

# A critical discussion on issues of higher education: Curriculum internationalization, challenges, and opportunities



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## ABSTRACT

Through the application of literature review and review of the higher education framework for internationalization, the present work presents a critical reflection of the challenges addressed in order for a curriculum in higher education to be internationalized and provides a practical guide regarding the required steps that need to be followed. A literature research approach is applied as a methodological approach, and the example of internationalizing a business management curriculum is used as a case for this study and the key research questions addresses what assist educational leaders and educational decision-makers to understand what is important to be considered when they plan, organize, design and implement activities for internationalizing a curriculum. The study also challenges that a more comprehensive framework is needed towards internationalization, and through reflection upon personal experience, provides practical guidance and recommendations to academics and educators on how higher education curricula can become international in context and practice.



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## 1. Introduction

Universities in the UK strive to increase the number of international students and claim they internationalize the student experience. At the same time, student-centered approaches seem to dominate across teaching, learning, and assessment methods. However, domestic and international students seem to have different experiences, needs, and perceptions regarding pedagogy, education, and curriculum. At the same time, Universities define the orientation for all students centrally, as a largely homogenous group. Research indicates that the processes adopted to support Erasmus students in exploring UK pedagogy, assessment, and curriculum are insufficient to support them through the application of a central approach. Main areas of discord regard curriculum development and context, assessment methods, expectations, and pedagogic style. The cognitive and intangible aspects of the student journey are problematic, showing that poor cross-institutional communication and generic orientation compound the challenges [1].

The internationalization of the curriculum is concerned with the curriculum in its broadest sense. As Leask [2], [3] states: internationalization of the curriculum is the incorporation of an intercultural and international dimension into the content of the curriculum, as well as the teaching and learning processes and support services of a program of study. An internationalized curriculum will engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity. Borrowing from Leask [4], [5] internationalization of the curriculum builds the capacity for Universities to work with a diversity of backgrounds and prepares students to become global citizens [6]. Disciplinary,

institutional, local, national, regional and global factors interact in different ways to facilitate and inhibit, drive and shape approaches to the internationalization of the curriculum (IoC), including how learning outcomes are defined, taught, and assessed. Hence, we would expect to see approaches to the internationalization of the curriculum that are both similar and different within and across disciplines [5].

McCormick and Murphy present three modes of how curricula operate: the '*specified*', the '*enacted*', and the '*experienced*.' The first two modes regard the perspective of people who design and teach the curriculum, the third regards people who experience it as learners. The main focus on curriculum regards the way it is intended and enacted by teachers than as it is experienced by students, so, in Universities, the typical focus has been the specified curriculum meaning 'the aims and content of what [is] to be taught. An internationalized specified curriculum might challenge for a critical understanding of the sociohistorical influences on the production and validation' of one's disciplinary knowledge, and how it is 'selected, organized, transmitted and evaluated' [7].

Moving forward, someone would ask, 'which are the important steps for internationalizing a postgraduate (PG) curriculum/module, and, more specifically, in the area of Business Management? The students of business management programs are about 90% international and 10% home-based/local students. Internationalizing the curriculum is a crucial issue regarding the effectiveness of higher education programs and activities, also adding value to students' satisfaction.

## 2. Method

The methodological approach for the present study is based on a critical literature review. The purpose of a literature review is to gain an understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to the particular topic or area of study and to present that knowledge in the form of a written report. Conducting a literature review helps to build knowledge in the examined field. This approach serves the purpose of the present study because it helps to gain insight into how researchers apply the concepts concerning higher education and internationalization of the curriculum, as well as, contributes towards a better understanding of how research findings are presented and discussed.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Global education: a critical review

Global Education: The globalized world is changing continuously; the social foundation of educational curricula has caused to review student experience required by a constructivist approach in educational curricula. With the variety of transportation means and mass media, people and countries are coming closer, people from diverse cultures are interacting with each other either due to work, or education or tourism or other reasons. Additionally, educational curricula have changed and continue to change in many places, especially in the geographies with high cross-cultural interaction. Açıkalın draws attention to the globalized climate and underscores the relation of the emphasis on culture with educational curricula [8], [9]. He sheds light on the issue by exploring an aspect of culture as global education. The idea of 'global education' aims to give a solution to current global problems we deal with regarding educational curricula [10]. Global problems, e.g., environment, terrorism, famine, this approach has the philosophy of introducing world cultures to students and emerged with the notion of incorporating them in educational curricula. Kirkwood builds the concept of 'global education' on four dimensions, and these are: First, acquiring many perspectives, being aware and respecting that others can have ideas or perspectives different from their own; Second, being aware and respecting other cultures; Third, being aware of global problems and finding solutions for these; Fourth, understanding the globalized world and acknowledging that nations are much more intertwined [11]. Cultural intelligence helps to manage cultural differences in cross-cultural settings, and social skills are an individual's capability to understand deeply and effectively his/her own and other people's ideas [12], emotions, and behaviors in social relationships acting accordingly [13]. Global Education serves the global world, serves the needs of our students without confusing them, without setting barriers to their preparation for global citizenship. My belief is that education shapes minds and global education; global pedagogy would contribute to shaping a global mindset for all.

