

Necessity of Internationalization of the Curriculum for Indian Universities

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the need and changing wants associated with internationalization of the curriculum in the context of Indian universities. The demand for international curriculum is growing day by day. To cater these needs institutions of higher education have started to take initiatives in this direction. Besides, traditional providers of higher education and new knowledge providers from corporate houses have started developing innovative curriculum modules for delivery to hone the urgently required skills among the learners as per the demand of the global market. Our courses designed in the past used to be centrally focused on imparting information and upgrading the depth of knowledge, lacking in honing various skills of the learners. But in the changed circumstances it has been observed that the curriculum designed today in the similar fashion that of the past has lost its relevance, practicability and applicability. We are shaping human resources on large scale but have forgotten the qualitative requirement of the global society. We have to think and rethink again and again as to why our degrees have not been proving self-sufficient to quench the quality requirement of the society at large.

1. Introduction

Internationalization of the curriculum is a broad term. It involves plethora of activities such as study abroad programs (short and long term), foreign language courses, interdisciplinary or area programs, or the provision of programs or courses with an international, intercultural, or comparative focus. But, in the present work, an internationalized curriculum will refer to course content, teaching and learning approaches with higher emphasis on an intercultural and international association. Thus, the attention is given on the subject matter of the curriculum and the educational institutions of teaching and learning approaches that will encourage the involvement of international students.

2. Importance of Internationalization of the curriculum

It is believed that curriculum is generally reflective of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a particular culture and an institution. In Western countries, the emphasis of education is on a didactic lecture format involving group discussions, tutorials and seminars that edify discussion, critical thinking, and active learning. This approach many a times leads to alienation of international students who are familiar to different styles of teaching and learning. Hence, internationalization of the curriculum is an essential component to develop an academic environment that supports the diverse cultural learning requirements of international students and valuing their contribution.

Internationalization of the curriculum is an effective tool for creation of optimal learning environment as it concurs with diverse cultures, perspectives and experiences of students. Hence, many researchers have outlined the importance of internationalization of the curriculum and associated teaching and learning processes as vital elements of internationalization. Curriculum is considered as the backbone of the internationalization process. Other researchers have agreed on the importance of an internationalized curriculum in providing a

better student-centered learning experience for all students and in preparing students to be successful in today's progressively interdependent global society. It opens new avenues and opportunities for securing a better job in multinational companies and institutions of high repute on a better and larger level.

3. Challenges associated with Internationalization of curriculum

The internationalization of the curriculum is an unending, multidimensional process that involves the cooperation and support of faculty members, students, academic departments and the institutional administration. It needs visionary leadership, dedication and commitment to the process, high intercultural sensitivity, full financial support, willingness, personal interest, open lines of communication, and interdisciplinary cooperation. A lack of these necessities either individually or in harmony can result in a number of challenges to internationalizing the curriculum including the following:

- In India, senior administrators from UGC and state governments and members of different bodies of a university try to use 'one size fits all' method. This results in homogeneity of curriculum, thereby, diminishing internationalizing the curriculum.
- Faculty, who are the important to curricular reform essential to become engaged in the internationalization process,
- Senior administrators who traditionally make decisions regarding the curricular reform process often don't have the required interdisciplinary, intercultural, and pedagogical competencies required to engage in this process.
- Faculty often neglects to draw upon the experiences of international students and domestic students who have international or intercultural experiences as potential resources for internationalizing their curricula and pedagogical practices.

