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Internationalisation of teaching, learning, and the curriculum in context: Emerging perspectives and new possibilities

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Abstract

The conceptualisation of internationalisation of the curriculum has evolved over the last 30 years. Simultaneously, its contextual foundation has also gradually shifted from being Euro-centric to encompass a broader landscape beyond the Western domain. Therefore, understanding of internationalisation of the curriculum needs to include practices in these contexts. This special issue hence has invited researchers and practitioners in the field of higher education internationalisation to participate in this conversation. The focus of the discussion is on emerging and alternative understanding and practices of internationalising the curriculum which include incorporating local cultural values and perspectives in the curriculum. This Special Issue features articles that firmly situate the Internationalisation of teaching, learning, and the curriculum in their specific contexts and acknowledge the influence of important contextual factors on the motivations, processes, and outcomes of internationalisation. Closely associated with taking an inclusive lens in understanding internationalisation of the curriculum, we also discuss the inclusivity of communicating research in this field. Specifically, we discuss the challenges encountered by scholars working outside the English-speaking domain to communicate their research with English-speaking research communities. We hence call for support for international academics from the publication outlets. We hope that this Special Issue constitutes a step towards a more diverse and inclusive scholarship in the field of internationalisation in higher education.

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Introduction

The internationalisation of teaching, learning, and curriculum constitutes an important agenda of many universities around the world. There is a renewed emphasis on this agenda since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted student and staff mobility and thus drew attention to the incorporation of international, intercultural, and global perspectives in pedagogies and curricula.

For the last two decades, the internationalisation of teaching, learning, and the curriculum has progressed slowly and fragmentedly, hindered by an overall tendency to conform to certain ideologies. There is a lack of consideration of the very different contexts where internationalisation of the curriculum takes place (Leask, 2015). Alternative paradigms for internationalisation, for example, a Tianxia (English translation: all under heaven) heuristic originated from ancient Chinese philosophies about the world (Yang et al., 2022), have been proposed and discussed at a macro level whilst issues at the curricular level, for example, how student learning can be designed to reflect multiple perspectives and pluralistic worldviews is still under-explored. As highlighted by Tight (2022), based on a recent systematic literature review, there is a lack of studies at the curricular level that is situated in alternative paradigms. Moreover, emerging paradigms, no matter how robust they are, still need to be examined prudently and contextualised before they can inform teaching, learning, and the curriculum.

There is a pressing need for more studies that contextualise the internationalisation of teaching, learning, and the curriculum and that consider the dynamics between the local, national, regional, and global layers (e.g., Lo & Hou, 2020). The learners' (Das, 2005; Graham, 2022) and teachers' (Singh & Chowdhury, 2021) culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds should also be taken into consideration in the development and delivery of a truly internationalised curriculum.

This is precisely the reason why we organised this special issue. We hope to promote an inquiry into alternative perspectives and new possibilities of internationalisation of higher education that more directly benefit teaching, learning, and the curriculum. These efforts, we believe, will allow us to better contribute to the latest development of internationalisation towards sustainability and humanisation (Tran et al., 2023).

Contextualising Internationalisation of the Curriculum

While internationalisation of the curriculum is often linked to international education, and in many ways understanding given that it is probably the easiest way to engage students with the concepts of internationalisation, as the various papers in this Special Issue have highlighted, the focus of internationalisation of the curriculum however is much broader. Internationalisation of the curriculum aims to provide a transformative experience for all students (Bridges, 2023). It is grounded on the idea that we are living in an increasingly borderless world, and many local populations reflect significant diversity among its citizens.

As Yue et al. (2021) have pointed out, within the higher education curriculum context, the internationalisation of the curriculum can be viewed from three positions. The first position is internationalisation through overseas experience, where students spend time in a foreign country. Secondly, internationalisation at a distance takes place when students engage with overseas universities and study experiences from their home country. This situation was prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic when most international students were required to study from home. The third position is internationalisation at home. It takes place when

students engage with international concepts and ideas while studying at a university in their home country and reflects the diversity of local populations.

