Internationalization of Curriculum in Omani Higher Education: Perceptions of Academic Staff in UTAS

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Abstract

The internationalization of the curriculum (IoC) has been a significant trend in higher education across the globe. However, there is a dearth of literature on this area of research in the Arab countries, including the Omani higher education context. As the key definition and conceptual frameworks of IoC have not been adopted in Omani higher education institutions (HEI), this qualitative study examined lecturers' understanding of IoC in the Omani higher education context. This was carried out through the employment of the typology of IoC which was proposed by Edwards et al. (2003). To collect data, eight lecturers in an Omani university were interviewed and the thematic analysis of the data revealed that academic staff perceived IoC as important to the institution. Further, the study reported that there are fragmented IoC practices that are primarily based on the ad hoc practices of academic staff. Initiatives should be taken to develop a shared understanding of IoC at the institutional level and in all degree programs in the Omani higher education context. Some suggestions are brought forward for stakeholders to support IoC and help to ensure the quality of degree programs offered.

Keywords: Curriculum internationalization, institutional level, perceptions, academic staff, higher education, Oman

1. Introduction

Internationalization of the curriculum (IoC) has been viewed to be a suitable response that meets both the local and international needs for institutions and universities around the globe. The IoC is considered a new field of research that has attracted researchers in education (Hans de Wit, 2020; Hans De Wit & Leask, 2017). However, the last few years have witnessed a rapidly growing interest in examining the IoC at the tertiary level in many countries around the world. This observation can be attributed to various factors, including the frictions between north and south, the tension between local and global aspects of education, and the dominance of "Western educational models" over the developed countries (Leask, 2015, p. 21). Furthermore, the attention given to IoC in higher education can be ascribed to the sudden and current change in the way education is delivered in recent times, especially in this era which has seen a shift in the world trend in internationalization from affiliation, students' mobility, and imported curriculum to IoC (B. Leask & DeWit, 2016). The pandemic has affected students' mobility and imposed challenges to the Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE), (Hudzik, 2020). The curriculum development stresses the importance of internationalization efforts at the institutional level in the IHE (Knight, 2006; Leask & de Wit, 2016). Leask (2015) regards curriculum internationalization as the most important step an organization can undertake and adds that it is the "heart" of internationalization with its ultimate goal to prepare students to accept each other and help them gain international skills. The academic staff are at the most affected layer in internationalization, and they are in charge of including integrating and embedding the curriculum, with international and intercultural perspectives in a planned manner (Leask & de Wit, 2016). They are also the first line who engage, design, select and deliver the content (de Wit & Leask, 2015).

Although researchers in Western contexts have given careful attention to the field of IoC (Hans De Wit, 2020), little attention has been given in the context of Arab countries, where there is still a dearth of research in this field. For example, in the Omani context the internationalization has focused on affiliation with international institutions, imported curriculum, and recruiting international staff as a goal for increasing internationalization in higher

education (HE) (Al'Abri, 2016, 2019; Alzadjali, 2019). HEIs will not be the same as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic, thus indicating that there must be new ways of IHE (S.-M. Renfors, 2018). Therefore, HE leaders must question their own long-held assumptions about the value of activities traditionally associated with internationalization, review and rethink policies and strategies, and current approaches to internationalization and the focus of IoC (B. Leask & DeWit, 2016). More importantly, there is a robust call for future research to look into how to: broaden the geopolitical context of IoC; stimulate faculty voices in IoC research; reassess the role of individual champions and academic leadership in IoC; and more fully engage students in global learning and IoC as partners in the design, development, and delivery of learning experiences (Green & Whitsed, 2018). It is evident that the Omani HEIs are highly international, intercultural, and global in all aspects (Alzadjali, 2019). For these reasons, HEIs rely on their academic staff, curriculum, and institutions' policies to be involved with internationalization. These features in internationalization create expectations for HEIs to operate in international environments, which result in assuming IoC understanding. Therefore, it is essential to identify the extent to which IoC exists, and how academic staff in HEIs conceptualize this phenomenon. This study aims at addressing the need to better understand IoC as an element of internationalization in the Omani HE.

