

University Administrators, Leadership, and Faculty Views on the Internationalization of Curriculum (A Perspective Through Decolonial Lenses From the Global South)

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Using a qualitative single case study approach this paper explores the views of academics which ultimately impact their actions to implement international curriculum within one institutional context in South Africa. The results show that a tailored IoC at an institution situated at the peripheries of the Western world is a policy that advances diversity of thought, decolonization of curriculum content, and appreciation of indigenous cultures and languages. The theory that emerged in this study underscores that IoC is a bottom-up customized policy as it applies to the needs of the students to become wider thinkers and professionally integrated in the intercontinental and global job markets. Further recommendations for future theory and practice suggest IoC as an educational approach that accounts for the geographic positionality of the institution, and all aspects of diversity, rather than for a collective institutional identity.

Keywords: Internationalization of Curriculum (IoC), global citizen in education, diversity of thought, decolonization of the curriculum, academics (understood as one term to substitute administrators, leadership, and faculty), international and intercultural skills (IIS)

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, Internationalization, and International Curriculum Intertwine

In the context of globalization, *cross-border* or *international academic mobility* (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit et al., 2017; Mihut et al., 2017; Sehoole, 2006) was characterized as the physical movement of students and faculty predominantly from universities, colleges, and organizations representing higher education in countries in the Global North, for academic enrichment and transformation of institutions in the South (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit et al., 2017; Sehoole, 2006). While *Global North* and *Global South* are relatively loose terms, they are associated with the geographic location of education systems in different countries and emerged from critiques brought to internationalization focused mainly on cross-border academic mobility: *elitism*, *westernization*, and *internationalization for social good* (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; de Wit et al., 2015).

If internationalization means traveling to an institution in a foreign country for teaching, learning, cultural exchange, and research, then it is exclusive to only those institutional stakeholders who have the opportunities and can afford to travel (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Leask, 2015). This perception created room for various interpretations of how higher education is *Westernized* worldwide because affordability is associated with wealthy countries situated in the Western world. Therefore, *Westernization*, as one aspect

of *internationalization* through academic mobility in higher education promoted socioeconomic, political, and cultural inequality among higher education systems worldwide (de Wit et al., 2017).

In the national context of the research site in this study, internationalization is associated with colonialism which was also driven by Western countries (Heleta & Cahsi, 2023; Sehoole, 2006). Through colonial lenses, *Western* wealthier nations used their economic power to support their education systems to model higher education in less wealthy nations in the East and South. The meaning of *Westernization*, therefore, was not centered on the social good in local communities but on the efforts of the nations in the West to mandate how those in the East and South conduct research, advance and use technology, and promote cultural movements with a focus on English linguistic skills which eventually influence social and political behavior.

This study examines the views that ultimately impact the actions of various institutional constituencies to introduce international and intercultural dimensions in the curricular and co-curricular activities to support students in gaining knowledge and developing skills to solve global issues that affect local communities. The inquiry of the study is anchored into an innovative approach to internationalization for social good theorized by various researchers in the field (Beelen & Jones, 2015; de Wit et al., 2017; Leask 2009, 2015) which alienates internationalization from being Westernized. The theory that internationalization brings meaningful contributions to society emphasizes the need to pay closer attention to the role of trained professionals who contribute to local socio-economic development, regardless of whether *local* is in wealthy or less wealthy nations. Further, internationalization becomes an inclusive policy that supports participation in international activities of individuals who cannot necessarily afford to travel nor have mastered the English language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inconsistency Among the Views of Administrators, Leadership, and Faculty on IoC

Positioning international formal and informal curricula as an added value to academic learning experiences is not an unanimously accepted strategy across institutions of postsecondary education around the world, nor universally accepted by colleges and universities in one education system (Whitsed & Green, 2015). In various institutional and national contexts, actors who play an essential role in the implementation of the internationalization of curriculum include international students' advisors, curriculum and policy advisors, international programs coordinators, executive boards, deans, and associate deans (Almeida et al., 2019; Leask & Bridge, 2013; Whitsed & Green, 2015).

