

Internationalization of Teaching and Research in Higher Education

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Abstract

Internationalization is one of a crucial focus in higher education to develop and implement strategies and to stay competitive in the global market. While internationalization is usually measured in terms of student mobility there has been a push to internationalize in other areas of higher education. These include staff and faculty recruitment and retention, cross-culture collaborations and partnerships in research, teaching and learning, and curriculum. Internationalization of teaching and research is needed now more than ever due to the number of international students, exchange students, and international scholars who are bringing equity between the Global North and South. Equipping current and future generations through access to intercultural understanding and awareness brings us closer to eliminating discrimination, promoting inclusion, addressing disparities, and overcoming barriers and challenges. This paper examines the need to internationalize teaching and research in higher education and potential challenges for faculty and staff.

Keywords: *internationalization of higher education, teaching and research, intercultural understanding and collaboration, higher education, internationalization*

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Introduction

Internationalization in higher education is a central focus for institutions in the competitive global market. Knight's (2003) widely used definition of internationalization of higher education is 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education' (p.2). Further, De Wit et al. (2015) emphasize that integration of international and intercultural dimensions should be an intentional process beneficial for all students, staff, and community members, instead of only being available for the elitist class. Hunter et al. (2022) argued the concept of internationalization continues to be refined and revised according to the evolving situations, uncertainties, and circumstances. Currently, internationalization needs to adapt to many areas within higher education as we recover from the COVID-19 and face the changing landscape of globalized higher education. This would provide much needed support to faculty, staff, students, local and global communities. There is no universal definition of internationalization due to national, political, and institutional shifts. Hence, the term "internationalization" refers to many areas within higher education from student mobility and recruitment, to teaching, and research.

The current literature that exists on internationalization and international education is deeply rooted in student mobility, especially research from the mid-20 century. In the last two decades, research has shifted from student mobility to teaching and research. Student mobility has raised awareness of diversity, transnational scholars and students' contributions to society. This recognition of the value of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and values has resulted in more demands for internationalizing the other parts of the campus as well. Increased competition to attract and retain students, higher enrollment numbers, various DEI initiatives, diverse staff and students, research collaborations across the globe, and industry partnerships have played a

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huge role in policies and processes to internationalize higher education across the world (Dobbins & Kweik, 2017). There is a new emphasis on producing, developing, and implementing policies and strategies around internationalization. This has resulted in the creation of new terms in the higher education world such as “cross-border delivery” (De wit & Deca, 2020, p.72).

There is a wide literature available on student mobility because internationalization is categorized and measured through international students and exchange students. Student mobility is one of main factors that higher education institutions and other agencies consider regarding internationalization. This is largely due to how much international students contribute to the economy of their host countries. International students contributed \$40.1 billion to the USA economy in the 2022-2023 academic year (Esaki-Smith, 2023) and \$30.9 billion contribution to Canada’s GDP in 2022 (Government of Canada, 2024) The focus from student and staff mobility has somewhat shifted now to other areas in higher education such as teaching pedagogy, curriculum, research, staff and faculty recruitment. More and more terms and policies are being developed around curriculum, teaching, research, recruitment, and future strategic plans for internationalizing higher education. There has been a focus on internationalization at home, abroad, virtual, comprehensive internationalization, and policies and strategies to internationalize institutions locally and nationally (Tebbett et al, 2021; Lee et al, 2022). In terms of internationalizing teaching and research there are different names and strategies being developed and implemented. In Europe, it is called “internationalization at home” (Beelen & Jones, 2015) and in Australia “internationalizing the curriculum” (Crosling et al., 2008). However, the complex and deep-rooted phenomena of developing intercultural and international education is to support all students, staff, faculty, and society (Sanderson, 2011). This paper

focuses on the internationalization of teaching through teaching pedagogy, faculty understanding and professional development, as well as the curriculum. It is important to note that most faculty members are affiliated with research along with practitioners where research is one of the central foci in institutions. Even though this paper's emphasis is on equipping faculty members with tools to internationalize their own practices, it is important to note that this paper also outlines challenges and barriers that exist for faculty and scholars and has laid out other measures that would be helpful to support them at the institutional and department levels.