Findings from this study may contribute to the existing research on the IoC in the Arab context, including the Omani one. Moreover, the study could yield significant findings for HEIs in the Omani context for several reasons. First, this study expands the perception of IoC in HE and provides further insight into how IoC is perceived in Omani HE by highlighting the academic staff's perceptions regarding IoC. Hence, this research seeks to answer the following question: how do academic staff perceive IoC in Omani HEIs? IoC is approached from the perception of including and embedding international, intercultural dimensions into the curriculum, teaching strategies, and learning outcomes the various departments of Omani HEIs in order to enhance the quality of HE for all learners. In an attempt to investigate the IoC in the Omani context, this study aims at providing valuable insights to decision-makers and all stakeholders in the University of Technology and Applied Science - Salalah (UTAS -Salalah) in Oman into a successful IoC.   The study assesses the international and intercultural elements in all departments in the university. The University of Technology and Applied Science - Salalah is a branch of newly merged colleges in Oman. The seven former colleges of Technology and six colleges of Applied Sciences were merged to form the largest public Omani university which currently has 13 branches across the country.

IoC studies stem from countries with a substantial number of international students like Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Malaysia, and European countries. Yet, IoC has been interpreted differently in studies carried out in many Western countries (Knight, 2012). Even recent studies in these countries have highlighted the need of studies that target understanding the personal experience of academic staff in the process of internationalization of curriculum. For example, Fragouli (2020) has recently pointed out that there is a need for comprehensive frameworks that can offer proper and practical guidance to academic staff on how to practice internationalisation of curriculum. However, creation of such framework must follow collecting insights on how academic staff themselves perceive the concept of internationalisation of curriculum.

The Arab context lacks adequate studies that explore and identify various issues related to the internationalization of curriculum.   In one of the recent studies, Zayed (2020) examined the challenges faced by EFL teachers in their effort to boost internationalization of curriculum in the Saudi context, Zayed (2020) has reported that there are various challenges which are largely associated to professional development of teachers, curriculum, and infrastructure. Focusing on the challenges of internationalisation in Arab countries can be an indication of the need of further studies that should first examine how academic staff perceive the concept of internationalisation. Zayed (2020) herself has called for further studies on internationalisation of curriculum in other Arab contexts. Thus, the current study brings forward a perspective from an Arab speaking country and addresses the importance of investigating the IoC with its unique features in this context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualization of IoC

Various scholars have offered definitions of curriculum internationalization (Hans De Wit, 2020; Heffernan et al., 2019; B. Leask & DeWit, 2016; Sanna-Mari Renfors, 2021).   Mestenhauser (1998), a pioneer in IoC in HE, said that IoC is one of the most uncommon forms of internationalization methods since it cultivates students' international viewpoints. In order to obtain global perspectives, a holistic approach to curriculum internationalization must be used. He also emphasized that meeting the demands of the twenty-first century cannot be accomplished in regular classrooms. Another definition is formulated by Leask (2009), which has gained popularity. Several years later, she revised the definition and suggested that the term could refer to "the incorporation of international,

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 of study" (Leask, 2015 p. 9).

The IoC is a continuous and complicated process where the involvement of all stakeholders is required. It does not require students and teachers only, but it needs support from all the decision-makers and administrators. For the process to succeed, everyone must be involved. In the UTAS case, it could be assumed that the decision about internationalization is embedded within the curriculum, but it has not been practiced by academics. It is imperative to investigate the IoC in UTAS-Salalah to explore the dimension of the curriculum, and whether it could be an international element either in the learning outcomes, or in the teaching practices.

Research on IoC has been investigated from a variety of perspectives. For example, some studies have focused on IoC from the organizational perspectives (McKinnon et al., 2019), students' views (Trinh & Conner, 2019), and the institutional position (Almeida et al., 2019). However, scholars have noted that IoC should be understood from a theoretical point of view (Leask, 2013), even though it is considered one of the most important practical strategies for producing real change in higher education institutes (Knight, 2007, 2017). It has been reported that IoC boosted entrepreneurship in colleges (Marantz-Gal, 2016). It is regarded as a multilayer process with many stakeholders involved.

