. One of the key aspects, to my mind, is for the university to have specialised administrative staff working with and for international students; staff whose English proficiency should be above average and who would have developed an "intercultural mind" (Shaules, 2015), in other words, people who have "an awareness of the limits of their cultural perspectives, and an increasing ability to look at a situation through the cultural eyes of others" (Shaules, 2015: 202-203). The same must apply to academic staff who should be trained to reflect on the cross-cultural experiences they may experience in the classroom, to look at situations from multiple perspectives, to cultivate cultural empathy.

In order to do this, learning a foreign language is the key to success. As Shaules puts it (2015: 204), "nothing is harder. Nothing is more powerful. Language is much more than a tool for information exchange. (...) The conscious decision to work on foreign language skills will change the flavor of your experience". On the one hand language is an integral part of culture, but on the other hand it is an expression of culture. Agar (1994: 28) clearly argues that "culture is in language and language is loaded with culture." Indeed, due to the cultural nature of language, and the fact that languages can in many respects be conceived of as products of their culture, different languages naturally differ from each other. This is why it seems to me that developing intercultural competence amongst all the actors involved in international education (students, teaching and administrative staff) cannot go without developing skills in a foreign language, especially English because of its status as the *lingua franca* par excellence (Clouet, 2013: 150). This is the only way we can hope to improve the results of Wachter and Maiworm's analysis, whereby the English proficiency of both academic and administrative staff is considered relatively low (Wachter and Maiworm, 2008: 101-102).

6. Conclusion

Quite understandably, the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Spanish Universities 2015-2020 stated among its priorities the necessity for universities in Spain to internationalise their teaching programmes; to carry on encouraging student and staff mobility; to increase their international attractiveness through improved welcoming services and adapted courses and programmes for international students, particularly English-taught modules; to foster transnational joint and multiple qualifications; to intensify cooperation and participate in networks, projects and international programmes; and to foster the international competitiveness of Spanish higher education.

Based on the analysis of the concept of internationalisation in the Spanish context and the way that internationalisation policies are implemented in Spanish universities (and notably at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), it seems that universities in Spain need to reflect upon their engagement not only with Europe through the Erasmus programme, but also with the rest of the world, if the internationalisation of education is to be successful. Moreover, they must understand the broad scope of the term "internationalisation" beyond concepts related to the mobility of students, teachers and administrative staff, or signing agreements with international partners. Spanish universities should seriously consider the internationalisation of the curriculum and research by attracting international talent, by fostering study abroad (and not only student exchange programmes), and by setting up joint or multiple degrees with foreign partners.

Implementing a comprehensive strategy for internationalisation cannot go without taking into account another key element: the intercultural aspects of internationalisation. All the participants involved in the process should be made aware of the context which their international students come from and be trained to build intercultural competence, greater empathy and understanding. Successful intercultural dialogue is paramount in international education and greater intercultural competence will, in turn, result in more mutual respect amongst the increasingly diverse community within Spanish universities.

References

Agar, M. (1994) *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Albert Verdú, C., Roig Cotanda, J. M. (2013) Tuitions fees in Spanish Public Universities in the academic year 2012-2013. http://www.ieb.ub.edu/files/PapersWSEE2013/Roig.pdf. Accessed 24 March 2016.

Altbach, P. G. (2004) The past and future of Asian universities: Twenty-first century challenges. In: Altbach, P. G. & Umakoshi, T. (eds.) *Asian Universities: Historical perspectives and contemporary challenges*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press. 13–32.

Bijedic, N., Drazena G., Pasic, S. (2015) Internationalization as universities' strive for excellence. *Eurasian Journal of Social Sciences* 3/2. pp 35–40.

Bolsmann, C., Miller, H. (2008) International student recruitment to universities in England: Discourse, rationales and globalisation. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 6. pp 75–88.

Byram, M., Zarate, G. (1994) *Definitions, Objectives and Assessment of Sociocultural Competence*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Clouet, R. (2013) Understanding and assessing intercultural competence in an online environment: a case study of transnational education programme delivery between college students in ULPGC, Spain, and ICES, France. *Revista española de linguistica aplicada* 26. pp 139–158.

De Wit, H. (2002) *Internationalisation of Higher Education in the United States of America and Europe: A Historical, Comparative, and Conceptual Analysis*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Dobinson, T. (2015) Teaching and Learning through the Eyes of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Postgraduates and their Lecturers in Australia and Vietnam: Implications for the Internationalisation of Education in Australian Universities. *Education Research and Perspectives. An International Journal* 42. pp 363–396.

Elkin, G., Devjee, F. (2003) *Report on internationalisation, committee for the advancement of learning and teaching*. Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago.

Elkin, G., Farnsworth, J., Templer, A. (2008) Strategy and the internationalisation of universities." *International Journal of Educational Management* 22/3. pp 239–250.

