Internationalisation of Curriculum at a University as an Integral Part of its Strategic Development

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Abstract: Internationalisation of curriculum has recently become an important objective of universities around the globe. Many universities shift the emphasis from developing students academic mobility to equipping all of them with skills necessary for them to be successfully involved into international social and labour environment. Russian universities are also taking steps to internationalise their educational process but these initiatives are still rather scarce. The study presents a model for curriculum internationalisation. In developing this model the researchers have taken into account the Russian higer education context, its legislation and regulation documents. The researchers have also identified the key factors that would facilitate an effective development and implementation of an internationalised curriculum, they are: scientific and methodological support to professors involved in curriculum internationalisation, ongoing improvement of English courses delivery for students and staff members as well as facilitating student and staff mobility including the virtual one.

Key words: Curriculum internationalisation, internationalisation model, legislation, regulation, methodological support

INTRODUCTION

There is currently hardly any higher education institution worldwide and particularly in the Bologna-signatory states that is not promoting its internationalisation. The Russian Federation is also actively engaged in internationalisation of its higher education. The government's educational policy is aimed at making the Russian higher education a competitive player on the international arena. The 5-100 initiative, aimed at supporting the chosen universities to enter world university rankings by 2020, the programme global education, targeted at facilitating graduate and postgraduate outgoing student mobility as well as a range of other activities support a more strategic and comprehensive approach to higher education internationalisation in Russia. Development and implementation of internationalisation strategies and action plans on national and institutional levels is seen as an efficient step towards incorporation of international dimensions into the key functions of universities.

The outcomes of a Europe wide project Barometer carried out by the European Association for International Education show that the majority of universities from 33 responding countries including Russia have separate internationalisation strategies or include internationalisation objectives into university strategic plans. The rationales for internationalisation vary depending on institutional context. Knight and de Wit identified four groups of rationales driving internationalisation: political, economic, social/cultural, and academic. Later Knight (2004) singled out a 5th group competition. Among the priority objectives the Barometer respondents mentioned (multiple answers were possible): improving the overall quality of education (56%), preparing students for a global world (45%), attracting more international students (37%) and others. Though enhancing academic mobility of students and staff still remains one of the key objectives of universities, many of them shift the emphasis on facilitating internationalisation of curriculum-incorporation of international, intercultural and 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, 2009).

The main idea behind the objective to internationalise curriculum is that universities should provide all students with the opportunity to gain skills that will allow them to

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live and work in an increasingly globalised society (Sinagatullin, 2012). Internationalisation of curriculum aims to 'develop students' global perspectives and cross-cultural capability in order to be able to perform, professionally and socially in a multicultural environment' (Clifford and Joseph, 2005). Knight describes curriculum as "the backbone of the internationalization process". The importance of internationalised curriculum is emphasised by Bond (2003) and Leask (2001). Zimitat argues that even if domestic graduates never leave their own country on graduation they will be forced to compete in international or multinational work and discovery environments'. Besides, internationalisation of curriculum is seen as a crucial element in integrating foreign students into their student life in a host university. Leask (2001) emphasises that internationalizing university curricula is a powerful and practical way of bridging the gap between rhetoric and practice to including and valuing the contribution of international students. The benefits of curriculum internationalisation for both national and international students is highlighted in Bremer and van der Wende's definition of internationalised curricula which they describe as curricula with an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context and designed for domestic students and/or foreign students.

Thus, internationalisation of curriculum becomes a mainstream activity of universities worldwide. As mentioned previously Russian universities have been taking great efforts towards their internationalisation but their experience is rather sporadic and scarce; some progress has been made but many challenges remain. One of the key obstacles for successful internationalisation of curriculum is insufficient information on methodological issues with regard to its development and implementation. Thus, the development of a model for curriculum internationalisation that can be transferred to the Russian higher education context is relevant for the Russian universities and could be also adopted by universities beyond Russia.

Literature review: Current studies on internationalisation of curriculum focus on methodological issues related to its development (Leask, 2009) and assessment. Leask suggests that curriculum internationalisation should be based on the active research approach which involves commitment of a group of professors to the development and implementation of an internationalised curriculum. The main steps in this process are (Leask, 2009): review and reflect (identification of the extent to which the existing curriculum is internationalised); imagine

(negotiation of possible inclusion of other ways of thinking and doing); revise and plan (strategic planning and development of an action plan); act (introduction of a reviewed content, teaching and assessment methods as well as collecting data on the outcomes); evaluate (identification of the extent to which the internationalisation goals have been achieved). It sould be noted that internationalisation process presented by Leask (2009) is not linear but cyclical.

The American Council on Education (ACE) has also developed a number of recommendations for internationalisation of curriculum they are: ensuring active leadership in making internationalisation a priority; creating a strategic framework for action; investing in faculty opportunities and focusing on the curriculum. All the above mentioned activities cover the development of an internationalised curriculum itself as well as the provision of adequate resources.

