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International Dimension in Curriculum Development A Synthesis of Research

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify the predominant trends in knowledge production, that related to internationalization of curriculum in the past two decades, which is a broad and relatively heterogeneous topic; consequently, the scoping literature review method has been adopted as the most appropriate for the research objectives among other methods. The review included numerical and thematic analysis of the research published between 2000 until 2019. The findings revealed considerable similarities in the related literature, characterized by focusing on perceptual surveys with particular emphasis on the role of teacher, as well as conceptual studies, which may indicate a lack of consensus on the terminology, whereas internationalization has been referred to in the literature in several concepts; such as: global citizenship, mobility and global market, therefore, business schools have formed fertile grounds for internationalization studies. In addition, it was notably evident that most of the studies flow from developed countries, with a special concentration on higher education, in the sense of increasing their global competitiveness with regard to attracting international students. However, a significant research gap has been detected, regarding the scarcity of research aiming at profoundly analyzing and criticizing the provision of the international dimension in universities' programs in terms of their effectiveness and sustainability.

Keywords: International dimension, internationalization, globalization, curriculum development, scoping review.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, it became a paramount for educational institutions to be more adaptive and inclusive; in order to respond to the growing number of international students as well as preparing all students to live and work in a connected and open world. Therefore, there is utmost necessity to embrace new approaches and improve their programmes to conform with the demographical changes in students, as well as elevating the competitiveness of their graduates. As a result, new concepts have been brought to the surface in all educational rhetoric related to investing in human capital and equipping the next generation with the 21st-century skills, whereby internationalization or globalization plays a dominant role in nurturing these attributes.

Internationalization is defined as the “process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.”(Luxona & Peelob 2009) Subsequently, higher education institutions have begun to embed international dimension in their programmes and curricula.

This study is intended to shed light on knowledge production in internationalization of curriculum in the last two decades, with the aim of identifying the prevailing trends in research concerning internationalization of curriculum, which may lead to discover how and to which extent the international dimension has been addressed in curriculum, as well as disclosing the potential gaps in the related literature.

2. Method

The aim of this study is to identify worldwide trends in knowledge production concerning international dimension in curriculum development (IDCD) in the past two decades, for this purpose, the scoping literature review method was employed, which can be useful in examining the extent, range, and nature of research activity in a topic area, especially if the topic has a complicated heterogeneous nature, or has not yet been widely reviewed (Pham et al. 2014), in order to rapidly map out the key concepts underlying the field of research, the main sources and types of evidence available (Arksey & O'Malley 2005). It can be considered an ideal tool to identify the scope of a body of literature on a particular topic and provide perspicuous evidence of the volume of literature and studies available as well as an overview of its emphasis (Munn et al. 2018).

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Although scoping review might include some steps similar to systematic review, however, it is considered as a sort of synthesis, rather than a type of systematic, there are specific differences related to the objectives and aspects of the method (Lockwood et al. 2019).

This study has some limitations resulted from the nature and purpose of the scoping review, which typically seeks neither to assess the quality of evidence nor to collect data from a variety of study designs and methods. Nevertheless, the study follows Arksey and O'Malley (2005) six-stage process that includes:

1. Identifying the research question,
2. Identifying relevant studies,
3. Study selection,
4. Charting the data,
5. Collating, summarizing and reporting the results, and
6. An optional consultation exercise, where valuable insights can be provided (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005).

Consequently, the review encompasses research articles with certain keywords including: internationalization or globalization, and curriculum development, available at Near East university database, The final review yielded fifty articles, whereas the inclusion criteria strict to the research published in academic journals in English language between 2000 until 2019, where the screening has been accomplished through several phases (Figure1) in order to determine the articles relevant to the following research questions:

Q1: What is the distribution of research articles that related to international dimension in curriculum development according to the year of publication and academic journal?

Q2: How is the distribution of the research articles that dealt with (the international dimension in curriculum development) by the country?

Q3: What are the prevailing trends in research concerning international dimension of curriculum development, in terms of objectives, topics, and methods?