The limitation of having a generally accepted group of active players in enacting IoC generates misperception about the role of administrators, executive leadership, and faculty in implementing the internationalization of curricular and co-curricular activities as an added value to academic educational experiences. Leask (2015) even raised the question of how invested institutional stakeholders in the curriculum internationalization process are and how one could find out. In various case studies conducted at various institutions globally and not particularly in the national context of the research site for this study, scholars stressed that administrators, leadership, and faculty run various international activities such as sending students on study abroad programs or recruiting more international students to diversify the institutional community. These activities ultimately explain that the curriculum is internationalized (Almeida et al., 2019; Beelen, 2017; Leask, 2015; Leask & Bridge, 2013; Niehaus & Williams, 2016). However, one way to measure internationalization and the impact of the international curriculum is through teaching and learning methods (Almeida et al., 2019; Beelen & Jones, 2015; Leask & Bridge, 2013; Leask, 2015) but pedagogy differs from one institution to another and even more so from one education system to another.

Studies in various higher education systems have proven that not all academics perceive the same meaning and practicum of international curriculum (Almeida et al., 2019; Leask & Bridge, 2013; Wimpenny et al., 2020). Depending on the geographical setting of institutions, the academics, including teaching faculty and administrators, believe that IoC means teaching foreign languages or developing of English language skills in a discipline (Almeida et al., 2019; Leask, 2009; Leask & Bridge, 2013;

Wimpenny et al., 2020). In others, some academics use personal experiences to incorporate international and intercultural dimensions into teaching methods (Leask and Bridge, 2013; Leask, 2015) or international learning and teaching strategies are a reflection of the international student population in classrooms (Leask and Bridge, 2013; Leask 2015; Sawir, 2013). The inconsistency among the views of administrators, leadership, and faculty on IoC contributes to the development of an unstable policy of IoC reflected in students' learning experiences and in the incapacity of shaping a common purpose across disciplines for IoC (Leask and Bridge, 2013; Leask, 2015). Some students are exposed exclusively to an individualistic interpretation of IoC through faculty experiences. Other students have their learning experiences mediated by a more strategic institutional accepted policy of international curriculum. They do not rely only on faculty's experiences but benefit from faculty's international research, collaborations, academic travels or foreign language and English acquisition (Leask, 2015). It is the understanding from previous studies that more research needs to be done to understand perspectives on how to launch IoC from being a theory to an institutionalized academic planning focusing on teaching and learning strategies across disciplines of knowledge acquisition beyond traditional norms and for local societal needs.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Purpose

According to previous research, in many institutional contexts, the limitations of international curriculum for being an inclusive policy and an added value to education are grounded in the fact that international curriculum is a sporadic act, as a result of being an institutional choice rather than a must (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Jooste, 2015; Leask & Bridge, 2013; Jackson, 2019; Sawir, 2011; Whitsed & Green, 2015; Leask & Bridge, 2013). Such limitations include various understandings of theory and practical application of international curriculum across institutions, schools, academic programs, and courses of study within a given institution. The interpretations of IoC include the role of international students to set in class diverse discussions on topics of study, the role of administrators, executive leadership, and faculty who use personal experiences to create a learning space favorable to the enactment of IoC. Other interpretations of IoC focus on the English language for collaborative research and teaching with peers from foreign institutions, and the use of information technology to create opportunities for all students to develop international and intercultural skills. While interpretations of IoC underscore different means for the dissemination of knowledge and how to include international and intercultural experiences within pedagogy from a more Western perspective, they did not capture the viewpoints of academics in postcolonial countries who dedicate their academic work to produce students with knowledge and skills that can solve global issues that affect local communities. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the perspectives of administrators, leadership, and faculty to develop and implement an effective international curriculum that offers all students a consistent international and intercultural learning experience.

Research Questions

As a result of the limitation in existing literature and based on its purpose, this study answers **two overarching research questions** with multiple sub-questions. The pseudonym *Protea University* is used as a substitute for the real name of the institution to protect the identity of the institution as well as of the participants in the study.

Research Question 1: *What are the views of administrators, leadership, and faculty on the enactment of an international curriculum at Protea University? To what extent are the views on the internationalization of curriculum consistent among administrators, leadership, and faculty at Protea University?*

Research Question 2: *How does internationalization of the curriculum happen at Protea University?*

METHODOLOGY

A single case study was selected as a research method to address the inquiry in this research and to analyze data collected within an institutional context. The institution is a metropolitan, research university located in South Africa and it serves more than 28,000 students with an enrollment of approximately 1,400 international students from over 60 countries, mostly from the African continent.