- Support for the curricular reform process must be recognized within written policy statements and strategic plans of the university and colleges and must be effectuated at the departmental and institutional levels.
- The lack of a continuous curricular review and assessment process at the majority of Indian universities is a major barrier to the curricular reform process
- Insufficient funding and resources to support the internationalization of the curriculum can also be serious.
- Faculty must believe that the academic and humanistic rationales for internationalizing the curriculum will enrich the learning environment for the benefit of everyone on campus rather than simply being an avenue of revenue generation which will increase the institution's potential of recruiting international fee-paying students
- Institutions that neglect to consider faculty's international experience and competence in their recruitment and hiring processes and fail to introduce reward and promotion strategies for faculty based on their involvement in international activities such as internationalizing the curricula impede the curricular reform process
- Lack of funding to support faculty development and to aid faculty in increasing their levels of international awareness and expertise through international research, study, and teaching activities can also negatively impact on the process of internationalizing of the curriculum.
- Lack of personal knowledge, skills, or interest in internationalization, and a lack of intercultural knowledge and sensitivity are other reasons for the lack of faculty involvement in international curricular reform initiatives.
- Ethnocentricity, a disbelief that knowledge is socially constructed, a belief that their discipline is already international, and a neglect to engage in self-reflection regarding the impact of their personal cultural beliefs on their choice of course content and pedagogical practices are all issues in faculty reluctance to engage in curricular internationalization and reform.
- Faculty may be reluctant to internationalize the curriculum at the expense of the basic knowledge required within the discipline and may question whether they should be creating a distinction between the international and traditional content within their courses or integrating the two.
- Student diversity is a crucial factor. It is essential to know that international students cannot be considered a homogeneous group. Their personal and cultural background, level of adjustment and ability to face problems vary significantly in a foreign educational environment. Students from families and cultures that differ widely from that of the host environment may have the greatest difficulty adjusting to the new culture.
- Linguistic and communication difficulties present one of the extreme academic challenges for international students whose first language differs from that of the host country.
- Pedagogical styles and expectations for learning approaches that differ from those to which the international students are accustomed in their own cultures may also be a source of difficulty

4. Approaches to Internationalizing the Curriculum

The internationalization of the curriculum requires an ongoing, collaborative, interdisciplinary approach combining the support, knowledge, efforts, and skills of inter-culturally sensitive and internationally experienced faculty, students, and administrators. Such a curricular reform process must be institution-wide in order to best meet the needs of all students in all departments and faculties. The three approaches to internationalizing the curriculum are:

- ✓ **The add-on approach:** It is the simplest and widely used strategy in many universities. It is highly useful for traditional courses. The add-on approach is the earliest used approach to internationalizing the curriculum and is characterized by adding international or intercultural content or themes to existing curricula and courses without modifying the original structure or pedagogical approaches.
- ✓ **The infusion approach:** The infusion approach to internationalizing the curriculum is the one most normally employed in western countries today. Within this approach, the curriculum is infused with content that enhances students' cross-cultural understanding and knowledge of diverse cultures. The infusion approach focuses on the interdisciplinary nature of the internationalization of the curriculum and exposes students in all fields of study to international and multicultural perspectives.
- ✓ **The transformation approach:** The transformation approach is probably the most difficult to adopt and the least utilized approach to modify the curriculum. This approach, which is based upon the tenets of critical pedagogy, "encourages new ways of thinking, incorporates new methodologies, so that different epistemological questions are raised, old assumptions are questioned, subjective data sources are considered, and prior theories either revised or invalidated".

5. Practical Suggestions for Internationalizing the Curriculum

An internationalized curriculum stresses to move from the traditional lecture and discussion style of teaching to a more inclusive, student-centered, interactive, and centered at teacher as well as learner experiential learning environment. Such a learning environment should encourage diverse learning styles.

6. Examples of Potential Learner-Centered Instructional Strategies

- Peer learning
- Small and large group discussions and projects that incorporate diverse groups of students and examine particular issues from various cultural perspectives
- Reaction papers and reflective writing assignments focusing on intercultural issues
- Analyses of international case studies
- Problem solving exercises focusing on international or intercultural contexts
- The use of multimedia and technology within the classroom
- The incorporation of international students and international guest speakers in the class

7. Suggestions for Faculty Members

- Faculty should explicitly outline the academic expectations and teaching and learning style requirements of the new educational environment
- Faculty should guide and support students in understanding their reasons and goals for utilizing

particular teaching strategies within the classroom environment

- Faculty members must provide sufficient time to enable international students to modify and add to their existing repertoire of learning styles to more successfully engage in their new learning environment.
- Faculty should incorporate wherever possible sources representing local, national, and international perspectives.
- Knowledge should be examined not from the perspective of a single discipline, but from multidisciplinary contexts.
- Internationalized course content should be carefully chosen to ensure it accurately reflects different countries and cultures and should encourage students to critically reflect on their own socially determined cultural identity.
- Faculty should employ a diverse range of assessment strategies to better meet the learning needs of international students.

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