Although research on IoC has seen an increase in the number of publications in the Western contexts, it is the opposite in Arab countries. Research on internationalization in these countries has been minimal, and curriculum internationalization alone is rarely studied. The growing interest in IoC could be attributed to the increasing demand for students studying abroad, the increase in world technologies and the internet, and a reaction to globalized education. It could also be due to the global and local issues that are happening in the Middle East in particular and around the globe in general. Welikala (2011) attempts to answer the issue of why curriculum internationalization is necessary and argues that the current 'geopolitical' and 'socio-economic' concerns highlight the necessity for curriculum internationalization (p.4). To fulfil the new globalization criteria in the Omani HE, HEIs in the country must ensure that their curriculum satisfies the global and international standards. It is also an aim of UTAS to offer skilful graduates and have worldwide standards.

2.2 Internationalization of the Curriculum: Faculty Perspectives

Previous studies showed that faculty members are key agents in the IoC (Bell, 2004; Bond, 2003; De Wit and Leask, 2017, Leask, 2015; Sanderson, 2008). The American Council on Education (ACE) and the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) believed that faculty were key agents in IoC (*American Council on Education*, n.d.; Deardorff, 2012). Faculty members are vital in internationalization, especially in the process of IoC because they are closely connected with the central elements of institutions and students. As such, they are the architect of IoC pitfalls and practices, and are the ones who implement them. ACE also stresses that colleges and universities in any HE context should establish programs for preparing their academic staff for a world that is globalized in various aspects. ACE has also highlighted that the preparation of academic staff for the globalized world can be executed through some strategies such as developing academic staff's abilities to be successful people in the world economy. Another approach that ACE highlighted was to offer essential steps that encourage academic staff to be influential players in other cultures and contexts. Skills that academic staff have can be central for the improvement of their own lives and their communities, as proposed by ACE. More importantly, ACE has pointed out that academic staff should be prepared to understand the current status of the modern world. In this way, their awareness can be raised to meet their responsibilities as citizens.

In another study conducted in the United States, Wamboye, Evelyn, Abel Adekola, (2014) investigated the extent of IoC implementation from the faculty's perspective. Intending to provide empirical evidence for policymakers, they found that a lack of international experience resulted in a lack of IoC. Furthermore, they reported that most approaches used in IoC were content infusion. This is also evident in a study conducted by Cheng et al. (2018), where disciplines displayed different degrees of curriculum internationalization Wamboye, Evelyn, Abel Adekola, (2014); Wamboye et al., (2015) found that business courses were more prone to internationalization than other 'hard' disciplines such as Engineering and IT. This variation in IoC could lead to a fragmented IoC and individual approaches to curriculum internationalization, and consequently lead to both divergence and lack of cohesion in curriculum internationalization.

The importance of faculty members in the IoC process has been recognized in many studies (Alhalwaki & Hamdan, 2019; Hans De Wit & Leask, 2017; Sanna-Mari Renfors, 2021). However, there are a few primary reasons that could prevent academics from participating in IoC (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Niehaus & Williams, 2016). For example, a lack of institutional support for internationalization (McKinnon et al., 2019), financial deficit (Trinh & Conner, 2019),

and a lack of institutional policies (Almeida et al., 2019) may deter international engagement. Nonetheless, there is a paucity of material on faculty perceptions of their roles and responsibilities concerning the importance of internationalization (Dewey & Duff, 2009).

2.3 Internationalization of Curriculum in Oman

The government of Oman has opted for many strategic plans to improve HE, including student mobility, staff mobility, and co-joint programs with international universities (Al'Abri, 2019; Alzadjali, 2019). Not all HEIs in Oman fall under the umbrella of HE. For example, the Ministry of Manpower, the main governing body of technical colleges in Oman, does not have joint programs with other universities, and does not have student mobility in cross-border exchange programs. The ministry relied on its expertise in developing a suitable curriculum for its seven colleges. The variance of HEIs in Oman has resulted in the inconsistency of internationalization practices. With that being the case, the Oman Academic Accreditation Association (QAAA) was established in 2010 to ensure that the Omani graduates from national HEIs can "compete up in the job market and contribute effectively to the sustainable development of the country" (QAAA, n.d.).

