

Doctoral (PhD) Thesis

**ACADEMIC NETWORKS OF COOPERATION
OF INSTRUCTORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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I. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND THE DEFINING OF THE TOPIC

Throughout the past decades the need for the establishing of new international academic networks and the strengthening of already existing ties has been expressed not only by the Hungarian higher educational institutions, but also these organizations were directed, by the urge of the globalizing world, towards the international transfer of academic knowledge, the creating of cross-border cooperation, as well as participating in international research projects and scholarships. As a result, we can encounter the concept of internationalization in special literature more and more.

Internationalization originally is a term related to economy. However, it can also be applied to the world of education, since the cross-border cooperational networks – through internationalization, which is not an optional choice for higher educational institutions anymore since the beginning of the new millennia –, result in the quality development of research and education by experts stepping into the international arena to challenge their knowledge and also by joining academic networks. According to Bokodi this requires a flexible attitude and way of thinking from the individual's side, on top of an innovative approach. Moreover, it promotes getting to know new cultures as well.

Teichler defines the internationalization of higher education as an unstoppable trend, which we accept as a challenge and react to it accordingly, or we will fall behind. Enders and Fulton state that the different countries may have different answers to it, and their starting point could determine how they reach their goals. Enders, along with Teichler differentiates between four groups based on reactions to internationalization. The first one is the “it would be great if” internationalization: in these countries there is support to establish international co-operations, both from the institution and the individuals' side as well, however, they do not really find partners from among the representatives of bigger countries. They mention the “question of life or death”

internationalization second: these countries' representatives are not respected even at home in their own academic field, if they do not move confidently on the international stage. The third group is comprised of the "two arenas" countries: those nations belong here where the researchers and instructors have the chance to choose between the national and international academic arena, where they would want to make a name for themselves. Since the academic market is strong and large enough by itself, they have this option not to appear in the international arena if they do not want to. Lastly they mention the "one-way" internationalization: usually they list the English speaking countries in this group, where something only counts as academic achievement if it was published in English, and very often these countries are the target destinations for other nations' researchers and instructors.

In contrast to all of internationalization's positive output, it raises fear in many Hungarian instructors – for it may carry the possibility of failure and disappointment. It demands courage to present the results of our work to an international academic society, since the number of (sometimes relentless) critics increases, and the insufficient knowledge of a foreign language also multiplies the sense of anxiety. Those who in spite of this can successfully join an international academic network, will develop. However, the essential condition for becoming a part of such a network is language acquisition, especially that of English, for it would be hard if not impossible to get by without it on the international stage and make his work known to the academic public, let alone connecting to an international scholarly network.

Internationalization as a process, according to special literature, may appear within international organizations, on a governmental level, at universities and other institutions, as well as in the form of multi- and bilateral cooperations between departments and faculties, furthermore, they can also be set up through informal channels. Knight, and developing his ideas, Sanderson made an attempt to systematize and break all these into dimensions.

In his study, Knight mentions three key concepts in connection with internationalization – these are international, intercultural, and global. According to his understanding, the joint presence of these three characterizes internationalization (that is, it is most definitely not a synonym for globalization!), they give the depth and dimension of it. The appearance of internationalization may differ in each country or institution, depending on the history, unique culture and the priorities in education of a given country/region/institute. The international activities interlink on the various levels, even more, sometimes they can serve as catalysts of each other, and the correlation between them gives the context of internationalization.

The examination of the academic networks of researchers and instructors, especially in Hungary, does not have a long history, it is a relatively unexplored territory, thus it is to be expected in the next couple of decades that it will be in the center of attention of education policy. In an international glance the researches of Enders, Smeby, Trondal, Kyvik, Höhle and Teichler are significant. In Hungary, the most research was carried out by the Center of Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD). These were mainly focused on the effects of the Bologna system in our country, the examination of the near-the-border conditions, on international faculty and student mobility, international researcher and instructor co-operation, as well as on different international effects. The author herself has taken an active part in these research series. There has been notable research done on the trends of higher education mobility from the instructors at the Corvinus University of Budapest, and also at the Center for Higher Education Studies. We also have to mention the works of Viszt and Hörich.

