Embedding and Facilitating Intercultural Competence Development in Internationalization of the Curriculum of Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze how to embed and facilitate intercultural competence development in the process of internationalizing the curriculum of higher education institutions. Specific learning outcomes, effective pedagogical intervention and multimethod assessment are critical components for developing students' intercultural competence in an internationalized curriculum. The learning outcome statements need to be realistic, concrete, and measurable. Elements that determine the quality of intercultural contact, coupled with the personality and biography of the students should be considered when implementing the learning activities. Multimethod assessment is suggested for providing a comprehensive picture for the progressive development of intercultural competence. And it is equally necessary to make sure that the assessment criteria align with the specific learning outcomes and learning activities.

Keywords: intercultural competence, internationalization of the curriculum, learning outcomes, pedagogy, assessment

1. Introduction

Internationalization is a word broadly used and interpreted. Internationalization at the institutional level is defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2004, p11). De Wit & Hunter (2015) proposed a revised definition as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (p3). From the two definitions, it is evident that internationalization is perceived as an effective mechanism for the delivery of global-ready graduates. And the intercultural dimension is stressed in both definitions as an important part of internationalization. Even though education abroad such as student and staff mobility is still viewed as a critical component of internationalization in higher education institutions, internationalization of the curriculum has increasingly received considerable attention so as to benefit all the students and staff through systematic and purposeful learning and teaching efforts.

2. Internationalization of Curriculum

The concept of Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC) originates from Australia. Nilsson (2000) defined an internationalized curriculum as one that "gives international and intercultural knowledge and abilities, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally, socially, emotionally) in an international and multicultural context" (p.22). This definition links international and intercultural, and incorporates the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes as part of the function of this kind of curriculum. Leask (2015) differentiated internationalization of curriculum and an internationalized curriculum, the means and the end, and defined internationalization of curriculum as "the incorporation of an international and intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program" (Leask, 2015, p.9). This definition puts an emphasis on integrating the multifaceted dimensions to the whole process of curriculum. In the context of IoC, Leask (2015) drew attention to the various forms of the curriculum. The formal curriculum refers to the syllabus and the learner activities that are formally assessed and

credit bearing. The informal curriculum consists of all the support services and student life activities and options that are usually not assessed but contribute to student learning and development. The hidden curriculum consists of the "unintended hidden messages to students" (Leask, 2015, p. 8). It informs students about the dominant values and beliefs, how and when to interact and with whom, and when not to, and reflects the social structure and the dominant culture of the university. The formal, informal, and hidden elements of the curriculum are connected and interactive, rather than discrete—experienced by students as a dynamic interplay of teaching and learning processes, content, and activities in and out of the classroom (Leask, 2015, p.9).

Much of the literature on IoC comes from Australia and the United Kingdom, both countries having diverse, multicultural urban populations alongside significant numbers of international students (Jones & Killick, 2013). However, it should be noted that the mere recruitment of international students does not mean the internationalization of curriculum even though the international students can bring a wealth of cultural diversity. There is increased awareness of the importance of internationalizing the curriculum in the higher education sector (Yemini & Sagie, 2015), because the rationale for internationalization of the curriculum is often associated with preparing graduates to live and work locally in a globalized world (Leask, 2015). IoC should be considered as a strategy to support students "to become more aware of their own and other cultures" (Green & Whitsed 2015, p.9). Despite the increased awareness around internationalizing the curriculum, there is limited practical guidance on how to internationalize the curriculum (Edwards et al., 2003). As for the practice of internationalizing the curriculum, most emphasis was devoted to incorporating international elements into course content (Wamboye, Adekola, & Baldwin, 2014, 2015). Thus, there is a crying need to provide guidance on how to strengthen the intercultural learning for graduates in an internationalized curriculum.

3. Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is often described as an important and significant attribute of graduates, an outcome of internationalization and a requirement for global citizenship. It is a complex term to define and assess, which draws great attention from various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, communication, linguistics, education, to name a few, in the past decades of research. Scholars from different disciplines have different conceptualizations of this intricate construct. In recent years, there has been certain consensus among scholars pertaining to intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2006, p.247). This definition implies that effectiveness and appropriateness are two critical components of intercultural competence prevalent in literature. It is also agreed among scholars that intercultural competence includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. But the criteria by which we judge effectiveness and appropriateness of intercultural competence and the extent to which it is a cultural mindset, skillset or knowledge remain unsolved.

Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) reviewed some selective and categorized models of intercultural competence critically and uncovered the conceptual complexity of this term. Gregersen-Hermans (2016) summarized the key points that arise from those models:

- Intercultural competence builds on the awareness of the self as a cultural being, recognizing that one is a member of various cultural collectives simultaneously.
- Intercultural competence consists of components in the domains of knowledge, skills, and motivation and attitude.
- Intercultural competence is associated with linguistic competence- a minimum level of linguistic competence is conditional for culturally competent behavior.
- Motivational components and attitudes influence or drive the development of intercultural competence. At the same time, positive interactions with culturally different others enhance an individual's self-confidence and self-efficacy to engage in intercultural interactions.
- Intercultural competence includes processes of self-management, perception management, and relationship management.
- Intercultural competence is a process of balancing co-orientation towards a joint frame of reference and tolerance for ambiguity with the objective to stay in the relationship.
- Intercultural competence is a process of balancing adaptability (to the intercultural interaction and the culturally different others) with the negation of personal space and identity.

- Intercultural competence can be divided into development stages that are associated with different ways of constructing and perceiving daily reality. Developmental stages are progressive in nature, develop over time, and function as predictors of performance.

- Intercultural competence can be developed.

The above list stresses the key aspects that need to be considered when developing intercultural competence and establishing rubrics for assessing it as learning outcomes of an internationalized curriculum.

While it is relatively easy to see the theoretical connection intercultural competence has with internationalization of the curriculum, it is not as easy to identify effective ways to assist students to become interculturally autonomous as human, social, and economic beings (Leask, 2015). Enhancing student mobility or providing an internationalized university environment to offer students an intercultural experience as such does not necessarily lead to intercultural learning. Although students may have had a transformative experience because of these activities, this will not necessarily have been an intercultural one (Bennett, 2012). Developing intercultural competence in specific discipline or through a program of study is actually "a dynamic, ongoing, interactive self-reflective learning process that transforms attitudes, skills and knowledge for effective communication and interaction across cultures and contexts" (Freeman et al., 2009, p.13). Therefore, how to properly implement and elaborate intercultural competence within an internationalized curriculum is a challenging task for all academic staff.

4. Discussion

When intercultural competence development is embedded in internationalization of the curriculum, one of the key concerns is ensuring students with intercultural skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to make positive contributions as citizens to their local, national, and global communities. The purposeful development requires the incorporation of specific intercultural objectives in the process of learning, teaching, and assessing. This is because learning, teaching, and assessment are at the heart of internationalization of the curriculum (Jones & Killick, 2007), which should be well planned and managed. Another requisite consideration is that intercultural competence is contextualized by the curriculum, the specific discipline, and the related professions. This can enhance its transferability and perceive relevance. But, in practice, the generic attributes of intercultural competence would have different interpretations associated with different disciplines and professions such as nursing, engineering, social working and so on. Thus, the knowledge within the discipline and across the disciplines plays an important role in developing intercultural competence in internationalization of the curriculum, which means the applications would vary from discipline to discipline.

Developing intercultural competence is a highly dynamic process rather than a static one. Embedding intercultural competence development into the core of the internationalized curriculum and linking it to professional and societal needs involves changes in the plan of the curriculum, the teaching methods, and the methods of assessment.

4.1 How to Plan the Curriculum

The ultimate purpose of internationalizing a curriculum is to improve the learning outcomes of students. This will not be achieved without careful program and course design (Leask, 2015). A central consideration in curriculum design is what students can be expected to know and be able to do, as well as who they will 'be' at the end of a program and as graduates (Leask, 2013). Therefore, when planning the internationalized curriculum pointing to intercultural competence development, the focus should be given to the importance of engaging all the students with interculturally informed content and providing them opportunities to develop their intercultural perspectives through the entire study of the curriculum. Before the delivery of the curriculum, the academic staff should:

- state the intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes the students will exhibit in the curriculum

- clarify the ways how students will achieve those intercultural goals through the curriculum

- arrange teaching environment in which students will obtain multiple opportunities to practice the intended intercultural strategies

- make the assessment criteria referring to the development of intercultural competence explicit.