*1) Learning approaches, styles, and culture*

Pratt [14] supports that learning styles might vary among cultures. Interdisciplinary research in this area targets to enhance our understanding of how learning styles or approaches differ across cultures [15]. Since culture is perceived as an all-pervading shared set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and accompanied behaviors, then matters such as studying and learning, although take place at an individual level, are also embedded in the rationale of a specific culture, so reveal collective patterns at a macro level. At this point, I need to make a distinction between learning styles and approaches to learning, which both are raised here. The term 'learning style' is associated with Kolb's work [16], and regards a kind of general and a higher level of preferences for specific learning modes, whereas learning approaches regard mainly competencies needed for effective learning for a specific situation, particularly in student courses [17], or how a student decides to address a learning task under the consideration of perceived demands [18]. Culture and education system of a country influence the type of learning modes and approaches, so it does not surprise me why the Erasmus students reacted positively to the learning journey when they learned how things were through the received feedback minimizing the gap between their expectations and tutor's expectations, and why before. However, the effort has put the performance was not so good.

As Hall emphasizes, educational systems are cultural products, and due to this, educators will have to be aware of the context where learning is acquired [19]. This requires a deep and critical understanding of how learning approaches and teaching differ across cultures. In the present case, I was satisfied to notice that the staff, as supportive practice creating a positive learning environment, they made themselves also appeared vulnerable in sharing poignant (and harrowing) personal learning curves, which helped shape staff's knowledge and perceptions of soft skills.

Preparing to learn in a new and culturally different environment has appeared a very critical element regarding a student's preparation or a student's planning to emigrate for studies [20]. Research regarding 'how' individuals learn has captured the attention of scholars across disciplines many decades before and continuously generates much empirical and theoretical work ending up in refinement of conceptualizing learning patterns and developing new instruments for assessing learning patterns. It is agreed that educators could employ this knowledge to get a deeper understanding of the variety of differences in learning behaviors that they experience in their classrooms, even within one country [21].

We see that performance of Erasmus students was low although they put effort. They did not make use of the right information because they seemed to have problems with understanding and learning approaches; I felt that was appropriate. The staff member arranges tutorials and provides detailed and constructive feedback helping them to understand the tutor's expectations and the tutor similarly to understand students' expectations. However, I would suggest, instead of the student having such a negative (low performance) assessment experience, which often can demotivate dramatically, and get feedback afterward, the staff member being proactive should provide feedback with detailed directions in advance so that students not to experience frustration and anxiety. To my perspective, it is not fair University students of one country to be 'assessed' or to be expected to 'learn' when experiencing a 'cultural shock, having knowledge only of their own learning style and of their home University assessment standards. The staff member also reflects an institutional and local educational culture applying approaches and practices that are known and applied in UK higher education (tutorials after) but not necessarily in other countries (e.g., and they do not have the level and quality of the needed support adjust changing learning styles and approaches to a direction that is unknown to them. The same applies to the abstract words that are used by the staff member, e.g., independent learning, critical thinking, etc. Expressing a local approach and thinking in terms of communication.

### **3.2.3. Steps of internationalizing the curriculum**

#### *1) To identify what is internationalization*

To develop an understanding of the complexities when defining internationalization in my discipline. I make a list of statements read, and search. A challenge though is that internationalization of the curriculum is not only a discipline matter; Leask's five-phase [22], cyclical action research regarding facilitating the internationalization of curriculum (IoC) within disciplines indicates that engaging a disciplinary team in meaningful discussion about IoC as a concept appear to exist many deep-seated epistemological differences between team members. Research Green and Whitsed [23] shows that IoC, as an interdisciplinary process, requires critical interdisciplinary spaces to be

developed [24], fostering the exchange of innovative ideas. Those involved in IoC must develop critical interdisciplinary spaces. Also, disciplines may be better to be described as spaces where 'multiple, conflicting narratives' co-exist [25].