The main aim of the dissertation was to examine international cooperations on the individual level in two Hungarian higher educational institutions – amongst the instructors of a big, multi-faculty, regional university, and a college that has gained the applied sciences university just recently.

However, our research sets a precedent, seeing as to the best of our knowledge there has been no test and/or research focusing on the internationalization on the individual level.

In our dissertation we put a special emphasis on the forms internationalization on the individual level – from among these we only mention and categorize the ones that are relevant from the perspective of our research. What made our work difficult was that not all forms of internationalization could be detected in statistical analyses, since in the case of official missions abroad and joint projects collaboration is better registered, while informal cooperations do not always appear in the databases, not even the institutional ones.

Our further aim was to get to know how and along which variables the international relations of instructors are formed, and why certain people are more apt to build out networks than others. It was also a question of how instructors could join already existing international networks; to what extent is the “translatability” of a field of study, the gender, the age, the language proficiency, the family background and the workplace of the instructor determinant. We organized these issues around five topics that contain all the questions for which we would want to find an answer in our research.

First, we were interested in how “patterns” were outlined amongst the teachers’ (in regards to integration into international academic networks) and in how chief types could be defined looking at those relationships/networks’ existence, vastness, intensity, or even the lack thereof. For the analysis of this question, we had the help of the surveys and interviews. We did not pose a hypothesis for this one, as the development of its own clusters was our aim.

Next we wanted to respond to know what roles do the “brought” factors (age, gender, family cultural and relationship-based capital, language knowledge, etc.) play in the construction of international relationships. We

formed our suppositions thus around family (H1), residence (H2), experience and language acquisition (H3), and gender (H4).

The question also arose, how the teachers' academic field of expertise which he represents affects international network building, and how much that area's "translatability" simplifies or complicates these efforts toward cooperation (H5).

Furthermore it is a debated question in special literature of how much and on what level do the personal relationship and the institute context determine the creation of international connections (H6).

Finally, the last point to which we sought an answer was, what dangers are hidden within the formation of international academic networks regarding "brain drain" abroad, and can these be taken seriously as realistic danger or not? (H7).

II. RESEARCH METHODS

We carried out the first half of our research between 2012 and 2014 by involving the instructors of both the Debrecen and Eszterházy Károly University. Working from very limited material we were unable to interview the entirety of the Debrecen University's teachers, therefore we received samples for our surveys from the Humanities and Medical Departments.

During the survey process there was no opportunity to develop representative samples, thus we did not attempt to, simply because many teachers left the country to work abroad, retired, or went on maternity leave. Our examination's focus was a look into the formation process of personal relationship-based international academic networks. Yet the teachers not working at the universities anymore are still part of the networks because they helped their students ("disciples") and their colleagues join those networks.

Seeing that the examination period was longer than a semester, and due to already mentioned reasons, we were not able to say with certainty the exact number of the teachers. As we have already mentioned, during that period, almost 1,420 teachers worked in the Debrecen University's faculties (240-260 in the faculties we examined), while there were 270 at the Eszterházy Károly University. The surveys were filled out by 71 from the Medical Faculty of the University of Debrecen, by 70 from the Faculty of Humanities and by 69 from the whole of Eszterházy Károly University. We prepared a full-spectrum survey, of which 25-26% were filled out and returned, which is a rather acceptable percentage. The balanced ratio allowed us to compare all three – Eszterházy Károly University, the Faculty of Humanities and the Medical Faculty of the University of Debrecen. All things considered, it was not our aim to show how one was better than the other, but simply to gather data on international networking samples from multiple institutes.

With the two institutes' large amount of teachers, as well as the complexity of the theme taken into account, we chose to start with surveys in the first half of the research period. We used self-input surveys in the interest of answer validation. This sixty-question survey was given in printed format on paper, although when requested (with prior agreement), we provided online services as well. The SPSS 11.5 statistics data analysis program was used to grade the surveys; though the questionnaire was long and complex, those questioned found the topic and its examination important.

