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The OECD's influence on national higher education policies: internationalisation in Israel and South Korea

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ABSTRACT

An extensive literature has explored the influence of the OECD on school education policies globally, while their influence on higher education policies has been underexamined. This article addresses that void by analysing the internationalisation of higher education in Israel and South Korea. We suggest that joining the OECD provided political legitimacy for both countries and that the OECD comparative metrics and guidelines were crucial in generating anxieties about their underperformance in the global market for international students. These metrics served as benchmarks for internationalisation policies and shaped the foci, aims and definitions of success (i.e. parity with OECD averages). The desire to compete spurred cross-national policy referencing and borrowing, initially with little adaptation resulting in a form of 'prefabricated internationalisation'. Over time, the (im)balance between global aspiration and local realities resulted in localisation. We argue that policy isomorphism is overstated, and call for the recognition of complexity in the convergence debate.

KEYWORDS

Globalisation; international organisations; OECD; policy borrowing and referencing; prefabricated internationalisation; higher education; Israel; Korea

关键词

全球化; 国际组织; 经合组织; 政策借鉴和参考; 预制国际化; 高等教育; 以色列; 韩国

经合组织对国家高等教育政策的影响: 以色列和韩国的国际化

摘要

经合组织对各国学校教育政策的影响已有大量文献探讨，而其对高等教育政策的影响尚未得到充分研究。通过对以色列和韩国高等教育国际化的归纳定性分析，本文填补这一空白。我们认为，加入经合组织为两国提供了政治合法性，而经合组织的比较指标和准则，使两国因在全球留学生市场中的不佳表现而产生焦虑。这些指标成为衡量国际化政策的标尺，并形塑成功之重点、目标与定义（即与经合组织平均水平持平）。竞争的渴望激发跨国政策参考与借鉴，并在初始时不加调整，导致一种"预制国际化"的形式。随着时间推移，全球愿景与本土现实之间的平衡（失衡）产生了在地化。我们认为，政策同构被夸大，并呼吁在对趋同的讨论中认识其复杂性。

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Introduction

In recent years, the role of the state in internationalisation in higher education (HE) has been the subject of increasing research (Jooste and Hagenmeier 2022; Veerasamy and Durst 2021). Yet, only about 10% of countries around the world have a formal national internationalisation strategy, mostly concentrated in affluent democracies, and of those, over 80% of them are OECD members (Crăciun 2018, 2019). Analyses of education policies at the school level have identified 'globalisation' as a driving force in their formation, indicating that international organisations (IOs) play an influential role in promoting isomorphism and setting the norms, discourses, and models of such policies (Dobbins and Martens 2012; Engel 2015; Sellar and Lingard 2013); however, scant scholarship has investigated the role of IOs and specifically the OECD in HE policies.

We provide an analysis of the OECD in shaping national internationalisation policies in Israel and South Korea (hereinafter, Korea), two nations which are members of the OECD but on the 'periphery' in terms of those which have driven globalisation. These two cases provide a basis to understand how the OECD is invoked as a benchmark, and source of legitimacy and evidence, promoting and shaping the national formulation of HE policies. We argue that being part of the OECD, a club of wealthy democracies, serves as a source of legitimacy and identity for these nations: for Israel, in light of its continued conflict with the Palestinians; for Korea, in its transition from military dictatorship to democracy and its intractable conflict with an authoritarian North Korea. The OECD comparative metrics (e.g. *Education at a Glance*) in both cases served as benchmarks for international student policies. We further argue that the desire to 'be part of the club' (Li and Morris 2022) and improve on comparative metrics, spurred a process of policy referencing and borrowing from other countries with varying levels of localisation/recontextualisation. We argue that the Israeli representation of internationalisation policies in select European nations failed to recognise established critiques; and that this resulted in a form of 'prefabricated internationalisation', which may succeed in its mission to broadcast the nation's membership in an exclusive club/part of Europe, but is destined to fall short of its potential for localised internationalisation practices. Korea, in contrast, instituted internationalisation strategies since the mid-1990s and has recognised problems arising from a prefabricated model. In more recent policies, while still borrowing instruments pioneered in the West (i.e. franchising), it provides more evidence of localisation.

We employed a multiple case study approach which allows researchers to describe, document and critically analyse phenomena in context and its impact on theory construction and evolution in a particular field (Stake 2013). Our cases were purposefully chosen because they illuminate the role of a prominent IO, the OECD, in national internationalisation policies. Both countries are OECD members, with important high technology sectors, involved in intractable conflict, and strong connections with diaspora. Both have been argued to have ethnonational elements to their internationalisation and are peripheral to both the core nations studied in the internationalisation literature (Bamberger, Morris, and Yemini 2019; Kim 2011) and to the nations which created the OECD. We recognise considerable differences between the Israeli and Korean cases; notably, the timing of initiatives, scope, and extent of critique and 'localisation'; we address these issues in the final section.