2) *To identify how international is the curriculum:*

Borrowing from my experience, I should promote self-awareness of how my work contributes to the internationalization of the curriculum. The curriculum is driven by academics' understandings of the nature of disciplinary knowledge and the processes through which it is acquired or constructed [7], [26], [27]. The nature of the subject material of the area of business management such as focusing on ways of managing people, on organizational behavior, the impact of social contexts and values on individuals and groups means that the study and understanding of issues of diversity, cultural matters are core in this discipline. What this means is that the two approaches of internationalization cooperate. First, we ensure our business curriculum modules are inclusive and provide a safe and supportive environment for all students from all backgrounds and all sections of society. We deliver modules that focus on issues of cultural differences, ethics, international management practices, cross-cultural awareness topics. The aim is to engender a critical awareness in our students, and foster the development of graduates who are truly international in their outlook, valuable employees in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century global community.

3) *To review current practices:*

exchanging opinions with colleagues, sharing practice, and strategies for internationalizing the curriculum assist in this direction. As we know from experience, for most academics outside of the discipline of education, the disciplinary knowledge and the processes through which a curriculum is constructed are tacit; they lie 'buried in curricula' as largely 'uninspected assumptions' [7].

4) *To identify areas of development:*

To identify challenges and opportunities in the business management discipline for internationalization. Searching, reading and discussing; I note that a) The aim is to create a supportive environment and opportunities for ongoing learning and development. The induction program contributes to this, providing general introductory information about modules, staff, and others. Library, language, and student support services can also be part of it. Attendance in the induction program may be sporadic; a challenge is the need to effectively communicate the value of the program to students from the start. Through the induction program, students should be informed of the professional support and services available at the university.

5) *To develop an action plan:*

To bring together elements of the above activities and think about taking this forward through a series of actions. For example:

a) *Internationalize or enhance internationalization in the curriculum/module*

The curriculum arguably needs to prepare students for the global marketplace [28]. Even those whose goal is to remain in the UK will work in an environment with people from all over the world. An internationalized curriculum may not be appropriate for every module. However, it should exist in every program and may help to attract international students and those with ambitions to work in multi-national settings. Using gap analysis, important areas are identified such as the selection of international examples/case studies, reviews of various subjects from a different range of perspectives; examination of challenges when students bring their international experience in the classroom; consideration of challenges when students identify aspects of teaching styles from other cultures and incorporate them where appropriate; design activities (e.g., analysis of group global case studies from the current business world; interactive discussions in the classroom examining different perspectives and international implications where students can bring and share their experiences; Research [29] supports that business schools internationalize curricula introducing *stand-alone units* as part of programs or by injecting international materials or /and activities into all (or nearly all) of its preexisting modules. Adoption of these could regard tutorial discussions, assignments on international business matters, research essays that explore cross-national practices and behavior, review of global business ethics [30], global case studies, and group work [31].

b) *Provide opportunities for intercultural interaction in the classroom*

International students often feel alienated as UK students, and they do not mix [32]. The challenge is that academic staff need to use a repertoire of strategies to bring student groups together using their varied experiences, as these can enrich the curriculum [33]. Encouragement of students to raise queries

publicly and to put forward other points of view and make use of relevant technologies such as videos, GoogleEarth, and others have added value.

*c) Support international students*

International students take some time to tune/adjust; academic support is important to do it successfully [34]. Intercultural difference awareness helps all (including staff) to provide effective support for this. Academic, pastoral, and front-line support should be provided, with clearly communicated office hours indicating staff availability outside timetabled sessions.

*d) Collaborate with national or/and international partners*

Bringing people from industry as guest speakers in-class sessions or/and working with international partners is beneficial for all students' learning providing research opportunities as well; Additionally, sharing of knowledge and experience of experts, awareness of different corporate cultures of international companies assist towards the direction of becoming open and international oriented..

*e) Encourage or organize overseas visits*

Overseas experiences have a powerful impact on personal and academic development [35]. Such experiences can help students to move from a parochial thought process to a more dynamic way of thinking and add to students' employability prospects [36], [37].

*f) Make use of development opportunities for staff*

Participating in discussions about internationalization [38], learning from experts, attending training programs by people who have already internalized curricula has benefits for staff development. key areas of development may be considered: inter-cultural competence, international perspectives and other.

*g) Internationalizing curriculum and student employability*

Internationalizing curriculum means resulting in graduates who think globally [39], respect international diversity [40]; students have to communicate effectively across borders, to understand international business practices, to be cross-cultural aware. Such graduates are better prepared for employment in contemporary firms [28], [33], [41]–[43]. Avila supported that studying international and cross-cultural topics in a business program is of critical importance for professional success [29]. Employers' requirements are almost consistent across countries [44], and it is known that many business graduates aspire to work abroad [45]; business graduates require international and cross-cultural knowledge and skills [33], [40]. Internationalized curricula are delivered to domestic, as well as, international students and should, in principle, be equally relevant for both groups [39]. They are considering the above, while international the business curriculum /module, my actions regard selecting module themes of interest for the current business world.