Ethical clearance was obtained from researchers' host institution as well as from the research site. Members in the study were selected to represent *academics* within the groups of administrators, leadership, and faculty at Protea University. They were asked to sign a consent form that explained in detail the purpose of the study and options to withdraw. The inquiry of the study focused on the views of academics on IoC according to their professional responsibilities in the institution and not whether such views shifted according to cultural, ethical or racial background. Therefore, it is important to mention that race, ethnicity and cultural background did not count as factors when selecting the sample population. Consequently, it is irrelevant to mention whether this university is a historically black or white institution or whether the majority of people belong to a certain cultural and ethnical background. In correlation with the critiques brought to internationalization that it is *westernized* and in South Africa it's also a repercussion of colonialism (Heleta & Chasi, 2022) it is important to mention that most of the students at Protea University represent economically disadvantaged local communities. This characteristic supports the later arguments and the purpose of the study that internationalization of curriculum needs to be studied, desired, and achievable in a nonwestern institution for the academic and professional benefits of unwealthy students.

According to Palinkas et al. (2015) theory, *purposeful* sampling was used in this study to target specific groups of individuals who had knowledge related to the phenomenon of inquiry. I adopted Bryman, 2016; Miles et al. (2020) theory for an effective snowballing sampling. I relied on the group of members identified through purposeful sampling to point me to other individuals who are knowledgeable about the research topic. Through purposeful and snowballing sampling, 18 participants were interviewed. I have used pseudonyms rather than real names to protect participants' identities. The participants in the study were recruited across the School of Humanities, School of Education, and School of Visual Arts from programs such as media and communications, language and communications, photography, and higher and K–12 education. Two participants were administrators who worked for the International Office. The leadership who participated in the study were deputy vice-chancellors for teaching and learning and for internationalization and research, respectively; executive dean of the School of Education; and deputy dean of the School of Humanities. A visual representation of the participants in the study is offered in Table 1.

The comprehensive methodology to **collect data** in this study, included interviews, document analysis and the researcher's diary. The interview protocols were designed specifically for three separate groups of participants, including a set of open-ended questions, lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and then transcribed through Otter.ai – speech to text application. In order to ensure accuracy of the transcripts, I reviewed each for error during a second listening session, which took place during the data exploration stage. The document analysis included official external documents only, selected to match the study's overarching inquiry: *Institutional Research Innovation Report at Protea University* (2016) and *Policy Framework of Internationalization of Higher Education in South Africa* (PFIHESA, 2019).

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Pseudonym	Position at the Research Site	Member Group in the Study (Administrator, Faculty, or Executive Leader)
Prof. Nooky	Associate Professor, Faculty of Education	Faculty
Dr. Moek	Executive Dean, Faculty of Education	Executive Leadership
Lucky	Deputy Dean, Faculty of Humanities	Executive Leadership
Dr. Paul	Program Director, School of Visual and Performing Arts	Administrator
Dr. Pily	Associate Professor, Head of Department in Faculty of Education Curriculum Transformation	Faculty and Administrator
Prof. Logan	Associate Professor, Faculty of Education	Faculty
Dr. Eli	Lecturer, Headmaster and Doctoral Program	Faculty and Administrator
Dr. Tweb	Deputy Vice Chancellor for Internationalization and Innovation	Executive Leadership
Rod	Lecturer, School of Visual Arts	Faculty
Andra	Officer, International Office	Administrator
MJ	Officer, International Office	Administrator
Dr. Giani	Associate Professor, School of Language, Media, and Communication	Faculty
Dr. Sati	Senior Lecturer, Head of Department /Secondary School Teaching Education, School of Education	Faculty and Administrator
Maier	Professor, School of Visual Arts	Faculty
Dr. Noemi	Director, Research Management	Administrator
Dr. James	Lecturer, Department of Media and Communication	Faculty
Dr. Craft	Deputy Vice Chancellor, Learning and Teaching	Executive Leadership
Ms. Michaela	French Professor, School of Media and Communication	Faculty

According to Bryman's (2016) theory, the researcher's diary in this study was a mechanism used to keep track of progress on data collection and for accountability of the work done each step of the way. In the diary, I also included the field notes of information shared and observations during the interviews, and I noted times and locations where the interviews were conducted, the number of participants, and how many more interviews were needed to satisfy the data needs for this study.