For data analysis (charting and reporting), specific information has been extracted from the articles including title, journal, year of publication, regional location of the author(s) and data source, the aim of the research, the part of curriculum development (e.g. development, evaluation, content, pedagogies etc.), and research method (i.e. case study, content analysis, document analysis, group discussion etc.)

These data were considered as variables in order to synthesize the frequent patterns with a view of identifying the predominant trends in literature pertaining internationalization of curriculum. With this in mind, the methods of data analysis were limited to the use of descriptive statistics and graphing of trends.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that globalization and internationalization have been used interchangeably.

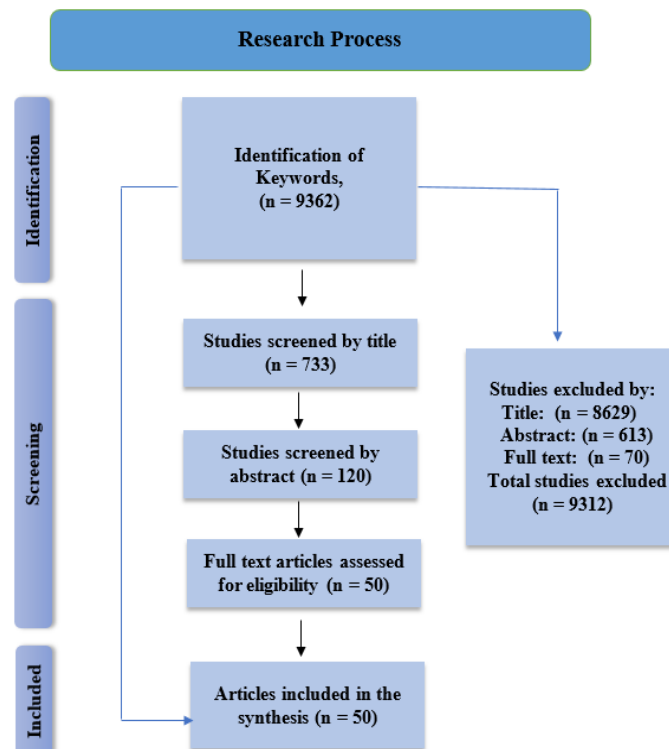


Figure 1. Research process (Author's own construction)

3. Findings

This section presents the results of the scoping review of the fifty articles, which include both a descriptive numerical summary as well as a thematic analysis, highlighting the frequencies as well as the variability of the patterns in light of the research questions.

3.1 Descriptive Numerical Summary

3.1.1 Distribution of Articles According to the Year of Publication

The review of knowledge production in (IDCD) from 2000 to 2019 has yielded fifty articles, distributed chronologically as shown in Figure 2.