Stating the specific learning outcomes is the critical step for a curriculum design. The statements need to be realistic, concrete, and measurable. The learning outcomes sometimes are intended because students may not achieve all the described learning outcomes. They may learn much more at a deeper level than we intended, or they may learn much less at a more superficial level, or they may simply not achieve some learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Teachers who are aware of the intended learning outcomes are more likely to organize the interculturally appropriate

learning activities and give students constructive feedback on their progress towards achievement of defined and intended learning outcomes. Students who are clear about the intended learning outcomes and their relationship with assessment tasks are more likely to focus their activity and perform well. As for the intercultural competence development in a curriculum, Deardorff (2015) noted that, "writing specific outcomes statements (learning objectives) and developing indicators of the degree to which statements can be assessed remains an area in need of further research, especially within specific fields" (p.136). Thus, it is necessary that teaching, learning, and assessing, the core components of an internationalized curriculum with intercultural competence development, are well planned before the implementation of the curriculum.

4.2 How to Provide an Effective Pedagogical Environment for Students

Intercultural competence development is an ongoing process rather than a finite destination. Pedagogies to develop intercultural competence that have been tested in specific disciplinary context is limited because intercultural learning is often assumed to be an automatic outcome benefiting from intercultural contact in class, on campus or abroad. However, a growing body of evidence proved that some sort of intervention is required at home and abroad if students are to become interculturally competent in a program of study (Weber-Bosley, 2010). When constructing a curriculum that embeds intercultural competence development three dimensions are relevant (Gregersen-Hermans, 2016):

•   The first dimension includes the personality structure of the student, his or her communication skills and motivation to engage in intercultural contact.

•   The second dimension includes the personal biography of the student, in particular living independently from the parents, previous experience abroad, and fluency in the language of instruction.

•   The third dimension refers to the quality of the contact with culturally different others.

These three dimensions indicate that when enhancing intercultural competence, simple exposure to cultural diversity does not fully satisfy the need. Active engagement, previous intercultural encounters and contact quality determine whether the curriculum could provide an effective pedagogical setting to make students interculturally competent.

The first two need to be considered and explored before the implementation of an internationalized curriculum because these dimensions influence the current level of students' intercultural competence and guarantee the smooth process of the curriculum as the premises. The quality of the contact which may lead to the development of intercultural competence should be given more attention during the process of the curriculum. Contact is expected to lead to increased familiarity, to reduced prejudice or ethnocentrism and to constructive and positive contact (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). Contact between students should be voluntary. Students need to feel free to make contact. If they are forced to interact in the program, the intercultural interaction is unlikely to have positive effect. Thus, students' engagement and willingness would impact the quality of their learning outcomes. Gregersen-Hermans (2016) proposed five elements that constitute and determine the quality of contact: opportunities for engagement, the conditions under which this engagement takes place, the friendship potential, the specific pedagogical interventions, and the inclusiveness of the university environment. All these five significant elements should be considered when embedding intercultural competence development in an internationalized curriculum. First, the curriculum needs to offer a plenty of opportunities for students to participate in activities and communicate with culturally different others. The diversity in student population can be taken advantage of as teaching and learning resources. Second, the curriculum should maximize cooperation and minimize competition among students. Especially when students with equal status have to achieve common goals they agree on, they would create diversity, build relationship and obtain stronger learning effects. Institutional support and encouragement should be also provided to facilitate intercultural interaction. Third, the curriculum should include ample opportunities for students to develop friendship because the superficial contact between them is not likely to result in attitude change and productive communication. Fourth, a series of pedagogical interventions are necessary and needed for guiding and stimulating students to develop high levels of intercultural competence. By means of teaching techniques, teachers can help students reflect critically on the various behaviors and values in different cultures and identify with the cultural diversity. This intentional intercultural thinking is favorable for students to deepen their interculturally empathic understanding with different others and behave effectively and appropriately in a globalized context. Fifth, intercultural competent behavior is "prevalent at all levels in the university, from senior management to hourly staff" (Moodian, 2008, p4). Thus, the inclusive university environment is expected to facilitate the development of intercultural competence and help promote intercultural behaviors as the norms in class or on campus.

In sum, in order to facilitate the development of students' intercultural competence, an internationalized curriculum

has to take into account the five elements that determine the quality of intercultural contact and influence the learning outcomes, coupled with the personality and biography of the students which determine the current level of intercultural competence and the learning needs.