At the **coding** stage, as a progressive method, deductive codes were first identified in previous theory on GCE (Bosio & Torres, 2019; Torres & Bosio, 2020) and IoC (Leask, 2009, 2015; Leask & Bridge, 2013). Second, the inductive coding emerged from frequent themes in the raw data. Data was sorted in Dedoose, and according to qualitative data methods (Saldaña, 2016), two-cycle coding was used to create categories of codes that later helped develop theory building and analysis. In the first cycle, provisional, in vivo, versus, and causation coding were used. The second cycle coding included pattern coding.

Reliability and validity are gauged to evaluate the quality of research and to assure that the results of the study answer the research question and are as free from bias as possible in order to be a consistent reference for future studies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Bryman, 2016; Miles et al., 2020). Transparency enables readers to understand the researcher's positionality and actions to conduct a reliable qualitative study over time (Bryman, 2016). The methods used to ensure this study's reliability, validity, and transparency are *triangulation*, *member checks*, *consent forms*, and a *diary for readers*.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The two theoretical frameworks introduced in this study are international curriculum as theory and global citizenship in education (GCE). IoC is used as a conceptual framework for enhancing the quality of education by integrating international and intercultural dimensions into formal and informal curricula (Leask, 2015). GCE highlights two major current trends in higher education today: interconnectivity of research and study across nations, and the fact that students should graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to solve global issues that equally affect all local communities (Bosio & Torres, 2019; Mannion et al., 2011; Myers, 2006; Tarrant et al., 2014).

The common denominator of both theories is significant to this study because it sets individuals, regardless of their country of origin, cultural background, race, or socioeconomic status, as important players in solving global issues that affect local communities (Bosio & Torres, 2019; Guo et al., 2019; Leask, 2015; Mannion et al., 2011; Myers, 2006; Ruger, 2014; Stoner et al., 2014). Such individuals need to have the right knowledge of global trends and the right skills to deal with the changes caused by such trends. To achieve these skills, the central role of institutions of higher education worldwide expands from graduating professionals in various fields of study to disseminating knowledge and developing skills to find solutions for local social change and economic growth (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; de Wit et al., 2017; Leask, 2015). The United Nations (2011) defines the current global issues as poverty, racial discrimination, global warming, economic collapses, access to education, and global public health. This study will highlight the IoC approach in a specific institutional context, to promote critical thinking about such global issues that impede transformation for social good at community levels. The most recent situation with a pervasive global impact on local communities and an implicit impact on institutions of higher education worldwide is the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

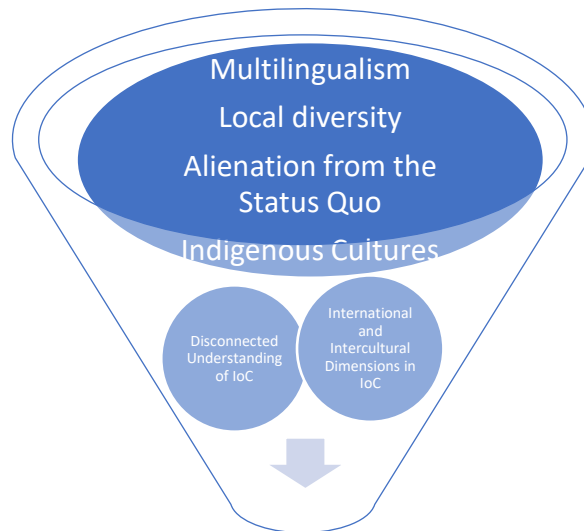
According to World Health organization, COVID-19 is "an infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 Virus" and affects local communities differently. As highlighted in the next section of this study, COVID-19 was mentioned as a cause to shift the strategies for internationalization of curriculum from being mobile to a more static scholastic approach that benefits a larger group of students, not only those who may travel.

