

Beyond Mobility: Positioning Curriculum at the Centre of Internationalisation in South African Higher Education

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Abstract. In this paper, I argue that although South African universities engage in various internationalisation activities such as staff and student mobility programmes, robust internationalisation practices at the curricular, teaching, and learning levels remain scarce. Since curricula play a major role in socialising students, I contend that a meaningful internationalisation agenda requires South African universities to internationalise curricula and teaching and learning. While it may seem straightforward for universities to formulate internationalisation policies, implementing meaningful internationalised curricula is challenging in practice. Drawing on internationalisation policies from two selected universities in South Africa, I examine the meanings attached to internationalisation and how universities plan to implement it. I pose questions that a university might consider when attempting to internationalise its curricula and argue for in-depth inquiry into the internationalisation of curricula in South African universities.

Keywords: Internationalisation; Curricula; Teaching and learning.

1 Introduction

Curricula encompass several things, notably the subject matter and the process of teaching and learning or the mediation of the subject matter. As such, they play an important role in socialising students in Higher Education Institutions.



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Socialisation is “the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society” (Weidman, 2006, p. 253). In higher education, socialisation involves a series of processes that shape students’ behaviours and ways of acting (see Weidman, 1989; Weidman, De Angelo, & Bethea, 2014; Shawa, 2015). Universities are institutions of teaching and learning in which curricula play key roles in socialising and shaping students’ knowledge, skills and dispositions. Thus, I contend that meaningful internationalisation in South African higher education requires it to be embedded in universities’ curricula and teaching and learning.

Luxon and Peeló (2009) note that much of the scholarship on internationalisation has focused on institutional and national policy strategy, which has tended to obscure this issue at the teaching and learning level, where students and teachers experience internationalisation. Similarly, in South Africa, while serious internationalisation initiatives have been pursued by the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) and some universities, studies that engage with the internationalisation of curricula and teaching and learning are rare.

Schoole (2006) observes that while the internationalisation of higher education in South Africa began during colonialism, meaningful engagement with this concept started after the 1994 democratic dispensation, as the country was previously internationally isolated due to apartheid. From 1994, South Africa opened up to the world, began to attract both international students and staff to its universities, and began positioning itself to become part of the knowledge economy.

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training is clear on the importance of internationalisation in South Africa and stipulates the need for a suitable policy framework for international cooperation in post-school education and training. Similarly, Kishun (2007) contends that if South African universities are to benefit from internationalisation, it needs to permeate the entire higher education sector. I contend that this goal requires a critical analysis of the nexus among internationalisation, curricula, teaching, and learning in South African universities.

Despite its contested nature, internationalisation is regarded as providing benefits to countries in the global knowledge economy/society (see Kishun, 2007). Discourses surrounding this concept highlight advantages such as knowledge sharing among and between countries and regions. For example, internationalisation has been said to be useful in addressing global issues such as peace, inequality, poverty and others. Through internationalisation, universities aspire to provide education that is globally relevant and produce graduates who are citizens of the world.

Most governments and universities worldwide formulate internationalisation policies to benefit from the global knowledge economy. However, while it seems relatively simple for universities to produce policy documents on

internationalisation, implementing meaningful internationalised curricula and teaching and learning is challenging.

I posit that the implementation of meaningful internationalised curricula in South African higher education remains elusive and requires in-depth inquiry. Drawing on internationalisation policies from the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Rhodes University in South Africa as examples, I explore the meanings they attach to internationalisation and its implementation and pose questions that a university might consider when attempting to internationalise curricula meaningfully.

This paper is organised into four sections. The first conceptualises internationalisation and briefly discusses its perceived risks and benefits, while the second briefly establishes the connection between internationalisation and the curriculum. The third section discusses how selected South African universities view internationalisation and its implementation through policy. I pose questions that a university might consider when attempting to internationalise curricula meaningfully. The fourth section concludes the discussion.

2 Conceptualising Internationalisation in Higher Education

Internationalisation of higher education is a contested notion that has been defined differently by different people (see De Wit, 2013; Knight, 2003). Knight and Schoole (2013) vividly illustrate this contestation:

For some people, higher education internationalisation means a series of activities, such as academic mobility for students and teachers, international linkages, partnerships, and projects, new international academic programmes, and research initiatives. To many, it means cooperating with universities in other countries to reform and modernise curricula and pedagogy. For others, it means delivering education to other countries using a variety of face-to-face and distance techniques (Knight & Schoole, 2013, p. 4).