As far as the curriculum development is concerned, researchers (Bond, 2003) identify three approaches to its internationalisation add on infusion and transformation approaches. Within the add-on approach the existing curricula is extended with international or intercultural material or topics without its modification. The infusion approach involves introduction of course content that reflects diverse perspectives ... [and] knowledge of deferences in professional practices across cultures. This approach as well as the transformational one require modification of curriculum. The transformational approach in its turn encourages new ways of thinking, incorporates new methodologies so that different epistemological questions are raised old assumptions are quested, subjective data sources are considered and prior theories either revised or invalidated (Marchesani and Adams, 1992). Most European universities resort to the infusion approach whereas there are quite many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) including Russian ones that still use the add on approach.

Development and implementation of internationalisation strategies also requires the use of a system approach, an ethos approach, a process approach, an activity and a competency approaches (Gaponova and Balashov, 2014; Kolomiets, 2014; Maltseva *et al.*, 2015; Morova *et al.*, 2015). We have taken into account these approaches in developing a model for curriculum internationalisation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research involved the use of the following methods: review of scientific and methodological literature on curriculum internationalisation and relevant issues;

analysis of policy documents on curriculum internationalisation in Russia and beyond. Elaboration of the model for curriculum internationalisation was carried out on the basis of the analysis of the existing international practices in curriculum internationalisation, the use of pedagogical modeling methods as well as discussion of research findings on international conferences.

Hence, the main goal of the research was to summarise theoretical and empirical research on curriculum internationalisation in Russia and beyond in order to build a model of curriculum internationalisation that can be easily adapted in various national contexts, including the Russian one. The main research questions are:

- What are the components of curriculum internationalisation and how are they developed and implemented to meet the goal of internationalisation?
- What are the factors facilitating curriculum internationalisation?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Elaboration of the model for curriculum internationalisation presented in this study was aimed at adapting internationalisation practices developed and implemented outside Russia for the Russian educational context. The model comprises the following components: Goals and objectives component, content component, activity component as well as assessment and results component.

Goals, objectives and content component: Analysis of the definitions presented in the recent research allows us to identify the main goal of curriculum internationalisation-organisation of the study process in a way to develop students' professional and general competences which will allow them to live and work successfully in an international and multicultural environment. The objectives that support the goal are: Development and implementation of a relevant strategic plan and action plan at a university and programme levels; provision of adequate resources (staff, funding and facilities); incorporation of international components into the content of curriculum, methods of teaching and assessment as well as the extracurricular activities of students.

The content component is composed of two parts: invariant and variable. In spite of the fact that in some countries HEIs are autonomous in terms of curricula development, other countries have to adhere to national

educational standards where the key competencies for each study programme are specified. Therefore, we included these standards into the invariant part. For instance, the majority of Russian HEIs have to develop their curricula in compliance with the Federal State Educational Standards of Higher Professional Education. At the same time, universities are also granted an opportunity to add learning outcomes specified in international educational and professional standards, which is voluntary. Another document which plays a crucial role in developing curriculum in European countries is the European Qualifications Framework which serves as a template for the development of national qualifications frameworks. According to Cedefop findings in 2015, frameworks have been or are being developed in all 38 countries cooperating on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

Taking into account the Russian regulations on the development of study programmes and their curricula we have referred national educational standards being mandatory to the invariant part and international educational standards as well as national and international professional standards and national qualifications frameworks into the variable part. Though in case of curriculum internationalisation it is preferable to use all the above mentioned documents when the desired learning outcomes as well as methods used for their achievement and assessment are identified at programme and disciplinary levels. Inclusion of international components into professional and general learning outcomes would encourage and facilitate student mobility as well as international research.

Action component: The action component consists of three groups of activities: inclusion of international and intercultural components into the process of studies, research activities and extracurricular activities of students.

Student-centred and competency based approaches in teaching are aimed at forming student's productive thinking but not reproductive. Productive thinking involves knowledge and critical (creative) thinking. Perkins (1984) defines creative thinking as 'thinking patterned in a way that leads to creative results. The ultimate criterion for creativity is output. We call a person creative when that person consistently gets creative results, meaning, roughly speaking, original and otherwise appropriate results by the criteria of the domain in question. Development of critical thinking skills, self-development skills as well as intercultural competency is crucial in preparing students for successful life and work in the globalised society.

This development requires application of relevant and adequate educational technologies. Educational technology is seen (Luppicini, 2005) as goal oriented problem-solving systems approach utilizing tools, techniques, theories and methods from multiple knowledge domains to: design, develop and evaluate human and mechanical resources efficiently and effectively in order to facilitate and leverage all aspects of learning and guide change agency and transformation of educational systems and practices in order to contribute to influencing change in society. Hence, an educational technology is aimed at efficient attainment of educational goals through the choice of appropriate teaching methods and evaluation of student learning outcomes. Kondratenko *et al.* (2015) suggests that the task of selecting and combining separate parts of an educational technology should be done on the basis of an objective assessment of their didactic effectiveness in a given educational process.