FINDINGS

Three overarching themes were identified in this study: *Defining Internationalization of Curriculum at Protea University*, *Enactment of International Curriculum at Protea University*, and *Challenges to and Opportunities for Effective Enactment of IOC at Protea University*.

Figure 1 offers a visual interpretation to the first theme, which is a response to the first research question in this study.

FIGURE 1
ELEMENTS OF CUSTOMIZED INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CURRICULUM AT
PROTEA UNIVERSITY



Participants’ opinions on the definition of international curriculum, are incoherent, it varies from unclarity of what’s “foregrounded” through IoC, to being a walking idea and a fluid form of pedagogy to advance professionalization and critical thinking in local and global contexts.

“My only challenge is the fact that within the whole concept of internationalization, my question is always what is being foregrounded” (Prof. Noky).

“And I think above all, IoC is something that is actually quite critical if we are to force the professionalization of the entire professions.” (Anda, Intl Programs Officer)

“So, internationalizing the curriculum requires some thought process into how the curriculum is delivered, how the curriculum serves the purpose within our context.” (Dr. Tweb, Deputy Vice-Chancellor)

“The idea of internationalization means that the student cohort that you’re teaching should have some kind of understanding and some kind of ability to connect with the global sphere of learning.” (Dr. Giani, of Language, Media, and Communication)

The connectivity of students with the global sphere through learning was understood at Protea University differently at different times, making the internationalization of curriculum content and instruction a fluid but ultimately inclusive strategy. According to Dr. Craft, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, in the past, Protea University had “a very traditional approach and had policies and frameworks that encouraged building internationalization into the curriculum,” which meant adapting the teaching and learning strategies to accommodate international students and the experiences gained by domestic students during study abroad, and to invite foreign professors to teach on the local campus. More recently, it meant

continental inner mindfulness and benchmarking with other institutions within the continent as reflected into MJ's response.

“I mean, when you look at the IoC, and of course, for us, the only continent, if I pick from the conversation that we've been having with signatories, it has been trying and benchmark, you know, qualification within the continent in itself, for qualifications to speak to each other. (M.J., Office of International Programs)”

Another identified perspective was to craft a definition of IoC centered around international and intercultural dimensions into teaching and learning strategies and to accept various viewpoints of thinking within the institutional learning space in order to avoid isolation. Students and academics need to have the right social and multilingual skills to become a broader thinker who is competent to adapt to different cultural, ethnic, racial, multilingual and religious settings. In the local national context, there are 11 official languages spoken and students at Protea University need to earn cultural capital to communicate with individuals who belong to local multicultural groups but also with individuals from foreign cultures.

“IoC . . . is basically the incorporation and the integration of international, intercultural, curriculum or any other aspects into one.” (Dr. Moek, executive dean of the School of Education)

“If you have to interact with people of different ethnicities, different language backgrounds, different religious backgrounds, even different sexual orientations, I think if you are able to navigate all of those, which may be very different from yours, with sensitivity and respect, and acceptance, ...that it's an ability to co-exist, in spite of difference.” (Dr. Noemi, Director of Research Management)

“[IoC]...the sharing of ideas for the multiple perspectives of reality, so that we don't become inward looking.” (Prof. Logan of the School of Education)

“Well, for me, languages come into internationalization because language is not just a language...it's also the culture.” (Michaela, Instructor of French)

When defining IoC, participants in the study also emphasized the “cry” for decolonialization as alienation from Europeanism and Americanism in curriculum instruction, which creates at the research site space to “diversity of thought” (Dr. Tweb, Deputy Vice Chancellor). In order to prepare students to function in any way they choose anywhere in the world, diversity of thought enables faculty and researchers to offer multiple perspectives across disciplines rather than one colonial side for delivery of academic content. The multiple citations listed below, support the argument that in most of their responses, the members' associated Europeanism, Americanism, and English language with colonialism and these connotations also represent the status quo of international curriculum. Academics must not look to benchmark with the West in the process of internationalization; in fact, local and continental differences as well as other geopolitical regions such as *African*, *South American*, *Asian* should be accounted more in the process of internationalization.