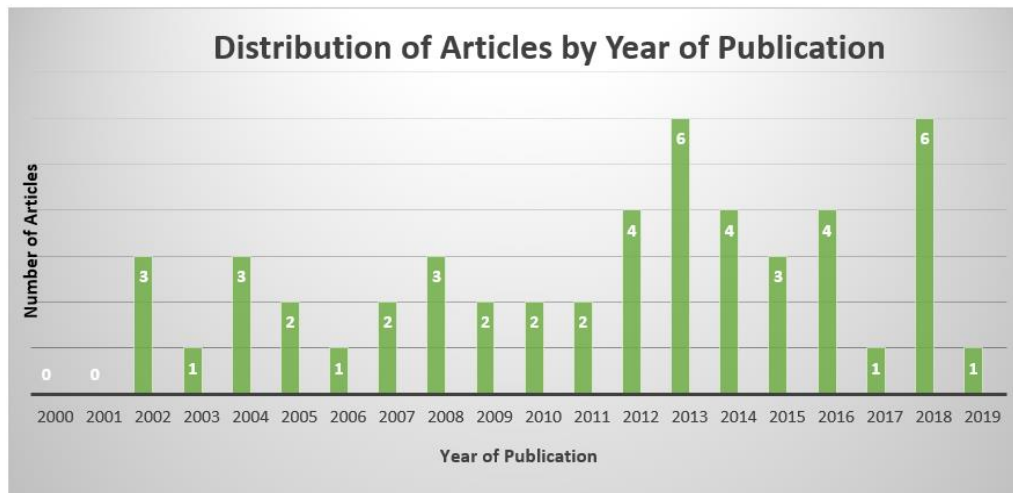


Figure 2. Distribution of articles based on the year of publication

It is obvious that the years 2013 and 2018 observed the highest number of publications, although the results show an interest in the topic, this interest is oscillating and does not reflect an increasing interest over the years, however, this focus can be attributed to the united nations resolutions and initiatives (Imara and Altinay 2021) between (2002-2019) starting from the announcement of the period 2005 until 2014 as the decade for education for sustainable development (DESD), and the global action programme (GAP) (2015-2019), in addition to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) (2015), which calls for integrating global citizenship into all levels of education as a means to enhance acquiring knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (UNESCO 2017).

3.1.2 Distribution of Articles According to the Journal

Regarding the journals, no significant or striking phenomena was observed. Whereby the journals varied in terms of subject and research interests, which included curriculum development, intercultural studies, globalization, educational change, innovation and development of higher education, business and geography in higher education (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Distribution of articles according to the academic journal

3.1.3 Distribution of the Research Articles based on the Country

The analysis revealed that 74% of articles included in this study have flowed from three developed countries namely Australia, The UK, and The USA, (see figure 4) whereas Australia has occupied the first place with nineteen articles out of fifty, followed by the UK and likewise the USA with nine articles from each. With substantial emphasis on higher education, this may pinpoint the increasing proportion of international students pursuing their tertiary education in these countries. It seems like that Australia persist to further its competitiveness; since it is considered as the largest provider of international education at degree level, after the USA and the UK. It is among the top countries that attract international students and particularly students from Southeast Asian nations (Sawir 2011).

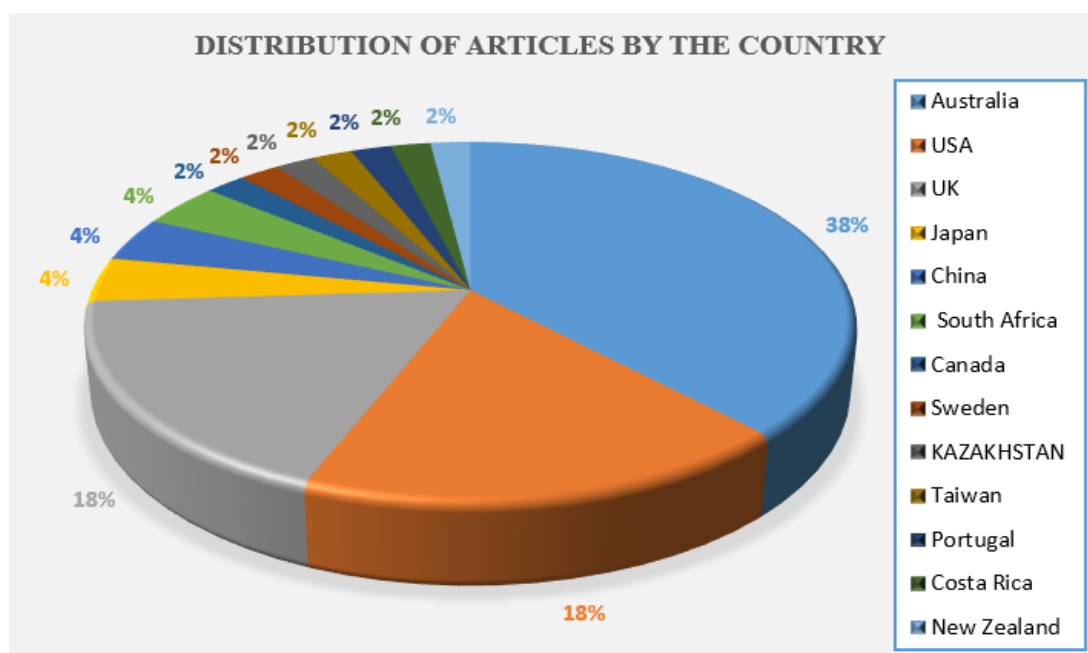


Figure 4. Distribution of articles by the country

3.2 Thematic Analysis: Trends in Knowledge Production in IDCD

The findings guided by the research question (What are the prevailing trends in research concerning international dimension of curriculum development, in terms of objectives, topics, and methods?) are given as follows.