These perspectives are perhaps summed up in Knight's (2003, p. 2) definition of internationalisation as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into purposes, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education". Furthermore, internationalisation is increasingly connected to globalisation. Altbach (2010, p.6) holds that "internationalisation includes specific policies and programmes undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments or institutions to cope with or exploit globalisation..." Altbach and Knight (2007) argue that while globalisation is usually confused with internationalisation, these are different concepts. They define globalisation as "the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21st Century higher education toward greater international involvement" (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 1). In South Africa, for example, the IEASA, which is calling for

a national policy on internationalisation, argues that globalisation and global restructuring underline the need for internationalisation in Higher Education Institutions.

Altbach and Knight (2007) set out several motivations for and sources of internationalisation. They argue that, in the for-profit sector and at some traditional non-profit universities facing financial problems, earning money is a key motivation. In contrast, non-profit universities wish to enhance research and knowledge capacity and to increase cultural understanding. They note that many countries, such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States, charge very high international fees. They thus posit that *traditional internationalisation* (as practised in some US universities) is rarely for profit and includes activities such as study-abroad experiences, curriculum enrichment through international studies majors or areas, strengthened foreign-language instruction, and sponsorship of international students to study on campus. However, De Wit (2013) warns against narrow conceptualisations of internationalisation, arguing that the fact that universities have an international dimension in their programmes does not always translate into meaningful internationalisation.

2.1 Risks and benefits of internationalisation

Knight (2007) identifies three major risks of internationalisation: the commercialisation and commodification of education programmes, an increase in the number of foreign 'degree mills' and low-quality providers, and brain drain. Jowi (2012) posits that while internationalisation could assist Africa in institutional strengthening and the enhancement of research capacity and knowledge production, it also poses serious risks to African universities. Similarly, Teferra (2008) posits that Africa engages with internationalisation from a comparatively weaker position given its historical, economic and political contexts.

There are many reasons why governments and universities internationalise. Hénard, Damond and Roseveare (2012) contend that internationalisation enables governments to develop national university systems within a broader, global framework; produce a skilled workforce with global awareness and multicultural competencies; use public higher education funds to promote national participation in the global knowledge economy; and benefit from trade in education services. They add that internationalisation matters for Higher Education Institutions as it enables them to achieve national and international visibility; leverage institutional strengths through strategic partnerships; enlarge the academic community within which to benchmark their activities; mobilise internal intellectual resources; add important contemporary learning outcomes to students' experience; and develop strong research groups. I posit that for South African universities, the said benefits could be better achieved through thoroughly planned internationalised curricula that ultimately enhance quality higher education.

2.2 Internationalisation and Curriculum

The ideas on the need for internationalisation expressed in The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, and by IEASA and some South African scholars, reveal a serious need to internationalise curricula and teaching and learning. Firstly, I engage with the notion of curriculum as it is equally contested. Le Grange (2012), in Bitzer and Botha (2012), defines curriculum as the knowledge included or excluded in university learning and teaching, and how such knowledge is organised within academic institutions. Miller and Seller (1985) provide a deeper understanding of curriculum as an explicitly and implicitly intentional set of interactions designed to facilitate learning and development and to impose meaning on experience. They touch on the idea of the hidden curriculum (the roles and norms that underlie interactions within an institution), an important concept for understanding the connections among internationalisation, curricula, and teaching and learning. However, the meanings of curriculum are mostly tied to the Tyler Model of 1949, which examines this concept by posing four questions:

- What educational purposes should an institution seek to attain?
- What educational experiences can be provided?
- How can these educational experiences be organised effectively to achieve the purpose?
- How can we determine whether the expected objectives have been achieved? (see Chaudhary & Kalia, 2015; Shawa, 2015)

Applied to internationalisation of curricula, the questions posed in the Tyler Model help us to interrogate how universities' curricula objectives seek to achieve internationalisation; what activities or experiences are deliberately planned by universities to achieve internationalisation; what levels and quality of personnel (academics), including resources are available in universities to implement internationalised curricula; and finally what mechanisms universities put in place to assess the internationalisation agenda.

The answers to these questions are crucial and serve as a reminder that knowledge experiences at South African universities need to be carefully organised. What is clear in the conceptualisations of curriculum presented is that curriculum is central to providing experiences for learners, or simply to socialising them. The following section examines how two South African universities view internationalisation and its implementation, and poses questions that a university might consider when internationalising curricula.

3 Perception of Internationalisation at Selected Universities

The University of Cape Town's policy on internationalisation draws on Knight's (1994) definition as "the process of integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher learning" (UCT, nd.). Rhodes University defines internationalisation as "the conscious, proactive and consistent effort to create an institutional learning environment inclusive of international, intercultural and global dimensions at every level of thinking and practice within the institution" (Rhodes University, 2005).