Our data collection and analysis focused on national internationalisation policies and their related documents, commentaries and media coverage. We drew on multiple

sources: policy reports, tenders, press releases and decisions from the national HE authorities and their steering/advisory committees; government budgets and decisions; national media coverage; and the academic literature. The Israeli case also drew on interviews conducted for an in-depth study of internationalisation (Bamberger 2020). We employ a critical policy perspective (Apple 2019) and used inductive qualitative analysis to understand the local contexts in which the policies were developed along with an analysis of the documents stated aims, implicit assumptions, silences, and discursive constructions; we did not analyse policy enactment. We begin by examining the literature around national internationalisation of HE policies, and the role of IOs, specifically the OECD, in globalising education policies. We then analyse the two cases, focusing on how the OECD is discursively employed as a source of legitimacy, evidence, and the impact of its metrics on the instruments and aims of internationalisation policy.

National internationalisation policy in HE and IOs

Studies of internationalisation in higher education initially focused primarily on the institutional level; however, in the 2010s, with rising nationalism and populism, coupled with the increasing role of China and other authoritarian states in promoting internationalisation, there was a shift towards increased recognition and study of the role of the state (Bamberger and Morris, Forthcoming). States play an important role in setting immigration regulations, work visas, tuition fees, etc., and have become active in promoting policies (and national brands, see Lomer, Papatsiba, and Naidoo 2018)) aimed at international students. Despite such recognition, there are few countries with national policies towards internationalisation. Crăciun (2018) showed that 80% of countries had neither a formal national internationalisation strategy nor even a section on internationalisation in their HE strategy; she argues that at the national level, 'thinking strategically about higher education internationalisation is a new phenomenon' (100), one that has been primarily European (see Mittelmeier and Yang 2022; Tight 2022). Crăciun (2018) finds that the countries with internationalisation policies receive the majority of internationally mobile students, indicating either the effectiveness and importance of such policies, or their response to the growth of international students in those nations. Thus, national internationalisation policies have primarily emerged in developed (democratic) economies, and amongst nations within the OECD, an organisation which, in the field of education projects global policies and norms, promoting policy mimicry and isomorphism. However, rather little is known about the role of the OECD in national internationalisation policies, and how it may affect strategies, aims and forms in HE.

'Globalisation' is increasingly viewed as a project which is promoted and shaped by policies and comparative metrics emanating from IOs (Robertson and Dale 2015). It is often viewed as a force promoted by the West/Anglo-American sphere with strong links to neoliberalism. Considerable literature stresses the importance of IOs as agents of globalisation, setting norms, discourses and values, and promoting isomorphism (Robertson and Dale 2015; Zapp 2021). Scholars of isomorphism, tend to view national systems as converging around a global model, and the study of local/national variation as mere 'diversity facades' (Zapp, Marques, and Powell 2021). In contrast to isomorphism, comparative studies on national internationalisation policies tend to argue (at times implicitly) that such policies originate as a response to demands for 'globalisation', while then emphasising the way in

which national contexts impact on the approaches to (e.g. instruments used) or specific policy rationales for internationalisation, indicating policy localisation (Sanders 2019). Hong (2020), comparing Australia and China's policies, uses a framework of globalisation and path dependency, indicating that both countries' policies are embedded in a response to globalisation, however, ultimately alighting on the broad categories of 'capitalism' and 'socialism' as the explanations for their different approaches and rationales. Studies thus emphasise the way in which countries take different approaches, even if they may all be responding to an exogenous 'globalisation'.

The drive to compete on global metrics can result in policy isomorphism and mimicry and the OECD, with its PISA test has been noted for its influence on education policy at the secondary level (Dobbins and Martens 2012; Engel 2015; Sellar and Lingard 2013). In striving to compete, nations may embark on a process of horizon scanning, to identify 'what works' and best practices elsewhere, facilitating forms of policy borrowing from high performers (Forestier et al. 2016; You and Morris 2016). While policy borrowing is often subject to a process of translation and transformation (Cowen 2009), policies can also be transplanted with little adaptation. Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock (2017) argue that developing countries often adopt policies, programmes and institutional structures from developed countries, which helps improve their image and legitimacy; however, these solutions are often not fit for the local context and they are often required to borrow policies by their funders. The result is the transfer of prefabricated solutions which ensures 'successful failure' as external best practices are adopted as policies, but fall short of their purposes, and do not promote innovation, experimentation or localised solutions. A small but increasing number of commentaries on internationalisation in HE focusing on its proliferation outside of the West have stressed the need for greater context sensitivity. Addressing 'new players' in the field of internationalisation, Crossley (2022) argues for 'greater problematisation of the uncritical international transfer of pedagogical, professional, and research modalities during the internationalisation of higher education' (361). Tight's (2022) systematic review of the internationalisation literature indicates an increasing diversity of policies and practices 'beyond the West', and argues that we should not ' … expect continued internationalisation to lead to common standards and practices (i.e. to Westernisation)' (253).