“Because I feel with the integration of all these cultures and integration of views, there will always be a difference, and that is where our strength is. And then the question is, how do we then utilize that difference to something that will benefit everyone. But if we're not open-minded to those ideas, then we will still, you know, go back to perpetuating the status quo, which actually aligns internationalization with being European and being English.” (Dr. Noky, School of Education)

“Because I think what gets lost with internationalization, is that people want to benchmark, largely, with the West and try and say this is what the West does, and it shouldn’t be like that.” (Dr. Tweb, Deputy Vice Chancellor).

“But I still feel that the African voice is never put at the forefront of this. Because for me, a definition that will be more specific to say, is the integration of African voice, you know, South American, or European, so that everybody can see themselves in the definition” (Dr. Noky, School of Education).

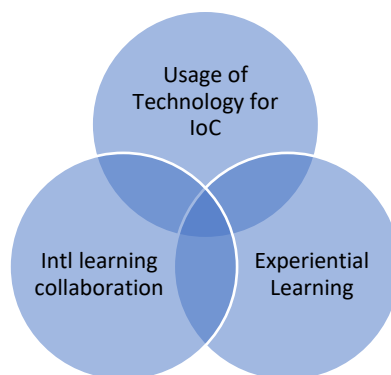
“I think one needs to retain ...African identity and see how we could take that globally, and for me, internationalization is almost a sharing of ideas, in terms of indigenous knowledge is because I think indigenous knowledge systems form the basis for learning and teaching, depending on, you know, where you are from in the world.” (Dr. Paul, Visual Arts)

“There’s a big cry for decolonization of the curriculum, because this very bias is very European and American” (Dr. Noemi, Director of Research Management)

“Listen, it’s about getting a diversity of thought, diversity of all forms of diversity, you know, into teaching and learning. And also preparing, I think...preparing a student to become whatever that person can be in the world.” (Dr. Tweb, Deputy Vice Chancellor)

The second theme emerged from analyzing data is illustrated in fig.2. According to the consistent views of respondents, the enactment of IoC is possible when having an established interdependency among, usage of technology, international collaborative learning and experiential learning.

FIGURE 2
INTERDEPENDENCY OF ELEMENTS FOR ENACTMENT OF IOC AT
PROTEA UNIVERSITY



In this study, technology is not an institutional signature tool for IoC, while it is a reliable source for learning and engagement for researchers and professors from a South African institution with individuals from foreign partner institutions for the advancement of global knowledge and science. For example, in the School of Education, Dr. Eli thinks that one of the things that is important for a language and literacy person is that people read books and she still prefers printed scholarly articles for her students and books as a reliable means of teaching and learning. On the other hand, academics in media and communication, and Visual Arts consider that technology facilitates academics’ engagement in international collaborative learning with open minds and ready to accept views other than their own about how to teach and do research.

Technology also gives opportunity to administrators, leadership, and faculty to educate the international academic audience about local diversity, indigenous identity, and intellectual approach to solving global issues in local contexts. For example, The Broadband Communication Centre, in collaboration with universities around the world, created “novel optical fiber technology for the world’s largest radio telescope, the Square Kilometer Array (SKA). This technology will enable scientists to deal with the vast amounts of data dating back over 13 billion years that this telescope will gather. SKA is by far the biggest scientific project Africa has ever undertaken” (Prof. Stevens, Deputy Vice-Chancellor in RIR 2020-2021)

Another example is the virtual exchange of lectures, which is a sustainable method to include perspectives across disciplines, transcending national boundaries and advancing local understandings for a group of foreign learners.

“And obviously, the NFT¹ non-aspect of the metaverse is a space in which artists should engage in a learning and teaching space and should be more aware of, because it’s a new space in which they could be in a program or graduate program and actually make money, which is obviously the grand idea of what you want your students to sort of benefit from, from the space in which they learn.” (Rod, Associate Lecturer, School of Visual Arts)

The mutual benefit through online collaborative learning was also relevant to students at Protea University who are not only recipients of international and intercultural skills but also become educators through collaborative learning and research with students from foreign countries. Whether in the field of education, visual arts, or media and communication, students at Protea University are encouraged through experiential learning to translate in practice what they learn in theory and this may happen either within local contexts or at international sites.

Regardless of whether there’s a clear understanding of the meaning of IoC and an established interdependency among strategies to implement international curriculum, implementation of IoC is not free from challenges. This perspective is underscored in the third overarching theme along with a second standpoint that there’s an opportunity for effective enactment of IoC in each challenge.