Estrategia para la Internationalización de las Universidades Españolas 2015-2020. (2014) Secretaría General de Universidades. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/dms/mecd/educacion-mecd/areas-educacion/universidades/politica-internacional/estrategia-internacionalizacion/EstrategiaInternacionalizaci-n-Final.pdf. Accessed 3 April 2016.

Estrategia Universidad 2015. Modernizar la Universidad. (2011) Secretaría General de Universidades. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. https://www.ehu.eus/documents/2458096/2699121/VIIE_estrategiauniversidad2015.pdf. Accessed 3 April 2016.

Fuhui, L. (2016) The Internationalization of Higher Education in China: The Role of Government. *Journal of International Education Research* 12/1. pp 47–52.

Gallego-Balsà, L., Cots, J. M. (2016) 'Living to the rhythm of the city': internationalisation of universities and tourism discourse in Catalonia. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 29/1. pp 6–21.

Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera. (2015) The internationalisation agenda: a critical examination of internationalisation strategies in public universities in Ghana. *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 25/2. 1 pp 12–131.

Knight, J. (1997) Internationalisation of higher education: a conceptual framework. In: Knight, S. & De Wit, H. (eds.) *Internationalisation of Higher Education in Asia Pacific Countries*. Amsterdam: The EAIE. 5–18.

Knight, J. (2003) Updating the Definition of Internationalisation. *International Higher Education* 33(Fall). pp 2–3.

Kozma, T. (2008) Political Transformations and Higher Education Reforms. *European Education* 40/2. pp. 29–45.

Leask, B. (2004) Transnational education and intercultural learning: Reconstructing the offshore teaching team to enhance internationalization. *Proceedings of the Australian University's Quality Forum (AUQA) Occasional Paper, AUQA*. Melbourne, Australia.

Lunn, J. (2008) Global Perspectives in Higher Education: Taking the Agenda Forwarding the UK. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 12/3. pp 231–254.

Meyer, F. (2000) Wir waren, sind ein multinationals Haus: Zur Bedeutung und Aspekten interkultureller Kompetenz am Beispiel eines Dienstleistungsbetriebes. *Ressourcen, Kompetenzen, Qualifikationen: Potentiale von Zuwanderen in Weiterbildung und Arbeitsmarkt*. Hamburg: Gesellschaft fur Arbeit, Technik, und Entwicklung.

Mosneaga, A., Agergaard, J. (2012) Agents of internationalisation? Danish universities' practices for attracting international students. *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 10/4. pp 519–538.

OECD (2013) *Education at a Glance 2013: OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2013-en. Accessed 7 March 2016.

Plan Estratégico Institucional 2015-2018. Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. https://www.ulpgc.es/sites/default/files/ArchivosULPGC/noticia/2015/Dic/pei_20152018_d.pdf. Accessed 12 March 2016.

Sanderson, G. (2003) Living with the other: Non-western international students at Flinders University. In: Ninnes, P. & Tamatea, L. (eds.). *Internationalising Education in the Asia-Pacific region: Critical reflections, Critical times*. Proceedings of the 30th Annual Conference of the Australian and New Zealand Comparative and International Education Society. 148–169.

Santiago, P., Brunner, J. J., Haug, G., Malo, S., di Pietrogiacomo, P. (2009) *OECD Reviews of Tertiary Education. Spain*. OECD

Seah, W.T., Edwards, J. (2006) Flying in, Flying out: Offshore teaching in higher education. *Australian Journal of Education* 50/3. pp 296–311.

Sebastián, J. (2000) Percepciones sobre la cooperación académica y científica entre España y América Latina. In: Colomer Viadel, A. (ed.). *Congreso Internacional sobre la Universidad Iberoamericana, Actas II*. Madrid: Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (OEI).

Shaules, J. (2015) *The Intercultural Mind: Connecting Culture, Cognition, and Global Living*. London and Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Sidhu, R. K. (2006) Universities and Globalization: To Market, To Market. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Stukalova, I., A. Shishkin, Stukalova, A. (2015) Internationalization of higher education: a case of Russian universities. *Economics and Sociology* 8/1. pp 275–286.

Svetlik, I., Braček Lalić, A. (2016) The impact of the internationalisation of higher education on academic staff development - the case of Slovenian public universities. *Studies in Higher Education* 41/2. pp 364–380.

Wachter, B., Maiworm. F. (2014) *English-taught Programmes in European Higher Education. The State of Play in 2014*. Bonn: Lemmens Medien.

Warwick, P., Moogan, Y. J. (2013) A comparative study of perceptions of internationalisation strategies in UK universities. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 43/1. pp 102–123.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Woodfield, S. (2010) Europe. In: Egron-Polak, E. & Hudson, R. (eds.). *Internationalization of Higher Education: Global Trends, Regional Perspectives*. Paris: International Association of Universities 3rd Global Survey Report. 170–178.