Need to Internationalize Teaching and Research Practice

The enrollment of international students has increased in higher education institutions across the world, leading to many challenges for students. These include understanding content, language barriers, academic difficulties, interaction with faculty and peers, and other stressors and obstacles (Mushfiq, 2023). However, even after facing these challenges, most of these students are able to integrate into their host institutions and environment. These students thrive in their host cultural context as they develop and build on their critical thinking and intercultural skills. When compared to domestic students, they require more intercultural knowledge, education, and skills to be a global citizen (Deardoff, 2020). There is a stronger need to possess understanding, respect, and awareness as core professional competencies. Additionally, institutions are moving towards hiring and retaining internationally trained faculty and staff members. Highly skilled faculty and staff members add diversity, intercultural experiences, and innovative ideas. This diversity is a necessary component of a well-functioning educational department and institution (Salaran, 2010). To successfully implement internationalization policies and strategies in higher education, faculty and staff need to be involved and trained to

support students in the classroom, and at a departmental and institutional level (Storberg-Walker & Torracco, 2004).

The process of internationalization in higher education may happen at individual, departmental, institutional, local, regional, national, and global levels (Romani-Dias, 2019). Internationalization of research requires support and approaches from all these levels to effectively and efficiently internationalize research practices. Research activities led by faculty and institutions need resources and support, support which often is heavily based on their faculty members bringing in grants and fellowships to demonstrate innovation, retain talent, and stay competitive in the global market. That is why international activities such as collaborations and partnerships are deemed important in higher education institutions (Antelo, 2012). Institutions that focus on research both need to and are more likely to support both internationalization and international research collaborations, especially when compared to teaching-focused institutions (Buckner, 2022). Scholars, faculty members, practitioners, and other stakeholders can promote and support internationalization of research so that graduate, doctoral, and postdoctoral students have better opportunities to participate and get involved (Antelo, 2012).

There is a strong focus for many institutions to internationalize their campus through student recruitment, faculty and staff mobility, and recruitment. In parallel there is also a constant push towards a ranking system, institutional policies and internationalizing strategies being developed and implemented. A missing component of internationalization is faculty support and the teaching and research practices students' encounter in the classroom. Students should be the center of the higher education system, and they should be given opportunities to explore and learn from their faculty. Faculty members are one of the primary sources for knowledge delivery, learning, career navigation, advising, and they handle many different roles

within higher education. Since learning is a social process, faculty members and their relationship with students is a powerful tool to support students' personal and professional development, boosting their confidence, skills, and integration into the campus community (Baker and Griffin, 2010).

Method

This study incorporates a case study which is a “qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell, 2014, p. 241). Using the literature, lived experiences as a faculty member, higher education professional, and a former international student, this article presents possible strategies as well as avenues for improvement of incorporating internationalization in teaching and research. The focus of this study is on a specific case study, offering an in-depth understanding of potential challenges and struggles for faculty members when incorporating international education components into their teaching pedagogies and practices.

Potential Challenges

There are certainly many challenges and obstacles that faculty members face as they have diverse learners and needs in the classroom. From a diverse and multicultural perspective, Western and Eastern teaching (Socratic and Confucian) traditions presents a dichotomy in teaching culture and practices (Kingston and Forland, 2008). Most international students especially in the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia are coming from Asian countries and need proper support from faculty to successfully thrive in a new culture and teaching environment. Apart from international students, all students' needs and learning styles are different. Because of diverse experiences and different learning styles, faculty members can have their own biases,

stereotypes and assumptions about students' ethnicity, race, and gender. Instead of getting the support from their faculty members, students get distracted, confidence levels drop, they stop interacting with peers and have low participation in class. This can eventually cause students to experience stress from low grades or failure in the classroom. All of this stems from faculty members lack of awareness about incorporating intercultural and diverse teaching practices in their classroom.

Additionally, lack of support from the institution in terms of funding, professional development opportunities, training and workshops focusing on intercultural communication and teaching practices poses a risk to students and the academic community. The disconnect between faculty members and students can lead to higher drop-out rates, increased mental health challenges, and eventually low retention of students. There is also a need for continuous support at the departmental, institutional, and national level as well. Huang et al.'s (2022) study of Russian universities showed the importance of the national government taking an active role in sustaining internationalization during COVID-19 and the strategies they implemented to support the universities' needs and agendas. Additional support from the institution, national government, and other funding sources is essential to achieving internationalization. The implementation of an institutional mission alongside other strategies make it easier to accomplish this effectively and efficiently.