Knowledge of the history of other nations and the factors that shape our world is common in both global and local cultures. It also entails understanding society's interdependence, knowledge of the political and economic challenges that shape our world, adaptability, and empathy. Critical thinking, creativity, communication skills, and soft skills are other talents and information that are incorporated into HEIs' curricula (S. M. S.-M. Renfors, 2019). As a result, the acquisition of these skills and knowledge draws our attention to the practical applications of HE at colleges and universities, with a particular focus on technical colleges in Oman. According to reports, in Oman's HEIs, there is much evidence of both global and local cultures. Other research in similar circumstances has reported findings that coincide with those reported in these investigations (Tuzlukova et al., 2019).

3. Conceptual Framework

The current study is based on the conceptual framework which was proposed by Edwards, Ron, Glenda Crosling, Sonja Petrovic-Lazarovic, (2003). This framework is known as the typology of curriculum internationalization. The framework consists of three levels: international awareness, international competence, and international expertise. The first level is international awareness, which encompasses integrating international perspectives in the teaching and learning of the institutions. The ultimate result is to furnish students with an international attitude and respect for diverse cultures. The second level is international competence, which deals with engaging students with other cultures and involving students in an in-depth study of international matters. The third level is international expertise, which involves the immersion of students with study abroad in cross-border programs or in foreign language studies at home. The ultimate goal of this level is to produce students who are capable of operating anywhere around the globe. This typology was found to be useful for teachers and academic staff who have concerns about internationalizing the curriculum (Wamboye, Evelyn, Abel Adekola, 2014).

For the current study, the framework proposed by Edwards et al. (2003) was chosen for several reasons. First, it focuses on all levels of curriculum internationalization. Second, it links the aim of the curriculum to learning objectives and connects learning outcomes to IoC. Third, it identifies the strategies and approaches used at different curriculum levels. Fourth, it focuses on curriculum, and provides HEIs with a practical approach on how to internationalize the curriculum, as stated (Caruana & Hanstock, 2008). These four justifications show that this framework fits the overall purpose of the current study. Additionally, the framework proposed by Edwards et al. (2003) has been utilized by other researchers and was found to be an appropriate one. For example, Cheng et al. (2018) used the framework to explore Chinese students' development of international awareness, international competence, and international expertise. The findings revealed the presence of limited practices of IoC in the two universities and showed that the Chinese students desired more international perspectives to be included in the content of the course.

In summary, the IoC is considered a process that involves expanding the range of international activities and practices within and between HEIs. Many studies have utilized general perspectives and drawn on conceptual frameworks from various scholars. However, the study reported in this paper utilizes a qualitative approach to gauge how academic staff in all departments at UTAS perceive IoC. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do academic staff at UTAS conceptualize internationalization of the curriculum?

2. What are the strategies of internationalization of the curriculum at UTAS?

3. What are the challenges academic staff encounter in the internationalization of the curriculum at UTAS?

4. Method

The study employed a phenomenological approach as a lens for this study. The purpose of this method is to obtain an in-depth understanding of academic staff perceptions of IoC in Oman. Moreover, it examines what individuals have in common. It also aims to identify what and how these individuals have experienced IoC. The context for this study is the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), which has 331 academic staff, of which 220 are international staff, and more than 5000 students. The university has four departments: Business, Information Technology, Engineering, and General Foundation Program. Recently, the technical colleges have merged with other applied science colleges to form UTAS. Thus, studying IoC can be considered a crucial step at this stage. The sampling technique is purposeful sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Eight information-rich participants were chosen based on the following criteria: heads of ddepartments, senior lectures, and curriculum developers. The sample of the study consisted of five male participants and three female participants. All were interviewed to examine how they perceive internationalization of curriculum at UTAS. Table 1.1 shows the demographic of the participants.

Table 1. Participants' demographic

Name of participant	Gender	Years in UTAS	Highest qualification
Participant 1	Female	12	PhD
Participant 2	Male	15	PhD
Participant 3	Male	6	PhD
Participant 4	Male	12	MA
Participant 5	Female	12	PhD
Participant 6	Male	13	PhD
Participant 7	Male	16	PhD
Participant 8	Female	9	PhD