In the South African national context, public funding is not allocated to promote higher education through internationalization; therefore, universities are encouraged to design their own strategies to fund and proliferate international academic activities (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019, p. 24). While funding is also scarce at Protea University, due to its geopolitical location internal funding is a reliable resource to support the participation of academics in international professional development, the existing partnerships, and the initiation of new ones. Further, internal funding also shapes students’ opportunities to participate in international exchanges and collaborative learning which most of the time are limited due to class inequalities perpetuated through internationalization activities and the curriculum. The university for example “delivered computers to their doorsteps and the government gave free data to the students” (Dr. Tweb, Deputy Vice Chancellor) during the pandemic to disadvantaged students so they could continue their participation in academic learning.

“You get all forms of partnerships, either through individual partnerships organized partnerships or consulting. But sometimes it’s through funding, and the partnership is formed because of the funding agreement.” (Dr. Tweb, Deputy Vice-Chancellor)

“Yes, especially academics, they really have the blessing of being able to attend conferences, to work on projects internationally, because that opens up your thinking when you engage with others.” (Dr. Moek, Executive Dean of School of Education)

Bureaucracy has been also identified as a blockage in the process of internationalization of the curriculum. For example, it is not always sufficient to have funding and technology available to promote international teaching and learning collaboration but a more relaxed bureaucratic system that supports professors to engage their students in international collaborative learning as part of IoC. According to

members in the study, a more relaxed bureaucratic system around IoC is the responsibility of the *international office* which should endorse a more centralized organization of institutional policies. However, according to MJ, the office that he represents, the *international office* does not work alone to institutionalize internationalization, but it collaborates constantly with institutional stakeholders to advance internationalization across schools and disciplines. Some institutional stakeholders do not have a strong collaboration with the international office but a more individualistic approach while others collaborate on various projects for internationalization with the same office.

Dr. James, of Media, Film, and Communication, believes there is no real framework for the meaning of IoC at Protea University, an opinion supported by his attempt to co-teach with a professor from the United Kingdom. Dr. James received many bureaucratic “blockages” when it came to translating collaborative teaching into practice with his peers abroad, but he introduced comparative international aspects into his teaching and he also coordinates students from abroad. On the other hand, Dr. Pilly, professor and head of a department in the School of Education, perceives the faculty relationship with the international office as a strong collaboration that supports the implementation of IoC:

“So, we work very closely with our international office. So, you know, we have an international committee, and then we have representatives from the international office that work with us, who are represented in this committee and network with us. . . . Yes [, I am a member of the committee]. And so, the university also has links, and then we are encouraged to, you know, to be part of these kinds of planks and participate and consult.”

Interviewees also argued that the role of leadership becomes essential to create opportunities to implement the Internationalization of Curriculum as an inclusive policy. First, leadership identifies the management of online international collaborations as a modality to implement the international curriculum more cost-effectively. Second, leadership needs to be “personally involved and invested” (Dr. Moek, dean of the School of Education) in the process of IoC and at the same time “creative” (Dr. Noemi, director of Research Management) to facilitate a comfortable space for communication and brainstorm for innovative ideas under unprecedented circumstances such as Covid 19 pandemic to deal with various aspects of IoC. Lastly, the leadership’s role is to simplify the procedures for international research grants and collaboration, as well as the movement of scholars, international students, and study abroad, which are integrated into the institutional portfolio to coordinate the enactment of IoC at Protea University (Dr. Noemi, director of Research Management).

DISCUSSION

As a result of accepting that IoC needs to be designed to fit an institutional profile and needs, I understood that more studies on institutional stakeholders’ views would greatly contribute to future practices and models to implement international curricula. Another aspect that I accounted for when designing this study, is the criticism brought to internationalization that it is elitist and driven by institutions in wealthier nations who have the economic means to research and mobilize international academic activities. In most cases, these are situated in so-called *Western* and *Global North*. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the perspectives of administrators, leadership, and faculty on IoC in and institution in the Global South. Protea University serves underrepresented groups of students who belong to socioeconomically disadvantaged communities for whom traveling for international academic enhancement is more of an idea than a realistic option.