In our opinion, the survey alone would not have been enough for the theme's complete analysis, thus, in an interview we asked ten teachers with great insight and experience on the subject, to give their opinions about international academic networks. Primarily the interviews played a large role in the type development, since those questioned were more adept at answering due to their expertise and carrier choices. In the course of our research, we worked toward an analytical summary, the foundation of which was the statements given

in the interview, however, linguistic formation and stylistic choice were also regarded as important, because each of these in truth revealed the responders' attitude toward the topic.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the dissertation, we examined the instructors of two key higher education institutions from two regions of Hungary based on their international cooperation networks.

In the course of our research, we divided the themes into eight separate groupings, and it is very possible that on multiple points there was overlap regarding the analysis. Firstly, we looked at family, residence, and workplace atmosphere, followed by an international activity index and the reasons of lesser internationally active teachers to remain at home. Fourthly, while the facets of academics received a larger unit of the work, the importance of international cooperation and language acquisition got separate subchapters. One of the thesis' noteworthy results is the portion where the clusters are expounded upon, since, based on samples taken, we were able to give an even more colorful and more in-depth analysis of the teachers' academic activity that reached far beyond the international activity index. The last two themes were brain drain and online academic networks.

In our research, alongside the emerging researchers' questions we erected hypotheses regarding which we summarized the most important findings and experiences.

FAMILY

H1. We wanted to first receive an answer to whether or not those children of more highly qualified parents are more effective at international networking than first-generation intellectuals. Based on research from *Gazsó, Ferge, Pusztai* and

Andor, we began by theorizing that those instructors with parents who were more educated, who perhaps held diplomas, had a type of mindset that made movement about the academic world easier. We surmised that this higher cultural capital would have an effect on forging these international connections. However, we did not find any ties between the level of education of the parents and the inclination of instructors to join international academic networks in the samples we took.

In addition, the question arose that if a family member is already part of the academic world, will the rest of the family just as quickly and easily follow suit. Our survey results showed that only a few family members using their pre-existing connections were able to support the teachers during the course of their career. However, those surveyed found and highlighted the parents' financial and emotional support as very important. The interviews helped to shed light on the subject even more, thus proving our theory. They showed that in the medical and pedagogical professions, where the job "passes" from father to son, the presence of parental assistance in the formation of their child's career path via said academic networks was found to be very heavy. The role or importance of the siblings was less clear, seeing as they stepped up only after getting the first diploma. Spouses could help if, in that case, he or she worked in the same or a related field. Out of the three, the academic support seemed to appear most readily in this category. And in this our hypothesis is proven.

RESIDENCE

H2. Our second hypothesis focused on whether or not the teachers who, due to multiple changes in residence are more successful at building out international networks. Based on the research results of *Dusa*, we presumed for those teachers with fewer local ties it was easier to move, and having more experiences with mobility and connections in various places, they gained more professional associations. However, the results did not show any links between

the amount of residences and the teachers' academic activity, save in the medical faculty, where connections were found between teachers' international ties and the amount of residences. It was not proven across the board that those who move more, thus adapt faster have more academic connections.

EXPERIENCE, LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

H3. According to our assumption, older instructors who have more experience in their fields, and who have been working for longer, have greater and more widely spread networks than their younger counterparts. Our thoughts on the subject were these: because these elder teachers have more time on the job, they have had far more time and opportunity for academic interaction, giving them an edge over the younger ones. Thus our theory stood, and we could show significant ties between the teachers' age and their academic activity.

Another concept was that the more confident in language knowledge, similarly to older teachers, were more able to try themselves on the international stage, since their concrete and applicable language knowledge did not present a problem. That is, following *Medgyes'* and *Kaplan's* research we surmised, that according to worldwide tendencies in our samples too it will show that younger instructors retain this solid, stable language knowledge. In this our hypothesis was only partially proven. Though many among the youth held a high, mainly conversational level of language knowledge, this still did not mean that their networks were so widespread, that is to say, the language skill level or lack thereof did not/does not define the scope or number of the networks gained. This came as a surprise to us that the language major instructors were those who least built out their international cooperative networks, albeit their language skills were precisely what would have enabled them.

GENDER

H4. We wanted to determine which gender is more academically active, men or women. Using *Schneider's* conclusion as our starting point, we figured there was a very limited rapport between motherhood and mobility of women, in a word it was difficult to marry career and being a mother. In our minds, the responsibilities in the family, taking care of the children were less binding of men, thus making them more mobile. During our research, though men really did show higher international activity, no significant difference between the two was distinguishable.