Israel: OECD and legitimacy

In 2010, after a three-year ascension process, Israel became a member of the OECD, a club of wealthy democracies, based on market-principles and 'evidence-based' policies. Israel's ascension marked its inclusion into the exclusive club and the affirmation of its place as a modern, affluent, democratic nation-state (Lavie 2010). This was viewed as a significant boost to Israel's legitimacy, a country embroiled in ethnic conflict since its founding, with continual existential anxieties (Lavie 2010). The OECD has considerable influence in Israeli public policy and is viewed as an arbitrator of quality, and a benchmark for Israel's education policies (Maron 2020; Yemini and Gordon 2017).

'Internationalisation' in HE policy had not previously been on the agenda of Israel's Council of Higher Education (CHE), the national regulatory authority, or its funding arm, the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC), despite a history of international student engagement, particularly with the Jewish diaspora (Bamberger 2020). While

Israel was once a top destination for US (Jewish) students, its position as a host of international students has been in decline with a significant drop during the second Intifada (Bamberger 2020). In 2016, the Office of Strategy and International Affairs was established, the brainchild of Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg, an academic appointed to numerous government positions who advocated economic and social reforms based on agendas promoted by leading IOs, notably the OECD (Maron 2020). At its inception, it became the umbrella office for the planning, management and coordination of the EU's international programmes (joined in 2008), and the Asia scholarships programme, inaugurated in 2012, by the Netanyahu government to promote closer ties with Asia, notably China and India (PBC Decision 2011; Shagrir 2011). Thus, there was now an 'Office' that was mandated with international strategy, and assembled a team of international education professionals, in charge of national-level activities/agreements.

In March 2016, the report *Current State of International Students in Israel* was presented to the PBC, prepared by the new office's Deputy Director General (Maoz 2016a). While recognising that internationalisation is a multi-faceted term, the report quickly focuses on international students. It proceeds to depict the current situation in Israel of international students; using the OECD vocabulary of 'global markets of internationals students' and 'supply' and 'demand', it provides a 'market segmentation' analysis, outlining the numbers of international students in Israel, by institution, level, type of programme, discipline, and ethnicity (Jewish or 'general'). The report estimates ranged from 1.7% to 4.6% of the student cohort.

The report outlines the current programme offerings, activities and regulation across institutions and the CHE/PBC, including marketing and promotional activities, feedback from current and previous international students, and scholarship programmes and other actors in the field of international students. The report concludes with an 'international comparisons' section which uses the OECD's *Education at a Glance* report and statistics, as well as the IIE's Project Atlas report as a benchmark. Three major concerns are noted: (1) most countries have the highest number of international students coming from China or neighbouring countries, in Israel the largest group comes from the US (about 40%); (2) the OECD average is 9% of students in the country are international, this percentage is much higher than that in Israel, by all measures; and (3) in most OECD countries the percentage of international students is highest at the doctoral level, less in the master level and the lowest in the bachelors level. In Israel, the pattern is reversed. The overall sentiment of the report underlines Israel's anxiety about its performance in relation to OECD members.

We argue that these points are troubling for Israel in several ways: first, Israel cannot expect to attract international students from its neighbours, given its low regional integration into the Middle East. This hints at ways in which the conflict and Israel's position hinder its internationalisation and represent threats to its legitimacy. Second, Israel is portrayed as significantly below the OECD average, a major benchmark for Israeli policies (Maron 2020) and one of its routes to international legitimacy. It touches on Israel's desire to be part of the global, as it is not regionally integrated. Third, the fact that Israel has a low level of international students at the doctoral level is worrying because this is a key indicator of innovation and could be seen as a threat to the competitiveness of its high technology sector. With the new five-year plan (2017–2022) approaching, the report paves the way for policy action.

Horizon scanning and prefabricated internationalisation

Once the 'current situation' was established, the new Office was tasked to create policy recommendations and soon published *Internationalisation in Higher Education: International Students in Israel, Suggestions for Policy Principles* (Maoz 2016b), which was approved by the PBC/CHE and adopted for the 5-year plan (2017–2022). Its method was essentially to scan the approaches to internationalisation of countries which were deemed similar to Israel and to identify what Israel could borrow.

The document identifies two main models of internationalisation: Anglo-Saxon models, which stress the economic value of international students; and European models which the report describes as 'raising the quality and competition of the national system … ' (Maoz 2016b, 18). Readers are urged: 'The above two principal models – the European and the American-British-Australian should stand before our eyes when we come to adapt policy on the subject to Israel' (Maoz 2016b, 4). Although unattributed, Knight's (2004) oft-cited definition of internationalisation is introduced, and a host of possible advantages for internationalisation across levels are outlined, many of them echoing the dominant economic and political drivers (e.g. a branding tool; diversifying income streams; contributions to diplomacy and soft power) of the internationalisation literature. Several rationales more particular to Israel, are also outlined: 'tool to diminish academic boycotts', 'strengthening ties with the Jewish Diaspora' and 'ability to maintain quality human resources in the market (brain circulation)' (Maoz 2016b, 5). However, the recommended rationale for internationalisation is to: 'raise the level and the competitiveness of the HE system in Israel', the top rationale identified in the European model, and only as a secondary rationale the 'economic contributions to the HE system' (Maoz 2016b, 6).