These definitions show that the integration of international and intercultural dimensions into university life is the gist of universities' interpretations of internationalisation. This is in line with the expectations of the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training in South Africa, IEASA and some South African scholars. Moreover, the definitions implicitly point to the understanding of curriculum as a socialising entity.

However, the major challenge remains how to practically infuse international and intercultural dimensions into curricula and teaching and learning in South African universities, and how to consciously create an institutional learning environment inclusive of international, intercultural, and global dimensions at every level of thinking and practice. The following subsection examines these universities' understanding of the practical implications of internationalisation and poses questions to guide the internationalisation of curricula.

3.1 Internationalisation as Systemic

The UCT policy argues that "internationalisation affects curricula, teaching, research, administration, selection and promotion of staff, student recruitment, marketing, experiential learning through student and staff mobility, quality review, social responsiveness and communication". Similarly, Rhodes University's policy statement (2.2) contends that:

a commitment to internationalisation has implications for curricula, teaching methodology, research collaboration, administration, selection, induction, orientation and promotion of staff, student recruitment, fund-raising, marketing, experiential learning through student and staff mobility, quality review, the university budget, communication and all aspects of our institutional culture (Rhodes University, 2005).

As both policies hold, internationalisation affects the entire institutional life of the university. Internationalisation thus becomes a corollary to curricula and suggests the need for conscious, proactive measures that hinge on thorough planning of curricular experiences. Guided by the questions in the Tyler Model, I pose the following four questions: 1) In what ways are internationalisation experiences part of the objectives across curricula in these universities? 2) What deliberate

curriculum experiences on internationalisation are planned by these universities? 3) How are academics equipped to mediate curricula with international dimensions in these universities? 4) What procedures are available to assess aspects of internationalisation across curricula in these universities?

By posing these four questions, South African universities could move beyond simplistic and narrow conceptualisations of internationalisation. De Wit (2013, pp. 29-32) identifies the following nine examples of narrow conceptualisation that represent misconceptions of internationalisation:

- Internationalisation is equal to teaching in English
- Internationalisation is similar to studying abroad
- Internationalisation is similar to teaching an international subject
- Internationalisation means having many international students
- intercultural and international competencies do not necessarily have to be assessed as such
- The more agreements institutions have, the more international they are
- Higher education is international by its very nature
- Internationalisation is an objective in itself

These misconceptions blur meaningful internationalisation in universities.

3.2 Global Dimension

Another recurring theme is that internationalisation has a global dimension. For example, the UCT policy states that, “Globalisation has profoundly affected the way in which countries and businesses operate. In recognition of this, the University of Cape Town strongly supports internationalisation as an essential element of quality higher education and research” (UCT, nd.). Similarly, section 2.1 of Rhodes University’s policy contends:

In this ever-changing world, it is equally important that South African staff and students have a clear sense of the global context in which they are operating and that they are encouraged to travel out of South Africa on academic and exchange programs, to experience other cultures; to engage in global networks and to participate in internationally collaborative research... (Rhodes University, 2005).

The global aspect is viewed as a space that has changed how countries and universities do things and as one that has to be experienced by staff and students through academic exchanges. I pose three important questions to consider: 1) How are global trends or issues planned across curricula in these universities? 2) In what ways do these universities use curricula and teaching and learning to engage with global trends critically? 3) How are aspects of the global dimension assessed across curricula in these universities?

Drawing on the misconceptions of internationalisation presented by De Wit, the fact that a course has an international dimension does not necessarily mean that internationalisation has been achieved. Thus, these questions are pertinent to achieving meaningful internationalisation for quality higher education.

3.3 Local Policy Context

Both universities note that their internationalisation policies are developed within the framework of local realities, such as the SADC Protocol on Education and Training and IEASA's Code of Ethical Practice, as well as national policies and legislation. In its 2010-2014 Strategic Plan, UCT identifies its first goal as internationalisation via an Afropolitan niche in which it seeks to:

- Enhance the university's position by making it an intellectual meeting point and a sought-after destination for scholars worldwide who are interested in Africa's place in the world.
- Strengthen its international research profile through promoting academic exchanges, research dissemination, and partnerships worldwide, including and especially South-South links.
- Enhance graduate attributes by equipping students with knowledge and understanding of and, where possible, exposure to continental and international contexts.
- Internationalise the student experience by recruiting an internationally diverse student body and developing innovative curricula relevant to Africa and the globalised world.
- Ensure that staff development includes skills for teaching diverse student bodies as well as significant international exposure as a regular part of career development.
- Contribute to the resolution of problems of global significance through a wide range of socially responsive activities, including research, teaching and external policy engagement.

