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Local Undergraduates' Perceptions on Curriculum Internationalization: The Case of a Public University in Malaysia

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Research Highlights

The study findings revealed that curriculum internationalization is generally well-perceived by local undergraduates in the Malaysian public university. Specifically, the respondents agreed on the importance of internationalization of curriculum by their university. In their view, the internationalization elements have been integrated into the curriculum through various approaches by their lecturers, such as by infusing a global perspective in the lessons. Despite the perceived importance of curriculum internationalization, this study also reported that there are several barriers hindering local undergraduates to actively participate in internationalization activities, which include financial constraints and lack of awareness among the students about such programs and activities in their university

Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of local university students in a Malaysian public university regarding the internationalization of curriculum in the university. Specifically, this study aims to address the following research objectives: (i) to determine the extent to which curriculum internationalization is perceived positively by local undergraduates in the university, and (ii) to identify issues and challenges which could hinder the undergraduates' participation in internationalization activities throughout their study in the university.

As implication, the study findings provided insights from the perspective of Malaysian local undergraduates regarding the importance and practices of curriculum internationalization as well as the challenges faced by the university to internationalize its teaching and learning. These insights have put forward the importance of considering local undergraduates' positive perception and acceptance for a successful integration of internationalization in university curriculum. While the respondents have clearly stated their view that curriculum internationalization is currently being integrated and practiced in the university, more efforts are still needed at both institutional and national levels in order to ensure that the learning outcomes of curriculum internationalization in the university can be experienced and benefited optimally by local undergraduates as well, not just international students.



Methodology

This descriptive study employed a mixed survey method to gather relevant data explaining Malaysian local undergraduates' views towards various curriculum internationalization aspects in the university. The convenient samples include Malaysian students who were undertaking various undergraduate programs offered by different schools in the university. The respondents varied by the nature of their study field, i.e. either arts, sciences, or hybrid, and their participation in the survey was on voluntary basis.

In terms of data collection, the Google online form method was utilized to distribute the survey to respondents via their email. The total of responses received was 73. The "Questionnaire on Curriculum Internationalization in University" (QCIU) was adapted from Sammons (1995) and available in both Malay or English versions. The questionnaire consists of 32 questions within four sections: i) importance of curriculum internationalization, ii) internationalization practices, iii) barriers to participation in internationalization, and iv) demographic information. One open-ended question was included to gather relevant suggestions concerning curriculum internationalization. Quantitative data were statistically analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22, while qualitative inputs were analyzed by using a free version of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, i.e. the QDA Miner Lite.

Results

In terms of the importance of curriculum internationalization, respondents generally agreed on the importance for their university to integrate internationalization into the curriculum. The area which many considered as most important was for the lecturers to infuse global awareness into the courses being taught. Accordingly, majority of the respondents disagreed that "there is no need for the university to internationalize its curriculum because students will gain a global perspective elsewhere".

In terms of internationalization practices, there were considerably positive perceptions on the aspect among the respondents. Majority agreed that their lecturers infuse elements globally and regionally including those related to Asia and ASEAN into the curriculum. Moreover, the lecturers have also given assignments that require interaction with other cultural groups, domestically or abroad. In addition, respondents also agreed that the university has encouraged them to participate in international internship programs and offered international experiences for students.





In terms of barriers, financial resources seem to be the main factor preventing most respondents to participate in study abroad programs. As for on-campus international activities, most respondents were not aware of such opportunities. Other than that, lack of language skills appears as the main barrier faced by most respondents to work abroad.

Findings

In light of the findings, the roles of university, lecturer, and students are of great importance for international curriculum transformation. The opportunity to realize graduates' potential depends on the institutional effort in its fullest sense at both national and international levels (Giridharan, Ling, & Mazzolini, 2015). Educators are the major force for the development in internationalized study programs (Zelenkova & Spisiakova, 2013), and students' sense of social responsibility drive the need for curriculum internationalization (AUCC, 2009). Yet, the identified barriers emphasize the importance of understanding the needs and attitudes of the local undergraduates towards curriculum internationalization. Such understanding would be helpful for relevant bodies to enhance the processes and practices of curriculum internationalization in Malaysian higher education system.

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