Citing evidence from several European countries, the report recommends that the target should be to: 'focus on bringing students at a high academic level to Israel and to integrate as much as possible the international students in the same classes with the Israeli students' (Maoz 2016b, 8). The main categories which they recommend focusing on are doctoral and post-doctoral students, master's degree students, and short courses. Thus, they recommend reversing the current order of international students, in favour of the OECD report (Maoz 2016b, 16), following the European model.

Key target groups were defined as: (A) outstanding students from Asia – especially from China and India; and (B) outstanding Jewish students – mainly from the USA and Canada. The report explains that the

> definition (of preferential targets) stems both from looking at the global market of international students and its trends [i.e. large numbers of students from Asia, particularly China], and from the analysis of the relative advantages of Israel as a market for higher education … . (Maoz 2016b, 10)

The targets of the policy are in line with Israel's national identity as a Jewish nation-state, its political alliances, at the time, and the role of Chinese and Indian students in global HE. It likewise reflects thinking that these are groups which will study in Israel, despite Israel's problematic image in the world: Jewish students presumably because of their ethnoreligious identity and Asian students because: ' … in Asia, and in particular in China and India, Israel has a very positive image, and is identified with the values of innovation and excellence' (Maoz 2016b, 10).

In line with policies in European countries, the report recommends the promotion of teaching in English and the development of courses in English to create programmes that build on Israel's 'value added' areas. To reach the target international students, the CHE/PBC is recommended to exercise planning considerations around new programmes with the international target audiences in mind, and to revisit regulation about tuition caps for international students (with supporting evidence from the OECD that many countries in the world have two-tiered system of fees).

The report further recommends the creation of 'a significant body', similar to those in other European nations (i.e. Austria, Holland, Finland and Germany), for the marketing, branding, support and treatment of the international student. The funding of such a centralised body, similar to other cited examples of European nations, should come from different bodies, but operate autonomously. The budget support of the PBC should focus on the development of the necessary infrastructure in the public institutions (e.g. opening programmes in English, comprehensive support for the international student, building marketing capabilities and international presence) and supporting a limited number of 'excellence' scholarship programmes for both master's degree, doctoral and post-doctoral students.

The recommended aim of the programme is conservative:

> In the short term (1–2 years), the focus should be on taking care of regulatory issues, building infrastructure in institutions, and in building the (new department's) capabilities for marketing, branding and handling international students … only in the medium term (up to 5 years) and long (decade) we should expect to see a significant increase in numbers of international students in institutions with an international reputation, and an increase in the number of international collaborations of all institutions. (Maoz 2016b, 15)

The reason given for this slow approach is that 'the international higher education market … relies heavily on experiences that go through word of mouth, directly, through social networks, blogs, etc.' (Maoz 2016b).

The rationales, actions and goals for a national-level internationalisation policy are thus laid out. Several notable issues arise: first, the OECD, through its comparative metrics, provides the framing for the internationalisation policy (i.e. international students) and its aims (i.e. parity with the OECD average). Second, the extent of policy referencing, from a small number of European OECD nations (instead of the core/larger nations) to build this policy is combined with a lack of criticality, and awareness of the problems of such policies. Third is the view in the report that Israel is not a 'normal' international study destination and as such, considerable emphasis on marketing and branding is needed:

> Only in significant marketing and branding efforts on the one hand, and the efforts to build appropriate infrastructure in Israel, on the other hand, it will be possible to position the leading institutions in Israel as ordinary destinations in the international arena and to bring to them a critical mass of international students. (Maoz 2016b, 12)

Fourth, there is no attempt to define what is quality or how internationalisation, and specifically international students would contribute to it. The system is not framed as lacking quality in the report, and there is no mention of the academic quality or global nature of Israeli HEIs on metrics (e.g. rankings; bibliometric citation reports). Finally, Israel's distinctive features are marginalised, specifically the intractable conflict with the Palestinians, the diverse ethnic and religious communities within Israel, and the Jewish diaspora.

Thus, following a request for policy recommendations, there began a 'scanning the horizons' process (Forestier et al. 2016), in which 'successful' countries, comprising smaller OECD nations, were identified. The recommendations promote (and cite) policies and infrastructures found in these countries, most of which are seen as comparative to Israel because they are small, non-Anglophone countries with developed HE systems (Finland, The Netherlands, Estonia, Austria, Holland). While China and India are mentioned numerous times throughout the policy papers, these countries are seen not as those to imitate/borrow from; rather, as large source markets of students, and as apolitical with regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Established critiques of the policies are also absent; neither is there a critical analysis of their implementation in the Israeli context. For example, the logic to teach in English is so that Israeli and international students will be in the same classes and thus international students will serve to raise the academic level of the local students. Lomer (2017) argues that seeing international students as 'academic resources' for local students assumes that they will have positive interactions; international students are willing and able to serve in this capacity; and academic staff are able to teach in English and manage a multi-cultural classroom, all of which have been shown to be difficult propositions; moreover, the report notes that Israeli faculty are not comfortable teaching in English (Maoz 2016b, 7).