While similar goals are set in the teaching and learning strategies of most universities, there has been little research on how these are implemented. For reflection, I pose two questions: 1) In what ways are local realities embedded in curricula across faculties in South African universities? This is pertinent given that South Africa attracts many students from Africa, especially the SADC. For example, in 2015, 9% of international students in South Africa were non-Africans, 16% were other African and 75% were SADC citizens (Lee & Schoole, 2015). 2) How do these universities assess the aspects of local realities in curricula and teaching and learning levels? A genuine assessment of how curricula, teaching, and learning encompass local realities might be useful in understanding how South Africa integrates with the region. The misconception that intercultural and

international competencies need not be assessed as such is very misleading in achieving internationalised curricula at South African universities.

3.4 Student and Staff Mobility

As noted earlier, both UCT and Rhodes University's policies allude to the need for staff and student mobility and to the learning of new cultures. Reflectively, I pose the following questions: 1) Is the mobility of staff and students factored into curricula? 2) What activities or curriculum experiences are planned for use or through staff and student mobility activities? 3) In what ways does the larger university community benefit from the knowledge acquired by staff and students on study abroad programmes? 4) How are the newly acquired knowledge and skills used in curriculum mediation or teaching and learning? 5) In what ways are these knowledge and skills assessed?

These questions are pertinent and hinge on the intentional socialisation that could result from a well-organised curriculum within an institution. They could help South African universities go beyond mere staff and student mobility to the actual promotion of internationalisation.

3.5 Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

Both policies mention the importance of the curriculum in achieving internationalisation. In section 2.3 (1 and 3) of its policy, Rhodes University reiterates the importance of a curriculum that encompasses international dimensions and ensures that students and staff are exposed to comparative perspectives and contemporary developments in their fields at the international level. It also notes that teaching and learning should embrace innovative methodology, new technologies and international academic exchanges to enrich and enhance the learning experience (Rhodes University, 2005). The UCT policy states that the university strives to benchmark itself against international standards while maintaining the need for course offerings to be relevant to both regional and international contexts (UCT, nd).

Thus, these policies are clear on the importance of curriculum in achieving internationalisation. Furthermore, they implicitly understand that the curriculum provides socialisation. However, instead of regarding the curriculum as the core organising factor of experiences such as internationalisation, it is regarded as just one of the factors enabling internationalisation. I contend that if internationalisation is to permeate the whole university system, it should be embedded within carefully crafted institutional curricula. As De Wit (2013) warns, internationalisation should not be seen as a goal in itself. Rather, it should ultimately improve the quality of higher education, and, as such, embedding it within curricula makes it part and parcel of the institution's mission.

3.6 Implementation of Internationalisation Policy

According to the UCT policy, the International Academic Programmes Office (IAPO) should lead and coordinate the development of internationalisation and promote the integration of diverse communities across the university (UCT, nd.). Rhodes University's policy identifies several levels for the implementation of the policy and outlines the following actions and processes:

- The Director of the International Office generally develops and drives the internationalisation strategy and reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Development).
- The International Office serves as a contact point and support for international students and organises internationalisation-at-home activities and others.
- The Internationalisation Committee of the Senate champions internationalisation, working with the International Office, influences and inspires others, monitors internationalisation policy, communicates global developments in internationalisation, and networks, nominates, and selects ambassadors, among other duties.
- Deans of faculties, the Dean of Students, directors, heads of departments and divisions and the Students Representatives Council encourage and support the internationalisation of curriculum, international activities by and for all staff and students, and the development of international links and cooperative agreements in collaboration with the Director: International Relations.
- The Registrar and the Data Management Unit are responsible for maintaining a database in order to report information on international students to the International Office as and when requested (Rhodes University, 2005).

While Rhodes University's implementation process is quite detailed, its directors, through the international offices at both universities, advance internationalisation. Internationalisation thus becomes an administrative issue. However, these directors might not have in-depth knowledge of curriculum or teaching and learning, and even if they do, the nature of their space may mean they do not prioritise internationalisation as a curriculum and teaching-and-learning issue. De Wit (2016) holds that the administrative space that houses internationalisation generally impedes research on this concept. Given the complicated nature of internationalisation, I argue for an in-depth inquiry into the internationalisation of curricula in South African higher education.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the success of internationalisation in South African universities requires that it be treated seriously as a curriculum issue.

Drawing on policies from UCT and Rhodes University in South Africa as examples, I explored the meanings they attach to internationalisation and posed several questions that a university might consider when attempting to internationalise curricula. Furthermore, given the paucity of research on the internationalisation of curricula and its mediation at the teaching and learning level, an in-depth inquiry into internationalisation in South African higher education is required.

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