Yue et al. (2021) further point out that while there are various perspectives in internationalisation of the curriculum initiatives it must always be grounded within local contexts. While internationalisation of the curriculum is often considered as a means of developing global citizenship, the understanding about its meaning and how to implement it is very contextualised (Kirk et al., 2018).

These three positions are reflected in this Special Issue. **Li, Li and Wu** showcase a symbiotic ecosystem where all three forms of internationalisation of the curriculum took place in a college based within a university in China that specialises in international joint venture programs. **Einfalt** introduces an intercultural dialogic model for international students studying in an Australian regional university. This article highlights the importance of intercultural competence development among students for universities to promote global citizenship. **Zhuang, Hu and Guo** further argue for global competence through talent cultivation in international institutes based within a context outside the Western domain. **Graydon and colleagues** report on a university teaching and learning curriculum to provide on-site training for local medical staff in Cambodia to enhance skills and build relationships.

This special issue also engages in discussions of the key components of the curriculum, the diversity among the learners and the teachers. **Krautloher** recommends oral assessment as an inclusive assessment form to cater for diverse student cohorts. **West and co-authors** report on students as partners in co-designing educational resources that bring real-world experiences into the classroom and calls for centring the curriculum on the diversity of learners. **Li and the teaching team** investigated the culturally and linguistically diverse staff as an integral part of an internationalised curriculum in a first-year Bachelor of Arts compulsory subject. These studies collected in this special issue by offering contextualised understanding and practices of internationalisation of the curriculum.

Indigenising the Curriculum

One of the key themes for this special issue has been an invitation for academics and scholars to transcend entrenched Western perspectives. This is significant for a country like Australia that is considered a successful multicultural society, although, according to Lumadi (2021) most of the curricula taught in Australia are Euro-centric. The curriculum is a vehicle of colonialism in Western university pedagogy, and the “transformation of the university curriculum is “both a microcosm of and impetus for broader societal transformation” (Le Grange, 2016, p. 3).

Global citizenship has emerged as one of the most common graduate attributes for universities in Australia, however, it is still dominated by Western and white privilege (Bullen & Flavell, 2022). **Schembri** proposes an instrument designed to measure educator cultural competence within institutions to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples cultural awareness in the curriculum. In **Stevenson, Gurung and Zagala**, graduates’ solutions to the 21st century’s ‘wicked problems’ are likely to come from incorporating different ways of thinking into our curricula which is core to a decolonised curriculum.

A paradoxical atmosphere about indigenising the curriculum in Australia is that it is categorised as internationalisation of the curriculum in some institutes, although Indigenous Australia is part of Australia. Indigenous leaders and authors have been critiquing this mindset of othering

Indigenous Australia from the definition of Australia in many aspects. As Indigenous singer and songwriter Shellie Morris (One of One, n.d.) challenges the act of othering Indigenous Australian music:

If my music is in a language from Australia by First Nations Australians why are we in the world music category and competing with other countries from around the world, I understand that the language is unknown and that on a world-wide genre it is slotted into this category but please, it just feels wrong.

In higher education curriculum indigenisation, the situation is similar. Indigenisation of the curriculum is part of internationalisation of the curriculum in many universities' teaching and learning initiatives. While it is encouraging to see institutional effort to support indigenisation of the curriculum, more work is needed for systematic and institutional change to truthfully position indigenising the curriculum.

Calling for a More Inclusive Research Culture and Practice

Communication and exchange between nations and regions are beneficial and important for educational research. It is especially important for the field of internationalisation. For research in higher education internationalisation to be truly internationalised, international researchers' contribution is indispensable. In the field of internationalisation, discussion would seem insular and even hypocritical without the participation of international researchers. It is exactly the intention of this Special Issue to offer alternative perspectives of internationalisation to the traditional Western-centric conceptions. The editors, therefore, made every effort to invite scholars who work in the field of higher education internationalisation outside the Western contexts.