Notably, 'multi-culturalism' is acknowledged in the policy documents as a possible form and aim of internationalisation, however, 'multi-culturalism' is connected to discourses of creating 'global citizens', and 'skills demanded in today's world' such as the 'improvement of academic English' (Maoz 2016b, 5). There is little discussion of the potential of internationalisation (at home), through its multi-cultural aspects, to bring together disparate parts of Israeli society. This form of internationalisation, which might be more powerful in transforming Israeli society, as well as fostering '21st Century Skills' such as cross-cultural communication and critical thinking, is marginalised in the policy recommendations, targets, and measurement (i.e. assessment is framed in international student numbers), and in the subsequent budgeting mechanism (PBC Decision 2018).

Historically, many international schools and programmes in Israel have catered to Jewish diaspora students (Bamberger, Yan, and Morris 2021). The 'current status' report (Maoz 2016a) shows that more than half of Israel's international students are Jewish and includes appendices of different organisations which work within the Jewish diaspora to encourage international student mobility to Israel. However, there is little mention of Jewish diaspora students, except for those from specific locations (in the West) who are 'outstanding' in the policy recommendations. We argue that this is consistent with the aims of the policy: (1) to signal that Israel is part of the OECD club; and (2) to signal a desired form of 'internationalisation' to the Israeli HE sector. By not focusing on Jewish students, the new department differentiates its approach to internationalisation. This resonates with interviews conducted (Bamberger 2020) with CHE staff of the new Office, in which the typologies, aims and professional language current in the Western-dominated internationalisation literature were the prevailing worldview of the international education professionals and hence, those that should be adopted in Israel. Organisations such as the Jewish Agency, which focus on bringing Jewish students from the diaspora to Israeli universities, were not seen as engaging in 'internationalisation', given their different motivations (Bamberger 2020.). This reflects the dominance of the Westernised

discourse on internationalisation, propagated by American/European professional associations, conferences (e.g. NAFSA) and scholar-practitioner literature, in which it is associated with cosmopolitanism, and national, ethnic, religious and other identity categories are downplayed in favour of a shared humanity (Bamberger 2022). It is likewise a signalling device to the universities about the importance of internationalisation as an aim of the system (Ashwin 2022), and specifically, the form of internationalisation, adopted and promoted by the new Office. In this way, it presents a borrowed form of prefabricated internationalisation, in which distinctive features (i.e. issues of multi-culturalism and diversity in the Israeli domestic context) are marginalised.

Korea: OECD and legitimacy

Since the late 1980s, there has been pressure from the OECD and other member-states (e.g. USA) for Korea to open its financial markets and join the OECD (Kim 1995). As the country's balance of trade gradually improved with the turn of the decade, with a formal conclusion of the Uruguay Round in 1994 and the creation of the World Trade Organisation in 1995, a strong public sentiment coalesced in Korea to open up the market and join 'the prestigious club of developed economies' (Yang 1996). Hence when Kim Young-Sam (1993–1997) was elected president, 'globalisation (*segyehwa*)' was announced as both the foremost national objective and a political slogan. The Kim government prepared its application for the 'OECD club' to solidify the country's new identity not only as a rapidly developed economy, but also as a country that achieved political maturity in democracy and human rights (Ministry of Trade and Industry 1996). Education, in particular, was considered as a domain that required a drastic reform for the country to increase its competitiveness, especially that of HE, and to move towards a knowledge-based economy. This vision of a knowledge-based economy – and the country's strong advocacy and memetic desire to stand side by side with the 'global club' (Kim 2022) – gave rise to a series of internationalisation policies.

The Presidential Commission on Education Reform (PCER) formed under the Kim government in 1994 released four distinct educational reform plans over the next three years (1995–1997). The country's first internationalisation policies appeared in the *1st 5.31 Education Reform Plan* released in 1995. Similar to other East Asian countries (Sanders 2019), the government relaxed central control over the establishment of private HEIs and granted the decision concerning student quota to individual private HEIs. The Plan then recommended five internationalisation strategies: (i) internationalisation of research; (ii) training of experts in international relations; (iii) improve foreign student policies; (iv) support universities to establish branch campuses abroad; and (v) establish Korean cultural identity (PCER 1995). In these strategies, the role of culture is particularly prominent. The fourth strategy suggests establishing branch campuses in regions where overseas Korean diasporas are concentrated, such as Osaka (Japan) and Los Angeles (USA), presumably because, given the lack of popularity of Korean HE in the mid-1990s, the demand for overseas campuses of Korean HEIs would be higher than elsewhere. Additionally, the fifth strategy emphasises the following:

(1) Korean culture should be faithfully reflected in the curriculum of domestic universities for students to be equipped with national pride and a correct view of the country;

(2) Educate all students to learn at least one of the traditional Korean cultural arts;
(3) Provide remote education on Korean culture through satellite communication so that foreigners can properly understand Korean culture and overseas Koreans can strengthen their cultural solidarity. (PCER 1995, 42)

In contrast to how European countries embarked on the 'Internationalisation at Home' movement in the late 1990s (de Wit and Deca 2020), Korea's strategies hardly touched upon the issue of 'internationalising' the curriculum, teaching or learning. Instead, the focus was on competing in the 'global knowledge economy', while cementing both cultural ties and national identity.