Development and implementation of an internationalised curriculum requires the use of traditional educational technologies and methods of teaching as well as innovative technologies aimed at active learning. Such methods and forms of teaching as mentoring, role games, debates, case-studies, group and individual projects could be successfully used to achieve internationalised learning outcomes. The use of information technologies could also facilitate the development of specified learning outcomes (Kolesova, 2013). Professors can organise international videoconferences, involve students in international discussions as well as international research projects, including interdisciplinary ones.

One of the issues that is hindering this international cooperation is English language proficiency of Russian students. Though English is taught as a mandatory discipline in Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degree programmes, students' level of English is in many cases lower than B2 in compliance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment (CEFR). Consequently, insufficient English language proficiency of students becomes a barrier for international educational and research collaboration of students, development of student mobility and inclusion of foreign literature (mostly in English) into curriculum.

Another dimension that is closely linked with curriculum internationalisation is internationalisation of students' extracurricular activities. Infusion of intercultural and international elements into extracurricular activities of students will enable them to get intercultural knowledge and skills. Involvement of home and international students into joint activities enriches their knowledge about other cultures and helps them better understand their own culture, learn foreign languages and develop interpersonal skills (Biryukova, 2014). Thus, universities are encouraged to organise weeks of national cultures, tandem language events, develop mentoring programmes when home students help international students with integration into the local community. Besides a number of European universities, University of Hamburg, Queen's University and University of Passau deliver certification courses aimed at the development of intercultural competency.

Assessment and results component: Effectiveness of the implemented activities aimed at curriculum internationalisation can be evaluated by means of a systemic monitoring which constitutes the assessment and results component of curriculum internationalisation. Monitoring enables us to manage a process, evaluate the state of things at a certain period of implementation, identify barriers and possible mistakes and forecast the future development of the process and its outcomes (Biryukova, 2014). Since, curriculum internationalisation is an integral part of higher education quality assurance, all the tools and evaluation methods that are used for higher education quality assessment can be applied to measuring internationalisation. The key methods that are used for that purpose are accreditation, audit, certification and self-assessment. The choice of a relevant method depends on the institutional context. Hence, universities may develop their own assessment tools but there are currently a number of methodologies aimed at internationalisation assessment, including evaluation of curriculum internationalisation.

Therefore, we have identified and analysed these tools to single out the criteria that could be applied to curriculum internationalisation in Russia. In order to compile a list of criteria and indicators we have studied the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, public accreditation procedures that are carried out in Russia and the European Union countries as well as the methodology of a comprehensive assessment tool aimed at institutional and programme internationalisation evaluation that was developed by the European Accreditation Consortium within the project CeQuInt 2012-2015. This analysis enabled us to develop a self-assessment methodology aimed at evaluating curriculum internationalisation. All the chosen indicators were grouped into four criteria: curriculum internationalisation quality assurance at a programme level; development and implementation of a study programme in the course of curriculum

internationalisation; professors and research staff involved in curriculum internationalisation; students; resources. Indicators specified in these criteria cover the assessment of international dimension infused in the key components of an educational process.

Factors facilitating curriculum internationalization: Successful curriculum internationalisation depends on numerous factors. We have identified the factors that facilitate effective internationalisation and are particularly relevant for the Russian higher education system.

Educators involved in curriculum internationalisation agree that high commitment and relevant competence of professors play a crucial role in this process. Thus, we consider that provision of scientific and methodological support to professors involved in curriculum internationalisation will make a great contribution to the goal achievement. The support could be provided either by internal experts in curriculum internationalisation or external ones. Invitation of experts from foreign universities can bring an additional value.

Though academic mobility of all students and staff is a rather problematic objective, universities should take great effort to involve students and staff in international collaboration. Funding initiatives and development of virtual mobility could help staff and students foster international academic and research relations. The value-added effect of academic mobility for personal and professional growth of students and staff is evident.

Another important factor that influences successful curriculum internationalisation is an ongoing improvement of English teaching quality. Low level of English language proficiency of students and staff can hinder effectiveness of curriculum internationalisation. Knowledge of foreign languages of partner universities is also important but since, the English language remains a leading language of international academic and research cooperation its proficiency is vital for curriculum internationalisation facilitation (Sinagatullin, 2013). Constant improvement of educational technologies, the use of information technologies would allow English language professors develop students' linguistic competency (Kondratenko *et al.*, 2015). Creation of university level language centres providing a range of foreign language courses for home and international students including certification would also support internationalisation.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum internationalisation is a complex area of activities at the current stage of higher education development. Being an integral part of university strategic development it requires a certain approach to its effective and efficient development and implementation. Since, curriculum internationalisation is a relatively new phenomenon for the Russian higher education system, we have analysed the existing internationalisation practices used mainly in the European Union countries and developed a model of curriculum internationalisation that can be adopted by Russian universities. The model could be used by professors who take initiative in internationalizing their courses and disciplines as well as management of study programmes aspired to elaborate on the curriculum in order to build students professional and general competences that will allow them to work and live successfully in an intercultural and international environment.

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