Global positioning of power within higher education systems is unequal in the Global North and Global South due to a variety of reasons including global higher education landscapes, power inequities, nationalistic entitlements, stereotypes, and exclusions (Ramaswamy et al., 2021). There is an increasing divide between the North and the South, and this poses a risk and challenges to internationalization (Huang et al, 2022). While there is continuous work being

done to curtail the inequity that exists within higher education institutions, restrictions in place at a federal or national level prevent security threats which could hinder possible collaborations. Faculty members and researchers are restricted from seeking research opportunities at the international level because of limited academic freedom, potential security risks, and power dynamics of the political context (Sabzaleiva et al, 2020).

Another challenge to faculty engagement is the lack of institutional support which prevents them from developing cultural humility and competence. Cultural humility is not about knowledge of other cultures, but it is to become more aware of different cultures and values and developing a perspective to respect others in any situation while learning through the differences (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Faculty not engaging and incorporating international perspectives into their teaching and research practices rests upon many factors and is a complex layered phenomena which needs to be addressed. This will ensure faculty have the tools, resources, and proper incentives in place to explore, engage, and be a useful power tool to develop international collaborations, practices, pedagogies, and partnerships to support their students, institutions, and community overall.

Faculty Perspective on Internationalization

Faculty are one of the pillars of higher education institutions, as they are one of the driving forces of student success, institutional quality, innovation and research, content and curriculum planning and delivery (Gilbert, n.d.). In addition, faculty provide mentoring, advising, career and technical skills to help students advance their knowledge (Gilbert, n.d). Faculty engagement within internationalization is based on their personal motivations along with environmental conditions (Colbeck and Weaver, 2008). Personal endeavors, attitudes,

connections, and experiences can also play a key role for faculty motivation to pursue international activities and to tie those experiences into their day-to-day operations. Faculty members need to be equipped so they can broaden their research collaborations and partnerships beyond local or national boundaries to collaborate, build relationships, engage, interact, and enhance internationalization (Calikoglu et al., 2022). This would bring an opportunity for faculty members to move out of their comfort zones and bring research activities and teaching practices to their classrooms and institutions.

Faculty members who do seek research partnerships and collaborations are motivated because of their own professional development and growth, to gain institutions' support and trust, or for sociocultural development (Calikoglu et al., 2022; Criswell, 2014; Li and Tu, 2016). However, while faculty members are interested in expanding on their collaborations and would like to participate more in international activities there are limitations and restrictions based on various factors such as funding and budget allocations (Calikoglu et al., 2022)

Another study by Kuzhabekova and Lee (2020) found that even though faculty are engaged in publications and may provide opportunities for their students, they may not be engaged in building each other up. This is because of a lack of social connections between faculty members, a lack of proper reward structures, and the lack of tenure appointments (Kuzhabekova and Lee, 2020).

For some faculty it is important to incorporate an inclusive and less Western-centric approach to internationalization and bring in more international perspectives (Hudzik, 2011). Even though internationalization in teaching and research practices means to bring worldwide opportunities and perspectives into academic disciplines, faculty need to be at the center and leading the pack (Mudiamu, 2020).

Implementation and Discussion

The lack of institutional support impacts faculty in many ways but Childress (2010) argues that this can be minimized and if proper strategies are in place to support faculty by using the “Five I’s”: intentional, informational, involvement, institutional networks, and incentives (p.18).

Faculty members through teaching and research practices provide opportunities and support to their students to “develop globally oriented knowledge and intercultural understandings and skills” (Ryan, 2005). Equipping faculty members with teaching pedagogies will focus on intercultural (competence), globalization, internationalization, diverse learning styles, and real-time strategies. These include encouraging students to express their thoughts and ideas in more than one language, or incorporating the use of technology (Galante, 2020). Integrating global learning in the curriculum, teaching practices, and research is important and beneficial for increasing students’ understanding, critical thinking skills, and more importantly broadening their perceptions of different cultures around the world (Kerkhoff and Cloud, 2020). If faculty members continue to learn about the cultural differences of their students they will be able to be both considerate of these differences and able to integrate it into their educational content, helping all students (Carie et al, 2021).