After negotiations with the OECD, Korea officially joined the club in 1996. Membership not only meant an elevation of national status and image but also that the country needed to be attuned to the norms and standards agreed upon by the member-states. Although the OECD lacked any binding power over its member-states, as Kim (2005) argued, by the end of the 1990s, most OECD member-states identified 'rationales to internationalise their higher education systems under the pressures set by problems faced by nearly all OECD countries' (89), such as increasing mobility of students and faculty across borders, international quality assurance, and corporate partnerships. Also, with the advent of global league tables, the metrics produced by the OECD drove the HE agendas of the government (de Wit and Altbach 2021). Drawing on the 'foreign students in tertiary education' data published by the OECD (e.g. OECD 2000), both Korean media (e.g. Lee 2000) and the government (Ministry of Education [MOE] 2014) generated a sense of urgency about lagging behind other member-states in international student recruitment.

Two major internationalisation initiatives were implemented over the following decade. First, through the Brain Korea 21 (BK21) project, the government sought to enhance the global competitiveness of domestic HEIs since 1999. BK21 is a competitive funding programme that runs every seven years, which is designed to enhance the country's research capacity, nurture globally competitive universities, and high-quality manpower. Funding is awarded based on the research capacity of universities and departments, ultimately aiming to increase the quantity of Scientific Citation Indices (SCI). The OECD metrics were absent in the BK21 report (MEHRD 2007), whereas the foci, aims, and definitions of success are illustrated in terms of both the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook and the QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) rankings.

Second, driven to improve the education trade deficit caused by the increasing departure of domestic students and to reduce the parity with the OECD member-states, the government pursued a vigorous international student recruitment agenda through the SKP with an aim to increase the number by tenfold from 16,832 in 2004 to 50,000 by 2010 (MEHRD 2004). Whilst the SKP report (MEHRD 2004) does not provide any in-depth analysis of other countries activities, there are signs of 'horizon scanning' of the USA and Japan, presumably due to their global status as global and regional powers, respectively. By stating that more than half of post-doctoral students in USA universities are foreigners and attributing the success of USA's Silicon Valley to high-quality overseas students from India, China, and Korea, the report justifies its plan to increase the intake. Additionally, it references the Japanese Government Scholarships to identify 'best practices' (e.g. scholarship funding; international students affairs staff). In other words, the political motivation to become part of the 'prestigious OECD club' met the economic

rationale to recruit and nurture a high-quality foreign workforce, against the backdrop of an ageing society.

By the end of 2000s, several concerns arose in both the media and the scholarship regarding the country's internationalisation. First, the government is focusing on a narrow interpretation of internationalisation, wherein only the 'ceremonial façade' (Zapp, Marques, and Powell 2021) or the 'flagship dimensions', such as global university rankings, student mobility, and publications, are highlighted when evaluating the performance (de Wit and Deca 2020). Second, as the employment of foreign academic faculty became another indicator for measuring the level of 'internationalisation' (e.g. QS ranking), there was a surge of international academic staff within domestic HEIs. However, foreign academics in Korea were reported to often be subject to unfavourable treatment (e.g. lack of tenure-track opportunities) driven by the country's ethnocentric tradition (Kim 2005, 2011). Lastly, as the declining birth rate and the shrinking school-age population posed financial risks to HEIs – especially those located in the provinces – the HEIs found recruitment of foreign students as a solution to avoid large-scale university restructuring (Lee 2018). But lack of quality control resulted in a rise in illegal migrants (students not leaving the country after their expiration of student visa). These negative experiences resulting from the introduction of a prefabricated form of internationalisation during the first decade signalled the need to recalibrate the country's approach in accordance with local and demographic needs. The aggressive approach the country took to increase the foreign student intake despite its lacking quality assurance mechanisms before the 2010s can be understood as an example of prefabricated internationalisation. However, as the 'side-effects' became more noticeable (e.g. illegal immigrants, foreign students returning to their countries instead of staying and contributing to the economy), this caused regulatory tensions with other ministries (e.g. Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Employment and Labour) who saw foreign students as 'subjects of control'. These ill effects – as well as the UNESCO/OECD's guideline on 'quality' – generated the need to radically change the approach.

Horizon scanning and policy localisation

With these concerns on the rise, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST 2012) released the *Report on Strategies for Internationalisation of Higher Education* (hereinafter, 2012 Report). The report problematises that, 'despite the overall quantitative growth and development of higher education', Korea's level of internationalisation and competitiveness of the universities are 'still insufficient compared to advanced countries' (MEST 2012, 1). However, the report continues to insist that a further intake of foreign students would offset the oversupply of domestic HE caused by population decline and sets two goals: (i) double the number of foreign students to 200,000 by 2020; and (ii) prepare a range of internationalisation models for domestic universities.