Many factors were at play that prevented prospective authors from submitting full manuscripts, with one factor standing out: the barrier to publishing in English-speaking journals. In the editing of the Special Issue, the editors observed these hurdles in front of colleagues from non-English speaking backgrounds who made efforts to publish in an English language outlet. Our observation and work with international authors have raised the concern of the English language as the dominant language of publication. It is understood that English as an additional language (EAL) scholars find English a barrier to their intention to publish in international journals (Luo & Hyland, 2019).

Unfortunately, English as the dominant language of academic publication in the field of higher education internationalisation, as in almost all other fields of academic research, largely restricts the exchange of practices and research between international communities. This single-language dominance is problematic on multiple fronts.

For the whole knowledge advancement, having silos of knowledge with exchanges limited by language barriers could be a waste of resources. For research communities, it restricts English-speaking academics' access to works achieved outside of other languages. Not having access outside of the English domain deprives English-speaking academics of knowledge, ways of learning, and potentially attentive solutions to problems (Geiger et al., 2022). And vice versa, privileging English in academic publications also restricts the research communities outside the English-speaking domain from joining conversations with English-speaking colleagues.

There is a deeper problem of equity. The most apparent is language inequity. Most leading journals, especially those in internationalisation research, are published in English and many

in English only. For academics whose working language is not English, this creates a large barrier to publishing. These challenges are linked to writing in English at the standards for international academic style and navigating through the whole process of publication. In addition to the language itself, the protocols and conventions driven by the dominant Western concepts that are reflected in an English language journal can create another layer of obstacles for academics without education or research experience in the Western context.

There has also been controversy of linguistic injustice in publication where non-native-like abstracts are potentially rated lower than native-like abstracts at the gatekeeping stage of publication (Politzer-Ahles et al., 2020). In the broader academia it is argued “linguistic discrimination and subordination experienced by non-dominant language speakers” (May, 2023, p.651).

In addition to language disadvantage, there is also the concern of cultural bias in academic research output. English as the dominant language can mean certain research results, perspectives and methodologies are often aligned more closely with English-speaking contexts, hence limiting the diversity of perspectives in academic discourse. Sometimes it hinders the voices from outside these dominant contexts. The mission of this Special Issue is to provide an opportunity for alternative perspectives in the conceptualisation and practices of internationalisation of the curriculum.

Journal policies seem to lag behind the intention to support non-English speaking background (NESB) authors (Geiger et al., 2022). Many journals offer publication support and services for NESB academics and teams. This trend is growing rapidly in recent years. Some journals allow the use of generative artificial intelligence tools and large language models, while some do not. Such translation, editing, language polishing services and use of AI tools, on the one hand are liberating for many academics (Luo & Hyland, 2019) and provide optimistic futures (Grimaldi & Ehrler, 2023), while on the other, are raising concerns of equity and accessibility (Alasadi & Baiz, 2023). Many of the countries where these authors work in a language other than English happen to be less affluent countries. As a growing number of journals are initiating article processing charges (APCs), this has posed another layer of burden on academics, although there is also an observation that APCs tend to be better supported by developing nations than countries like Australia.

Internationalisation becomes truly internationalised when members in the international communities can participate equally. A more inclusive system is required in academic research and dissemination where the value of diverse voices and perspectives are more recognised. Efforts are needed to support multilingualism in an equal and accessible way.

Conclusion

This Editorial has explored some of the most prominent points of discussion in internationalisation of the curriculum outside the traditional Western pedagogical domain. It has focused on the contextualisation and indigenisation of the curriculum in different discourses. Inspired by some of the conversations with potential authors, the Editorial team has also reflected on challenges faced by international academics, particularly those in non-English-speaking regions outside the Western domain, to communicate their research effectively with English-speaking research communities. We hope to see more inclusivity in conceptualising the internationalisation of the curriculum and communicating it.

Conflict of Interest

The editors disclose that they have no actual or perceived conflicts of interest. The editors disclose that they have not received any funding for this manuscript beyond resourcing for academic time at their respective university. The editors have produced this manuscript without artificial intelligence support.

Editor contribution statement

Dongmei Li: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft, Review and Editing, Project administration **Tracy Zou:** Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft, Review and Editing. **Pranit Anand:** Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft and Review **Amita Krautloher:** Writing - Original Draft and Review.

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