There is a need to achieve equity with similar levels of success in the Global North and South. Countries in the North should be able to provide aid whether it is through training, development of programs, or any other support needed to bridge inequity. In fact, education is one of the most important tools for bridging the gap. Having resources in place to support teaching and research collaborations and partnerships across the globe is one possible way to

support, engage, and build pathways to promote internationalization and awareness of intercultural competencies.

Mentoring programs for faculty members and scholars aim to build research capacity, relationship, and networking circles for potential collaborations. This allows for a mutual exchange of knowledge, and different contributions for local and global impact. This would enable academic staff to reach their fullest potential. With these programs in place, faculty members would be able to build relationships with their students and provide tangible resources for supporting students through further education processes. These include admission, laboratory work, and industrial experiences, to name a few, which could support building the self-efficacy of students (Lukszo and Hayes, 2020).

The importance of acknowledging a mutual exchange of knowledge and research partners' different contributions to research endeavors seems largely absent from the literature on research collaborations and mentoring in higher education. There is now a stronger need to solve real-world challenges and ongoing issues through research investigations and ground-breaking results and impacts. It is important for faculty to develop relationships and cultivate cross-border collaborations and opportunities. Cross-cultural learning and research through different mediums is one way of experiencing different views, ideas, and critical thinking processes. Innovative approaches include knowledge and analysis of cross-cultural theories, methodologies, field work experiences, as well as reflection would be beneficial for everyone involved (Teichler, 2004).

Below are some recommendations for ways to internationalize teaching and research:

- Workshops, trainings, and professional development opportunities for faculty members related to intercultural understanding, international students, diverse students, learning styles to broaden their horizons of understanding.

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- Department/institution wide incentive for faculty and staff to incorporate and implement strategies by keeping institutions' mission and strategic planning and policies in their work.
- Reward and promotion policies for faculty to engage in international activities to consider internationalization of teaching and research in higher education (Knight, 2004). Funding and other resources to encourage faculty for collaboration and partnership opportunities (Khuzabekova and Lee, 2020).
- Proper training modules and step-by-step guidance and training for proposal writing, grant funding, and project management to establish successful research planning.
- Mandatory faculty and staff meetings and trainings for cross-cultural events and workshops to facilitate discussions, mutual understanding, and to expand relationships and network.
- Department and institution funding for workshops, conferences, and specific certifications which would help faculty and staff personnel explore intercultural knowledge and dimensions.
- Programs such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) training for faculty so they can explore different opportunities to bring intercultural learning and experiences on campus (Mudiamu, 2020).
- Encouraging opportunities such as the Fulbright Scholars program along with other programs. Not only is it a prestigious award for faculty, but it will also help engage their interests and provide an opportunity to explore and develop their skills, skills they can bring back into their practices.

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- Associations and memberships with various organizations who are emphasizing on international education is another way to get to know other people and build relationships. There are many associations and organizations who have specific community of practices on internationalization and are doing great work. Faculty can join these memberships to stay updated and get involved in various ways.

It is important to rethink internationalization at a broader and deeper level by keeping students in mind as ultimately these students are enrolling in higher education institutions for learning. Through internationalization of teaching and research strategies, faculty and research scholars would break many existing barriers. It is through the teamwork of each individual, department, institutional, and governmental stakeholder the important work of establishing relationships and partnerships is done and allows for this work to affect institutions and the wider community.

Conclusion

Internationalization of higher education during the uncertainties and changing landscape of education is essential to meet global demand, diversity, and to stay competitive in the global market. Overall, it is important that faculty members and scholars are supported and given opportunities to implement strategies to internationalize their own practices through innovative and intercultural pedagogies and diminish the gaps and inequities that exist in higher education institutions. Faculty members need support from departments, institutions, government, and across borders to support their research interests and teaching pedagogies. With this support they can develop, innovate and collaborate in ground-breaking research. This would help decision-makers to make informed decisions on preventive measures, strategic and innovative ways to

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combat climate change, sustainability, and future global health crises. Additionally, internationalization would develop and build relationships and partnerships that would fill the gaps and break the stereotypes that exist between the Global North and South and beyond.

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