

Chapter 13

A Methodological Literature Review on the Internationalisation of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to critique the methodologies of studies conducted in the field of the internationalization of higher education. The authors of this chapter selected nine articles and presented the commonalities between them and how their tools determined the findings. The authors first evaluated three articles that implemented a qualitative approach. Then they evaluated three articles that implemented a quantitative approach. Finally, the authors examined studies investigating higher education's internationalization through a mixed-method approach. The authors provide critiques, guidance, and insights into the procedural correctness on how the selected articles could be conducted better in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to critique the methodology researchers have employed to investigate internationalization in higher education institutions. The internationalization of higher education has been defined from different perspectives and at different levels (e.g., institutional and national). For example, at a national level it has been defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003, p. 2). At an institutional level, Hudzik (2011, p. 6) defined internationalization as infusing international and comparative perspectives “throughout the teaching, research and service missions of higher edu-

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cation enterprise”. A recent but as yet unpublished study in Oman by Albusaidi (2019b) investigated the perspectives of academic staff on ‘the internationalization at home’ (IaH) concept. The findings revealed that they understood internationalization as integrating international dimensions and aspects into institutional systems, such as attracting international students, providing students with international perspectives and issues from around the world, and enhancing students’ understanding of other cultures, where the curriculum and extracurricular activities are the main sources of information.

Because research on internationalization in the Gulf countries is limited, nine published studies have been selected for evaluation in this chapter. These studies were carried out at higher education institutions worldwide, which provides an indicator of how internationalization is investigated and understood in different countries. This will provide valuable insights for readers and researchers interested in the internationalization of higher education. Governments, and higher education institutions in particular, strive to raise the performance and quality of their higher education systems. The current authors consider this study to be one of the very few that critique the research methodologies employed to explore the internationalization of higher education, and encourage researchers to make use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Firstly, this is due to the high demand for mixed methods research. For instance, Varga (2018, p. 546) argues that “the demand for mixed methods research will increase as society develops higher performing computing, more knowledge, more access to data, and to different forms of data”. Secondly, “bringing quantitative and qualitative findings together has the potential to offer insights that could not otherwise be gleaned” (Bryman, 2007, p. 9). With these reasons in mind, the authors encourage the adoption of a mixed methods approach throughout this chapter and offer relevant suggestions as to how to achieve this.

The contributions of this chapter can be converted into practical and operational strategies that include but are not limited to: 1) comprehensively exploring people’s understandings of internationalization and its associated processes through the adoption of both qualitative and quantitative methods; 2) comprehensively investigating how policies such as internationalization are established in higher education institutions; and 3) examining how educational strategies and operational plans take policies such as internationalization into consideration. These contributions are based on understanding, critiquing, and reflecting on the weaknesses and strengths of other studies conducted in this area.

In this chapter, commonalities between the studies are highlighted, and an explanation provided as to how the research tools determine the findings. The qualitative studies are evaluated first, followed by the quantitative studies and then the mixed methods studies. The strengths and weaknesses of each of the selected studies are highlighted, and suggestions made as to how researchers could improve their research. Finally, a summary will highlight the main issues and make key recommendations regarding the methodology of the selected articles.

QUALITATIVE STUDIES

A wide range of studies have explored internationalization from a qualitative perspective. Three qualitative articles within higher education have therefore been selected and are reviewed in the following sections.

First, Tham and Kam (2008) compared internationalization concepts and challenges faced by four higher education institutions in Malaysia. Data were collected through secondary document analysis and interviews. Their main finding was that each institution employed different concepts of internationalization and faced different challenges, but funding was a common issue. These diverse issues mean that

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