Semi-structured interview questions were used to collect data from the participants on their perceptions of IoC at UTAS. A definition of IoC was first read to the participants, as given by Leask (2015, p.5): "The incorporation of international, 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 of study". Then, the participants were asked if they had a different meaning for IoC. This was done to determine their understanding of IoC and to set the boundaries of the interview. All the participants gave their permission to be recorded and signed the consent form prior to a face-to-face interview. Assurance of anonymity was provided in a writing form before the face-to-face interview. All responses were recorded with the participants' permission. The interviews were recorded using the researcher's laptop, and a high-definition microphone (BOYA BY-M1) was bought to enhance the audio quality of the recordings. The interviews were transcribed, and all the interviews were verified, and mispronounced words were corrected and emailed to the participants for their authentication. This data quality check was to ensure the validity of the interviews. The inductive coding analysis was applied in order to avoid pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were transcribed and reviewed several times. The collected responses were sorted into groups, and the data analysis was conducted thematically. Code names were given based on the frequent appearance of the words in the interviews, and the codes were later grouped into themes to reflect the code groups. The next stage involved the identification relationship of the codes and the various levels of the themes   The themes and codes were continuously reviewed during the analysis.

5. Findings

The analysis revealed three major themes describing the academic staff's perceptions of IoC in UTAS: (1) awareness of internationalization, (2) strategies of IoC at UTAS, and (3) challenges.

5.1 Internationalization Awareness

The analysis of the participants' internationalization awareness can be divided into two sub-themes, which are understanding of IoC, and international institutional elements and global skills.

5.1.1 Understanding of IoC

When the participants were asked about their definition of IoC, it was noticed that they had their own way of conceptualising the notion; even though the definition of IoC was read to them before the interview, their

understanding of IoC was connected to international standards, benchmarking with international institutions, imported curriculum, international academic staff, and teaching in English. International standards and benchmarking were the most common aspects in their conceptualisation of IoC. In the words of the participants, "*Making sure that whatever programs we are offering in the university is matching with the standards internationally*" (Participant 1). Another participant said that IoC means "*orienting our students toward the global requirements*" (Participant 8). Yet, another participant mentioned that "*we are in line with what the world is doing, and international universities are teaching*" (Participant 3). It was evident that there was one collective understanding of IoC among all the participants: the IoC should have any aspect of international elements in it. The participants collectively believed that when international standards and benchmarking exist in a curriculum, it can be described to be an internationalized curriculum.

5.1.2 Institutional International Element

In response to the question on internationalization elements in UTAS, three distinctive codes stood out. As revealed by the analysis, these codes represented the most frequent key words: international textbooks, international staff, and affiliation with international institutions. International textbooks as the most common phrase mentioned by all participants when asked about international elements in UTAS. For example, when Participant 3 was asked about elements of IoC in UTAS, he stated that "*if we talk about the foundation program, we are following Pathways, and Pathways series, and this is in line with the European Framework Reference*". Participant 3 considered that the major institutional element of internationalization was the reliance on English textbooks that are brought from Western contexts such as Pathways textbooks, which are created to teach various English language skills. Another participant pointed out that "*we are going to provide international textbooks for our students like we have our academic program committee is working with Pearson publications, so they are going to provide us standardized international level textbooks for the students reference*" (Participant 8). Another participant declared that they had an affiliation with international organizations like the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA): "*Yeah, these are either when you first you will buy the textbook either hard copy or soft copy or they can go for example, some courses like you know in counting they have the ACCA*" (Participant 6).

5.1.3 Global Skills

Regarding the question on preparing students to live and work in international settings. the most frequent responses were competition and equipping students with soft skills. For example, one of the participants said: "*The plan is already there, if we look at the graduate attributes the students are prepared to be highly professional to compete in the world*" (Participant 3). Another participant said, "*Obviously, because we have to compete with the other country with the other technology*" (Participant 2). Another participant added: "*We involve these students in some activities, OK outside or inside some social or the academic activities where they come, and they show their leadership or management how the things are done*" (Participant 9).

In terms of how students learn soft skills, leadership skills, and critical thinking skills, most of the responses centred around involving students in industrial training programs. According to one of the participants, "*one of the strategies is working very closely with our local industries to solve the industrial problem so students will get an opportunity to work with the real or industrial environment*" (Participant 8). Another participant said: "*I think that the college is quite good in that they provide the students with number of workshops and training and there is a program for the students and the industry we have our industrial links so even they send them for training*" (Participant 5). Another participant reiterated: "*The training is provided to these students, and this is called on job training*" (Participant 9).