To legitimise the first goal, the report provides supporting evidence from the OECD that, in terms of the proportion of foreign students in HEIs, Korea is performing poorly (2.4% in 2011) compared to the average OECD countries (8.7% in 2011). It further recommends that increasing the proportion up to 5.4% by 2020 would be 'ideal' in boosting the country's global competitiveness in HE (MEST 2012, 5). However, as the number of foreign students continued to decline until 2014, in 2015, the Ministry of Education

(MOE) announced a *Proposal for expanding the attraction of foreign students* Plan (hereinafter, the 2015 Plan) to extend the deadline from 2020 to 2023 (MOE 2015). Unlike the 2012 Report, which only vaguely states that the country will 'invite excellent human resources from *various countries* taking into account both priority partner countries and resource diplomacy' (MEST 2012, 11), the target groups are specified in the 2015 Plan: inland China, ASEAN countries, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The explanation for the choice of target groups is provided in another report hosted by the MOE (Lee 2015); whereas the selection of inland China is conceived in recognition of the growing number of foreign students coming from its regions, the other two (ASEAN, CIS) are chosen based on cultural ties – the former in their interest in Korean culture (*hallyu*) and the latter for their large population of Korean diaspora.

The second goal to prepare various internationalisation models for domestic universities is based on the argument that the country needs to provide opportunities for international students to receive the expected standard of education in Korea. The 2012 Report stresses the importance of setting the stage for domestic universities to expand overseas and identifies different types of internationalisation models: franchise, twinning, double/joint degree, articulation, overseas research centre/education centre, and branch campus. While no reference is provided in the Report, the typology resembles the models often found in the Western literature, especially Knight's model (2005, 21) categorised as cross-border programme and provider mobility modes. The recommendation is to formulate localised strategies that encourage not just the linkage between domestic and foreign universities to develop education programmes, but also between domestic universities and Korean global enterprises to establish branch campuses.

Subsequently, in 2016, the MOE (2016) published the *Measures to Improve the Higher Education System and Cultivate Creative and Innovative Talents* report, where it introduced an 'exportation of education programmes' strategy. Over the next two years, Korea established a legal framework that enables domestic HEIs to 'export' their curricula overseas through a new addition to the *Higher Education Act*:

> Article 13-2 (Operation of domestic university curriculum at foreign universities)
>
> (1) A domestic university may have a foreign university operate its curriculum … A foreign university shall be limited to the one which has obtained the evaluation certification by the foreign country or by the accreditation body recognised by the foreign country.
>
> (2) The curriculum content, teaching methods and the operation, such as the completion of credits, shall be determined by the university regulations in accordance with the standards prescribed by the Minister of Education.

This Article was particularly influential as many high-ranked universities immediately proposed to establish their own 'global campuses'. However, due to a regulation that the campuses should be operated in the form of a separate legal entity, many relinquished their projects (Huh 2021).

The franchising mode was then suggested as a solution for two reasons: (1) it enables universities to secure a sufficient number of student population against the backdrop of falling birth rate; and (2) no need to construct a physical campus (NARS 2021, 2). However, only three franchises were approved to be exported by the end of 2019 and, by the time of writing this article, a total of 11 curricula from five universities have been granted permission to 'export their excellent curriculum' (MOE 2022, 1). Unlike the economic rationale (e.g. cultivating creative innovative talents who will lead the fourth industrial revolution)

illustrated in the 2016 Report, it is noteworthy that the 2022 document on franchising was diplomatically driven as an objective of the Official Development Assistance strategy. Most of the 'recipients' of these franchises are developing countries such as Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and China, and the domestic universities were selected on the basis of 'a huge demand for architecture and Information Technology (IT) curriculum or their contribution to the expansion of cooperation between the two countries' (MOE 2022, 2).

The screening of the 'franchising model' focused on the experiences of three second-tier UK universities: University of Central Lancashire, Liverpool John Moores University, and London Metropolitan University (Jung 2017). Their experiences, however, were portrayed as incompatible in the Korean context, due to differences in their regulatory frameworks. UK universities do not require government approval on their franchises overseas; instead of critiquing this position in the light of reports of multiple quality assurance failures in the UK franchising system overseas (see Lieven and Martin 2006), the report indicates that as Korea is not yet equipped with a global standard quality assurance agency as the UK has, i.e. the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and that the autonomy should not be fully given to individual HEIs (Jung 2017, 209). It instead suggests localised guidelines (e.g. balance autonomy between universities and the government; at least ¼ of the curriculum being taught by the faculty members of domestic institutions), and by referencing the UNESCO/OECD's 2005 guidelines on *Quality provision in cross-border higher education*, the report legitimises the introduction of a government approval system to guarantee the quality of internationalisation (Jung 2017, 205). This reveals increasing selectivity in drawing superficial policy lessons from the IOs and Western reference societies, even when using similar models. It likewise reveals Korean anxieties about its stature in the global HE market, particularly the consequences of indiscriminate overseas expansion not only to 'consumers' but also to the competitiveness and the image of Korean HEIs.