4.3 How to Assess the Learning Outcomes

Assessment seeks to ascertain whether or to what extent the students attain the learning outcomes and is an integral part to the learning itself. Learning outcome assessment is different from curriculum evaluation. Learning outcome assessment is for the development of learners while curriculum evaluation is for curriculum improvement. Good learning outcome assessment does not represent the end of a curriculum but provides solid information and feedback to teachers and students for transforming the teaching and learning process. As indicated above, intercultural competence is a complex and broad construct and its development is an ongoing process and hard to identify. In order to assess it in a curriculum adequately, it is a must to define the concept and break it down into more discrete, measurable, learning objectives representing specific knowledge, attitudes, or skills. After conceptualizing the fundamental components of intercultural competence and determining the measurable objectives, the next is to choose the assessment measures compatible with the objectives. It is important to ensure that the information or data they provide aligns with the intended outcomes to be measured because the misalignment of assessment measures and stated outcomes would result in invalid data and a waste of resources.

Assessment evidence can be formative or summative, direct, or indirect, qualitative, or quantitative. Formative assessment undergirds the process of student learning during the intervention while summative assessment emphasizes the learning outcomes at the end of a course or curriculum. Direct assessment is the evidence collected during the actual student learning process such as papers, projects, tests, and observation. Indirect evidence, on the other hand, is the perception of student learning, often collected in surveys, interviews and focus groups. Quantitative evidence provides insights into the breadth of the assessment and qualitative evidence enhances the depth of the assessment. As for the complexity of intercultural competence, single method or perspective often remains insufficient. Thus, assessment of intercultural competence should adopt a multimethod, multiperspective approach that is focused more on the process of intercultural competence development than on an end-result (Deardorff, 2012; Gordon & Deardorff, 2013).

Leask (2015) listed some of the key characteristics of assessment in an internationalized curriculum:

- be aligned with program and course intended learning outcomes;
- reflect progressive development of intercultural and international skills and knowledge through the program of study;
- include assessment tasks and rubrics that make clear to students what levels of achievement are expected of them in relation to each intended learning outcome;
- focus on students' demonstrating their abilities to communicate, negotiate and problem solve effectively in a range of intercultural situations relevant to the discipline, the program, and related professional practice;
- test students' ability to gather and apply knowledge in and across disciplines in a globalized world;
- encourage students to consider the global application and impact of course content and the impact of culture and language on disciplinary knowledge and professional practice;
- include reflective written tasks that require students to analyze critically and reflect on their own assumptions, values, and beliefs.

Based on these requirements, the intercultural competence assessment in an internationalized curriculum should reflect the progressive development of intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills, including assessment tasks and rubrics demonstrating students' abilities to communicate, negotiate and solve problems in intercultural situations. Students are also encouraged to reflect on their own values and beliefs and think critically the impact of cultures on their disciplines and professions in a globalized world. In practice, some reflective writing assignments can be given such as journal entries and individual portfolios in which students are able to narrate their personal intercultural encounters and make sense of them.

5. Conclusion

This paper aims to make clear the reasons why intercultural competence development is imperative to achieving truly the internationalized curriculum on campuses. Embedding intercultural competence development into an

internationalized curriculum and facilitating it involves changes in the plan of the curriculum, teaching intervention and assessing methods. The journey starts with appreciating how complex the construct of intercultural competence is and understanding the progressive nature of its development. Intercultural competence development can be viewed as the improvement of knowledge, attitudes and skills that lead to the effective and appropriate communication behaviors in intercultural interactions. It constitutes the vital part for the graduate attributes who want to function effectively and appropriately in local, social, and international communities in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. In an internationalized curriculum in specific discipline, it is important to incorporate the development of intercultural competence into the teaching and learning activities in a more detailed and well-organized way for delivering global-ready graduates. An effective pedagogical environment is needed to guide students to understand the commonality and difference between cultures and reflect on the self-directed competency development. And it is equally necessary to make sure that the assessment criteria align with the intended learning outcomes and learning activities. There is no consensus on the right or best measurement tool for assessing this complex concept. Multimethod or multiperspective assessment is suggested to provide a comprehensive picture for its development and facilitation in internationalizing the curriculum.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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