5.2 IoC Strategies in UTAS

Another purpose of the current research was to assess whether strategies of IoC were embedded in the institutional practices, either intentionally or unintentionally. The analysis of the data revealed three strategies: infusion of international materials in the course content, exchange ideas through workshops, and benchmarking. These three strategies are explained below.

5.2.1 Infusion of International Materials in Course Content

One of the most important goals of curriculum internationalization is infusion of course content with international materials. All of the participants reported that international elements were included in all the courses taught in the different departments at UTAS, with variations on how they were implemented in the various departments. For example, in the Information Technology Department, the infusion was seen to be in case studies and courses with international affiliations such as Cisco course on networking and Huawei Academy Competition award certificate, where the students participated internationally and competed with international students abroad. In the Business

Department, case studies were infused in its courses. In addition, the courses have international links such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). For General Foundation Program (GFP), their courses were infused with the latest global issues such as global warming and other cultural elements, and also had Pathways and National Geography Textbooks.

5.2.2 Exchange Ideas through Workshops

Regarding how the departments help their academic staff to develop courses with an international focus, all participants mentioned using international textbooks. For example, one of the participants said: "*We are using right now international textbooks*" (Participant 4). Another reported a similar practice saying, "*In the delivery plan for one course we might find 3 or 4 international books, either Americans or British*" (Participant 6). Other participants added that attending workshops and seminars could help academic staff make their courses international. The excerpt below taken from the interview with Participant 3 reveals that:

> "*We rather very often our professional staff professional development committee, they organize seminars, and they organize workshops also and where the international speakers are invited and recently, I think during the first month of this semester we had international speakers from Tokyo. luckily, she had been our lecturer here and so she was invited and she gave us a brief overview of what they are doing over there and she gave certain concepts. how they are teaching, utilizing online resources to teach and so our department is in line with that*" (Participant 3).

5.2.3 Benchmarking

Another frequent key word that came in almost all the interviews was benchmarking of similar course with universities nationally and internationally. For example, one participant said: "*We do benchmarking a lot with other universities that have or offer similar programs as we are offering*" (Participant 1). Another participant said, "*we had a sort of benchmarking with the European framework, CEFR and then B1 and B2; and also, we had benchmarked with IELTS international exam*" (Participant 4). It appears that benchmarking was considered to be an essential element in IoC.

5.3 Challenges

In response to a question on the challenges the academic staff may encounter to help better internationalize their curriculum, the majority of the responses in the interviews were almost similar. They all agreed that students' level would be the main obstacle in IoC beside resources and cultural challenges. For example, one participant said: "*Some of the obstacles is that the level of our learning some of the graduates*" (Participant 4). Another participant said, "*All the teachers are very helpful, but the student is lagging something behind*" (Participant 2). Some participants mentioned that resources might be an obstacle to IoC. For example, one participant said: "*communicating with the international universities and getting the concepts and interculture into university level exchange programs so that maybe some what we call some monetary issues may become functional, may be an issue*" (Participant 3). Other participants mentioned that cultural diversity might also be an obstacle to IoC. For example, one participant said: "*I think the different culture and we are still conservative society, so we should not take everything we have to be selective*" (Participant 5).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study sought to investigate how academic staff perceive IoC in UTAS and the challenges that they may encounter in internationalizing their curriculum. The motivation for this study was the ongoing trend in IoC around the globe and its benefits in producing a real change to the graduates. The study focused on IoC from non-English speaking countries and Gulf countries, in particular. After the analysis of data, three major themes emerged: (1) international awareness, (2) strategies of IoC, and (3) challenges that might hinder IoC implementation.

The findings show that the majority of the academic staff had a fair understanding of the importance of international standards in HE and their impact on producing capable graduates. However, there seems to be a lack of the real existence of IoC in UTAS. There is no tangible evidence of IoC practices that is acknowledged by the institution. The top management did not take any initiatives to implement IoC, which has resulted in a globalized education, rather than curriculum internationalization. The majority of participants agreed on the importance of infusing curriculum with international content, and they attributed this to the use of international materials and textbooks.