The term (internationalization) is often accompanied with intercultural dimension, and sometimes it is interchanged with globalization, whereas internationalization of the curriculum has been treated as a feature or a dimension of the curriculum in higher education, this is often presented in the context of promoting globalization and intercultural dialogue among graduates (Bodycott; Mak; and Ramburuth 2013; Joseph 2012), in order to prepare them for global labour market, in addition to promote the inclusion of students from different countries and diverse backgrounds (Haigh 2002).

Therefore, universities reinforce IDCD as a strategy to enhance the competitiveness of their graduates and themselves as well, in terms of attracting a larger number of international students. This view may be illustrate the concentration on studying college teachers' perspectives on curriculum internationalization, (WAKS 2003; Mak & Kennedy 2012; McKinnon, Hammond & Foster 2019), in addition to the plenty of studies concerning internationalization of curriculum worldwide.

Since teachers have a decisive role in implementing the curriculum, therefore, it is crucial to build positive attitudes towards internationalization among them. With this in mind, the prevalence of surveying teachers' perceptions became clearly reasonable.

It is noteworthy that focusing on teacher perspectives towards internationalization of curriculum has had a particular interest more than examining the curriculum itself and its quality, and on exploring their perceptions towards the implementation without examining their practices (Sawir 2011).

Moreover, most articles under the current study have addressed the internationalization of the curriculum as an integrated feature, not as a distinct or stand-alone subject. Despite of its importance, the internationalization of curriculum has often been dealt with as projects applied for a specific period, so that a considerable number of studies have directed to report on the impact of these projects (Haigh 2002; Ho 2016; Lourenço 2017).

On the other side of the spectrum, the methods tend to utilize surveys, questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions, in order to identify teachers perceptions or needs, but rarely implement classroom observations.(Takagi 2009), furthermore, few researchers have examined the content of the learning materials or the curriculum (Clarkson 2002, O'Sullivan and McNamara 2015).

Evidence shows that the case study technique is strongly represented, this might be confirm the aforementioned notion, which see that international dimension has been dealt with as a temporary or additional element, rather than an integral part of the curriculum, this can be evident through the noticeable emphasis of all case studies on globalization as a short term initiative (Getahun; Abraham and Brömssen 2018).

Additionally, the analysis demonstrates that many studies were conceptual, which indicates a lack of consensus on the concept, which consequently affected the adoption of internationalization approach to

curriculum development (Patel; Li and Piscioneri 2013; Takagi 2015; Tangney 2017), where numerous concepts have been repeatedly mentioned in the vast majority of articles, these include global citizenship, mobility, global market (Myers 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising that economics faculties have formed fertile soil for internationalization related studies (Thomas and McKim 2013; Guillotin 2018).

4. Conclusion and outlook for future research

The findings of this review disclose a number of similarities within the literature pertaining the internationalization of curriculum, in terms of the dominant trends among scholars, whose tend to focus on perceptual studies with major emphasis on teachers, aiming at exploring their willingness, and their attitudes towards internationalization of the curriculum. Evidence indicates that the vast majority of articles reviewed in the current study; have dealt with internationalization as a strategy for promoting global citizenship, and enhancing the competitiveness of the graduates, therefore, most of case studies have presented the internationalization of curriculum as projects.

It can be concluded that focusing efforts on the same aspects in the majority of studies, has left a gap in terms of the lack of in-depth analysis and critique of the university programmes, which focused on enhancing the international dimension of curriculum, as well as measuring their sustainability.

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