### **3.3. Teaching philosophy and challenges when internationalizing the curriculum**

One challenge that instructors face is how to teach and design a curriculum or a module, so the material and activities engage students' prior knowledge, experience, and their skills, whether the aim is to build on that knowledge, to interrogate it, or to situate new ways of thinking. When teaching cohorts, which include students with diverse backgrounds, curriculum, or module design, is more challenging. On the other hand, considering student differences provides valuable clarity for both students and instructors; and drawing on student differences multiplies the teaching and learning exchange in a class.

The teaching philosophy provides the rationale for the educator's teaching behavior [46]. As a broad philosophical statement of teaching practice, it shows the conceptualization of teaching into action by justifying a set of principles that justifies how one teaches [47]. For example, this can include how teachers conduct classes, mentor students, develop instructional resources, or grade performances, instructional strategies used, display creativity, enthusiasm, and wisdom, what they want a student to experience in class, their energy level, the qualities they try to exhibit as a model and a coach, the climate they try to establish in the setting in which they teach. The teaching philosophy address issues such as: Under what opportunities and constraints do I learn and do others learn? What outcomes do I expect of my teaching? What student-teacher relationship do I strive for? How do I evaluate effective teaching? What habits, attitudes, methods show teaching outcomes? What values do I wish to impart to students, and what skills to be developed? What code of ethics guides me? Under what opportunities and constraints do I carry out my role? Etc. Rachel Scudamore, in the



guide, engaging home and international students, examining the relationship of culture and learning, based on the 'practical theory' of provides useful information and suggestions that informs my teaching philosophy regarding teaching activities and strategies when teaching cohorts with diverse groups of students. It also enhances or/and challenges my knowledge about the relationship culture-learning-teaching [48].

Finally, regarding challenges when internationalizing a curriculum, we should consider: (1) critical decisions, whose knowledge will be included in the curriculum and how to teach and assess learning? These, to a certain extent, are predetermined by the discipline; (2) institutional mission, ethos, policies and priorities will also influence approaches taken to the internationalization of the curriculum; (3) the local context, the social, cultural, political and economic conditions will also provide opportunities and challenges for internationalization of the curriculum; (4) accreditation requirements may require a focus on local legislation and policy; (5) the national and regional context will also influence the options available to internationalize the curriculum. Factors such as the home country language, the academic reputation of the national higher education system, and the size of the country will all have an impact [49]. So, besides the steps that someone follows, also, the above factors challenge further.

The social environment where students study is a source of the concepts in their mind states these skills improve with the increase of academic success. Students initiate positive social relationships with students, peers, teachers, families, and other community members, and their assessment should be well structured. All these issues should be considered when internationalizing the curriculum and should. Finally, concerning other issues such as the importance of orientation programs, a well as, the development of the appropriate programs when the synthesis of students is diverse, the importance of feedback, the specific dimensions of the cultural intelligence that are considered more important for international students are important issues to be considered. My belief is that it is not only 'what' we do but 'how' we do it, 'whether' we perceive correct what we do and how, as well as 'what' we know for our students so to do well what we do. Regarding recommendations for further research the present study, besides the need for an international empirical study, also recommends that further research is needed to explore the context of those specific curriculum reforms and innovative pedagogical approaches which can foster dispositions, values and skills with engaged global citizenship, as well as, how these reforms and approaches can be applied in practice so that to respond efficiently and effectively to needs of international students. Finally, the study recommends that for higher education to develop global citizens, a global and open mindset is needed by the educational leaders and decision-makers as well as educators.

#### 4. Conclusion

Planning, designing, administering, implementing correctly are important, facilitating the effectiveness of our teaching in an international environment of students. In other words, besides organizational policies and organizational climate which influence staff approach, we should always follow up sharing feedback with peers, students, and others to make sure that the appropriate steps and elements to internationalize a curriculum are considered. The main contribution of the present work is that reviewing the literature critically on internationalizing the curriculum provides a practical guide regarding the required steps that need to be followed for a higher education curriculum to become international. This helps educational leaders and educational decision-makers to understand what is important to be considered when they plan, organize, design, and implement activities for internationalizing a curriculum. Also, the present study challenges that a more comprehensive framework is needed for internationalizing the curriculum. The main limitation of the current work is the methodological approach, as this study is mainly focused on a critical literature review. An empirical study with international research findings from different educational systems and practices would assist in broadening our knowledge on possible additional factors that might be important to be considered for designing and delivering even more successfully international curricula. On this basis, further research is recommended exploring the role of mentality, perception, and biases of leaders, decision-makers, educators when a plan, organize, implement, follow specific steps in practice to internationalize the curriculum.

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