How Internationalised Is Your Curriculum? University Graduate Students Speak Out

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Abstract

Internationalisation of the curriculum has created changes to the traditional curriculum but little attention in research has been paid to the student perspective on these changes, and how they experience them. This paper aims to fill the gap by reporting on the findings of graduate students' perceptions of the internationalisation of the curriculum at Makerere University in Uganda. This study adopted a sequential explanatory survey study in which we collected both quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of 180 graduate students. The findings showed that the majority of the respondents agreed that their curricula had an international dimension. This was commonly seen by graduate students in terms of international academic staff, international students, travel abroad programmes for students, courses with an international focus, comparative studies and focus on ICTs. The participants voiced concerns about logistical constraints and the universality of knowledge. These findings reinforced the earlier research that proposed that the above aspects are critical in the IoC and can act as benchmarks to guide further work in the direction of the university's internationalisation agenda. No earlier works had similar results, at least in the context of the Global South where this study was conducted. Further studies need to involve other actors in higher education to explore more fully the notion of IoC to explain better the basis of students' perceptions and experiences of IoC reported in this study.

Keywords: *Higher education; Internationalisation of the curriculum; Graduate students*

Introduction

Today, a high-quality education must prepare students to live and work in a world characterised by growing multiculturalism and diminishing borders. Higher education institutions (HEIs) across the world are rising to this challenge by embracing internationalisation in the provision of

confirms Haigh's (2014) argument that internationalisation is about exploring and exploiting the opportunities of the connected world and the information age by utilising ICTs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explain the nature of curriculum internationalisation at Makerere University, Uganda's premier university, from the perspective of graduate students. The study is also the first of its kind to explore graduate students' perceptions of the international dimensions of their curriculum at Makerere University. Although the pragmatic nature of the study cannot fully allow for generalisation, what we can affirm is that there is IoC at Makerere University, especially in the graduate programmes, and that different dimensions of internationalisation of the curriculum could be identified by students. Considering the nature of responses to most questions, graduate students across all disciplinary fields were certain about various international dimensions in their programmes. The findings revealed that IoC is not narrowed down to Gao's (2015) dimensions, but it goes beyond students, academic staff and even the modes of instruction. Therefore, to plan IoC, a university needs not to confine itself to what is taught in class but may need to consider the students – because they receive the curriculum – and the staff – who deliver it. As such, this study adds to the current international research literature on the understanding of IoC in different programmes.

In the light of the findings, we call upon university managers at Makerere and other universities to play a critical role in ensuring that international perspectives such as those brought by international staff, travel abroad programmes for students, courses with an international focus, comparative studies, and focus on ICT are integrated into the curriculum. This would help students not only to acquire knowledge of their local environment, but also of the global world at large. Since the results of this study were largely based on the views and opinions of graduate students, we recommend further examination of the international dimension of the curriculum from the perspective of a broad range of other actors, such as undergraduate students, academics and administrators, for a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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