UTAS has adopted a strategy of benchmarking courses with other or national institutions and international ones. The strategy helped in curriculum improvement and exchange of ideas on how teaching and learning are carried out in other institutions. Mapping university courses with other courses internationally and nationally is considered

essential for the achievement of a successful IoC (Abdul-Mumin, 2016; Brandenburg, 2012; Nasser, 2019; Taylor, 2004; Weimer et al., 2019).

The participants emphasized a need to include international curriculum content, imported curriculum, and international academic staff in the system of education, as these can result in improvement and successful implementation of IoC. Academic staff should incorporate cultural, political, and global issues in their courses to prepare their students to be global citizens who are able to survive in local and global contexts. This finding is consistent with many past studies (Ohajionu, 2021; S. M. S.-M. Renfors, 2019). According to Ohajionu (2021) and Renfors (2019), the most sought after IoC in Finland and Malaysia is curriculum content.

In summary, the findings revealed that there were two important shortcomings in the perception of IoC at the institution level. The first was a lack of the institution's understanding of IoC and acknowledgement of its benefits in higher education internationalization. Thus, the IoC in the university is a result of a fragmented, unintentional process. There was neither systematic nor coordinated processes for IoC from the top management. The IoC was accidental rather than a top-down process negatively affecting the learning outcomes and the teaching practices across the departments at UTAS. The second shortcoming was the lack of competency in various departments to carry out IoC. The departments lacked the know-how on IoC, and they needed to implement more initiatives in IoC.

The findings of the study further revealed that the participants of this study considered workshops and seminars as IoC workshops. When the researcher asked them about the nature of the workshops, they explained that the workshops were on the latest trends in teaching and learning methods and practices, not on IoC per se. This indicates that there was a lack of understanding of IoC implementation in UTAS.

Another significant finding of this study is related the status of English in the university curriculum. This is reflected in the use of English as a medium of instruction in many courses. For the participants in this study, the use of English as a medium of instruction was one of the conceptualisations of IoC. Some academic staff considered programs that are taught in English, course/curriculum in English, and English as a medium of instruction as instances of IoC implementation. This observation corresponds with many other related studies from non-English speaking countries (Weimer et al., 2019).

The study also revealed that there was a significant understanding among the academic staff about the importance of improving teaching and learning in IoC, in addition to enhancing exchange programs or student mobility. Even though the university has established a future strategy to welcome overseas students, the academic staff believed that resources and curriculum should be improved. They also reiterated their opinions about the current quality of courses being delivered. Thus, it is vital to support the enhancement of their curriculum.

Another key finding of this study concerns benchmarking and assessment of courses. According to the American Productivity and Quality Center, benchmarking is defined as "the process of identifying, understanding, and adapting outstanding practices from organizations anywhere in the world to help your organization improve its performance" (AQPC, n.d.) Many of the participants referred to benchmarking as a way of conceptualising IoC. However, even though this strategy is adopted by many HEIs in Oman, it is more to do with the quality and performance, rather than IoC.

Despite what has been reported above, all the participants in this study acknowledged that their university was preparing students to be global citizens who can contribute to the development of the world in various aspects. The skills required to be global citizens are in the heart of IoC.

In their effort to implement IoC, the academic staff encountered some challenges, which could be categorized into two: students and resources. The students in the various departments lacked exposure to diverse cultures and nationalities. Additionally, limitations of physical resources such as monetary fund could be a hindrance to the implementation of IoC.

Based on the findings presented above, it is recommended that the departments in UTAS collaborate with each other to organize workshops on the latest techniques or methods in teaching and learning. It is also recommended that the involvement of departments in IoC must be effectively implemented. As discovered in this study, there was a lack of department involvement in the implementation of IoC. A possible effect of the departments' limited participation in IoC is that the academic staff may not be prepared for internationalization. Consequently, the implementation of IoC in the future may have many weaknesses.

This study is important for curriculum improvement in Omani universities in general and UTAS, in particular. The universities should take a huge step in reviewing their curriculum. The recommendations offered in this study will

help them in improving their curriculum and provide valuable insights for the policy makers in enhancing the curriculum at UTAS.

This study is limited to a single university in Oman, which is a part of the universities of technology and applied science in the country. Thus, future studies may consider examining academic staff's perceptions of IoC in all universities across Oman. In this way, a larger sample of participants may be obtained. Including more than one institution may help in shedding further insights on the internationalization aspect of the curriculum in Omani universities.

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