

The Impact of Curriculum Internationalisation: Perspectives of Academics and Students (0003)

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Introduction

The number of Chinese students around the world is rising considerably. Research on Chinese students has mainly focused on the influence of culture on their academic performance and the challenges they experience during their transition at the university (Huang 2012). There is lack of study on how the practice of curriculum design and development affects Chinese students' learning experiences. This research will address the gap by exploring how Chinese postgraduate taught (PGT) students experience curriculum internationalisation at a Scottish and an Australian university. Scotland and Australia are chosen for study, because they are popular study destinations for Chinese students, due to perceived academic reputation and prevalence of English language (Iannelli and Huang 2013).

Background

This paper considers that there is increased awareness of the importance to internationalize the curriculum in the higher education sector (Yemini and Sagie 2015), because it has been perceived as a main approach to develop students' global perspective of their subject area and the competences they will need in their future career (International Association of Universities 2012). However, there is limited practical guidance on how the curriculum can be internationalized (Edwards et al. 2003), in particular, what to teach, how to teach it, when and to whom, in what sequence, and of what quality and quantity (Bell 2004).

On consideration of the importance of curriculum internationalisation and the challenges in implementing that in practice, this paper will use the threefold typology proposed by Edwards et al. (2003) as a framework to explore and

compare the practice of internationalizing the curriculum in a Scottish and an Australian university. This typology is chosen because it has a focus on curriculum designers (academic staff) and students, and it provides higher education institutions with practical approaches to internationalize the curricula (Caruana and Hanstock 2003). This project will reveal whether the practice and strategies of curriculum internationalisation vary with disciplines and countries.

Methodology

There is two-stage data collection process in this project. Stage one involves ten focus groups with 40 Chinese postgraduate taught students and 21 semistructured interviews with academics, programme directors and university managers from one Australian and one Scottish university. Both universities are well-established, with years of internationalisation experience, and they have a large number of Chinese postgraduate taught students. These interviewees are selected from business and engineering studies, because these are popular subject areas among Chinese students (HEFCE 2014). A theoretical sampling approach (Punch 2013) is used to select these interviewees. Gender, seniority and cultural background are considered.

The focus groups and interviews are tape recorded and professionally transcribed. They are used to explore the existing practice and strategies of curriculum internationalisation in Scottish and Australian universities, and how that affects Chinese students' learning experiences and their engagement with the process. The effective strategies and practice of curriculum internationalisation and challenges to achieve that are identified and analyzed. Content analysis (McKee 2001) employing Nvivo software is used for data analysis.

In the second stage, informed by the findings of the focus groups and interviews, a questionnaire is designed and circulated to Chinese postgraduate taught students in business studies and engineering in the two selected universities, in order to further explore their understanding and experience of curriculum internationalisation. 325 students have completed

the survey. This survey provides a broad comparative view of Chinese students' experiences with curriculum internationalisation at both Scottish and Australian universities.

Results

The majority of academic interviewees in the Scottish and Australian universities share a common understanding of curriculum internationalisation, asserting that it mainly involves teaching case studies that cover an international context and being responsive to cultural differences in the student cohort. In terms of the extent of international elements in the curriculum, there is difference between business studies and engineering courses. Academic interviewees feel the need to provide international examples in business studies, but not in the engineering syllabus.

There is a clear lack of opportunities for Chinese students to get mobility experience during their Master's studies in both Australia and Scotland. Academics and university manager interviewees rationalize this lack of mobility opportunities by stating that the students already come from different cultures, so in a sense, they already have international experience. In contrast, Chinese Master's students express their strong desire for opportunities of mobility, such as internship, exchange programmes and visiting industry etc. They believe that this will give them good international experience, especially when they are in an environment where most of the students in their class are Chinese.

Reflection

The majority of Chinese students do not find their Master's education equip them well for their future job in China, because the subject as a whole is too focused on European, British or American perspectives, even when academics add international case studies in their teaching. This contrasts the view of academic interviewees that Western perspectives are important, because they have long been dominating many academic fields. These different views suggest that Chinese students and academics hold different

expectations for curriculum internationalisation, which creates challenges to developing and internationalizing curriculum within the institution (Edwards et al. 2003; Bell 2004).

Conclusion

This paper explores and compares how Chinese students experience curriculum internationalisation at Australian and Scottish universities. It reveals that the extent of international elements in the curriculum varies between business studies and engineering courses and that there is a need for both Scottish and Australian universities to improve their practices of internationalizing their curriculum for better student learning experience.