THE ACADEMIC REALM

H5. According to our fifth hypothesis, linguistic-majoring instructors had more vast connections than their contemporaries in social sciences or humanities.

Taking into consideration *Kyvik and Larsen's*, *Viszt's*, *Pusztai's*, *Fekete's*, as well as *Smeby és Trondal's* research, we figured that due to the academic realm's "translatability", the non-linguistic-major areas of social sciences and humanities were at a disadvantage to begin with compared to the other two. The medical profession's "universal" fact that during the Cold War Era the appearance of research results abroad and the international intellectual exchange that occurred among regional experts meant little danger. In conjunction with *Ronai's* research, we assumed that language majors had an advantage over their fellow instructors due to their proficient language skills that could easily put them ahead of their colleagues.

However, the results revealed that, though armed with foreign language knowledge, linguistics majors were not active internationally at all but rather left their skills unused. Many interviewees supposed this was because they lacked the courage to stand before an international audience to speak in that given foreign tongue. It was especially perplexing and discouraging for linguistics teachers that the possessed foreign language skills were considered a bare

necessity in the international arena, while at home they were highly valued for it. In contrast, social studies teachers' academic activity was notably greater, and they thrived better in this environment.

VALUE HOMOPHILIA

H6. Based on the research of *Lazarsfeld* and *Merton*, as well as *McPherson and his colleagues*, we presumed that in these international networks, the emphasis is placed on status and value homophilia rather than on professionalism. People do not get into these networks because they are “the best”, but rather if they possess similar values, attitudes and norms. Our results showed that academics gain access to the cooperative networks partly via colleagues and to some extent through taking part in various academic events, yet these beginnings of cooperation were not the dependents of some scientific achievement. An interviewee told us that the “being at the right place at the right time” theory was more prevalent than the existence of shared norms. Other than this, teachers rarely kept company with those involved in only one or two networks, the majority of the afore mentioned resulting from a one-time project, research series, or guest lecture that only targeted one professional area of the teacher’s carrier.

BRAIN DRAIN

H7. We supposed that a teacher only accepted work abroad if it served to benefit the interest of his or her children’s future. In agreement with *Erola and his partners'* research, we surmised that the cultural and relational capital of the teachers involved in our study, gained during their studies and work, were to be transformed into economic capital for the sake of their kids. Thus, this would serve as motivation for them to shoulder work abroad. Our sample did not show any reference to this motivation, and, furthermore, it was only brought up in the case when teachers already had kids.

THOSE WHO DID NOT TAKE PART IN THE SURVEY

H8. Finally, we assumed that among the instructors who did not fill out our questionnaire were overrepresented those who did not know with what to fill out the surveys. We were not able to either prove it or provide a rebuttal, since this was a group from whom data for that should have been gathered, but for precisely the lack thereof, we could not. However, during the interviews there were several direct as well as indirect references to these instructors, we thought it important to mention this particular group of teachers.

In our opinion, the notable achievement of this thesis was the extrapolation of an international academic activity index, through which the teachers became much more easily classifiable and with greater ease we could distinguish the level of their academic involvement. It was also worth noting that we were able to break up the research into eight groups founded upon the degree of motivation of the instructors. They are the following: 1. academically isolated; 2. the withdrawn; 3. the forced travelers; 4. those who stay out of it; 5. the world travelers; 6. knowledge brokers; 7. young instructors with a PhD; 8. saunterers. With the help of this typology and the international academic activity index the creators and executors of the international strategies, on the national, institutional, faculty, and department levels as well have a much better view of the surveyed teachers' academic motivations and attitudes, which could aid a more successful and realistic formation of strategic goals. The examination of the received data uncovered countless more problems and themes, that could serve both as an aid to the unraveling of the current theme's analysis and as the starting point for a whole new line of research projects.



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List of publications related to the dissertation

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1. **Fekete, I. D.**, Simándi, S.: Nemzetközi kapcsolatok, élménytársadalom, hivatásturizmus.
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