Discussion and conclusion

Drawing on literature that views IOs as actors promoting globalisation and spurring policy isomorphism, we argued that, while the role of OECD metrics, particularly that of PISA, has been established in the literature, this has not been established in HE policy. Through the analysis of the role of the OECD in national internationalisation policies in two cases – Israel and Korea – we argued that the purpose of the policies, beyond its stated aims, is to position the countries as successful OECD members and part of the club of developed and democratic nations. Being part of the OECD – a club of wealthy democracies – served as a source of legitimacy and identity for these nations: for Israel, in light of its continued conflict with the Palestinians; for Korea, in signalling its transition from military dictatorship to democracy and its intractable conflict with an authoritarian North Korea. Additionally, it can be argued that the OECD's soft mechanisms, such as 'governing by numbers' (Grek 2009) were evident in both Israeli and Korean cases, where its comparative metrics (i.e. parity with OECD average), served as benchmarks for the emerging national policies towards international students and as the yardstick of success.

While both countries used international students as prime indicators of legitimacy, quality and economic success, they recognised the difficulties of recruiting international students and turned to national marketing and recruitment campaigns to achieve their goals. Neither country aspired to lead the OECD; rather the aim for these two

peripheral/non-core OECD members was on closing the gap, indicating a desire to move towards the centre. Beyond HE, Korea has an established pattern of enthusiastically embracing the OECDs global initiatives (Kim 2022). They adopted the OECD neoliberal discourses and marketised views of HE and in an increasingly competitive 'international student market' they target 'their' diasporas through internationalisation policies; in line with central OECD tenets, they appear to portray 'their' diasporas on economic terms and as 'low-hanging fruit' (i.e. easy recruits; support for branch campuses/franchises) than on more political/nation-building grounds.

We further argued that the desire to 'be part of the club' and improve on comparative metrics, spurred a process of policy referencing and borrowing from other (primarily, European and Anglo-American) countries with varying levels of localisation. Israel and Korea referenced and employed concepts and models of internationalisation emanating from primarily Western nations, and in the Israeli case, other small, non-core OECD members. We argued that the Israeli representation of internationalisation policies in select European nations has identified strategies of internationalisation but has failed to recognise long established critiques of those strategies; this resulted in a form of prefabricated internationalisation, which may succeed in its mission to broadcast the nation's membership in an exclusive club but is destined to fall short of its potential for innovative, localised internationalisation practices. Korea in contrast, engaged in internationalisation policies for considerably longer than Israel (since 1995, as opposed to 2016), has recognised the problems arising from prefabricated solutions. More recent policies, while still borrowing instruments pioneered in the West (i.e. franchising), provide more evidence of awareness of the problems in implementation and a quest for local adaptation of such models, suggesting the importance of time and experience in spurring more localised policies. Criticality towards Western models (and their fit in local contexts), over time, was evident in Korea; however, their policy did not critique the UKs track record of substandard provision (notwithstanding its QA authority), rather it indicated that Korea did not yet have such a quality assurance institution, and thus should proceed cautiously. The role of the OECD, as a continual source of legitimisation and benchmarking continued. Thus, our study supports Crossley's (2022) claim 'that while learning from the international experience can be both helpful and inspirational, simplistic policy transfer from the 'West to the rest' is not an appropriate model for successful internationalisation (360–361).

While calls have been made for closer attention to context sensitivity in the internationalisation of HE literature (see Crossley 2022; Tight 2022), the significance of the length of time engaged in internationalisation process has been underexamined. We propose that the differing level of localisation between the two countries may be attributed to time; Korea's policy developed over time to become more independent and divergent with global metrics (e.g. originally based solely on quantitative measures, aligned with OECD metrics; over time, adapted and extended to more local purposes). This highlights Hayes and Findlow's (2020) observation about the '… intrinsic tension between international policymaking, the overlay of "global" frameworks and … local/grassroots concerns' (182). It likewise echoes Lo and Hou's (2020) argument that Taiwan has moved towards 'striking a balance' between global and local aims in internationalisation after decades of policy interventions.

Finally, our study contributes to the debate around convergence and policy isomorphism in higher education (e.g. Zapp and Ramirez 2019; Zapp, Marques, and Powell 2021).

Much of the literature on this makes claims about convergence based on the existence of institutional structures, memberships, etc., and argues that policies are increasingly disarticulated from local (national) processes and regulators; it often examines the adoption of policy at a singular point in time after its implementation. We suggest that often realities/issues are ignored which results in a further movement away from the borrowed policy, creating greater policy diversity. These changes are rarely studied and thus we suggest that symmetry, and convergence, is overstated. Thus, we call for more nuanced views and the recognition of complexity (e.g. Schriewer 2021) in the convergence debate, and against polarised positions.

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