Institutional Initiatives vs. National Framework on Internationalization of Curriculum

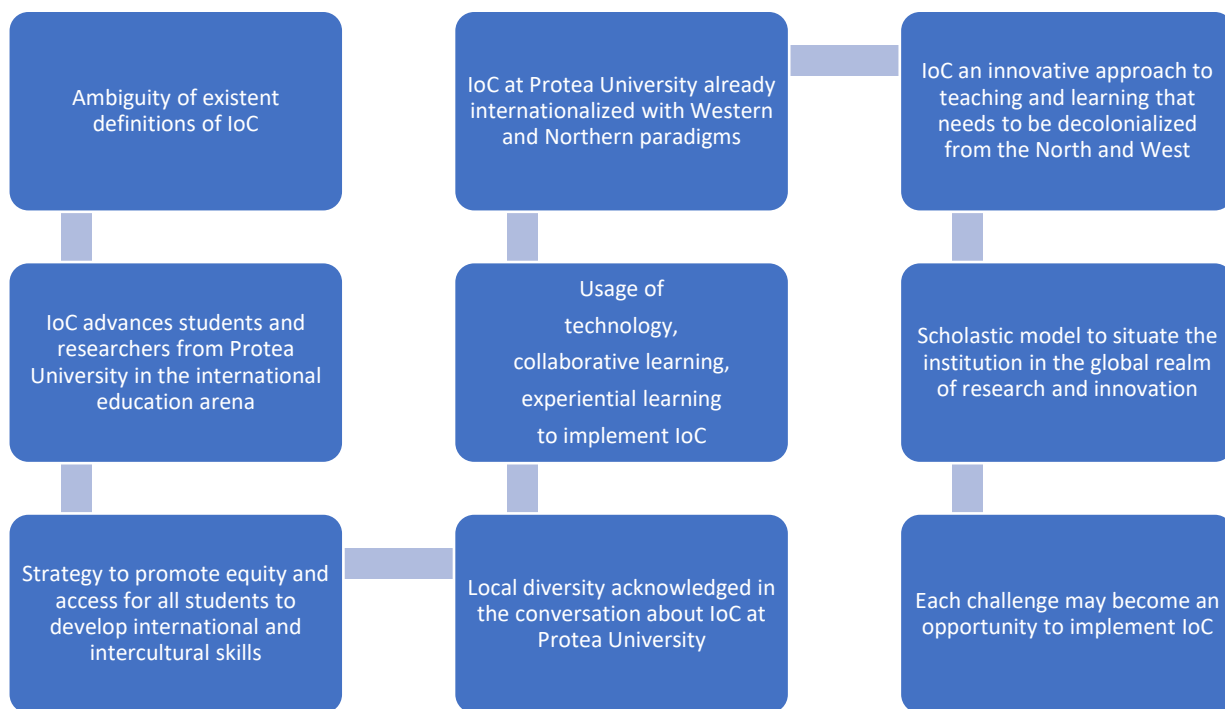
While part of the triangulation for this study was to include analysis of external documents such as PFIHESA (Department of Education, 2019), which adopts Leask’s (2015) definition as an explanation for the terminology of IoC, the participants in the study did not follow an established framework that offers a working definition of IoC. The interviewees’ answers provided a unique, tailored approach that promotes

transparency of indigenous cultures, languages, and social values, which define the academic community at Protea University.

According to the interviewees, the meaning and desired institutional initiatives on international curriculum primarily focused on using local identity and local diversity in the discourse for the internationalization of the curriculum. This viewpoint is contrary to definitions of IoC accepted by PFIHESA that highlight the integration of what outsiders understand through international and intercultural values into teaching and learning strategies as well as the function of the institution. Further, this standpoint emphasized heavily the need for decolonization from Western and Northern educational influence to generate channels of expression and participation for scholars and students from Protea University in international academic activities. If preferring technology over printed materials or being more actively engaged in internationalization activities, for the interviewees *IoC* is about balance in the *diversity of thought* where the inbound influence of teaching and learning strategies from peers at institutions abroad do not overpower the outbound teaching and learning from Protea University.

Internationalization of Curriculum: Customized Approach at Protea University

FIGURE 3
CONSISTENT VIEWS AMONG PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY ON DEF AND IMPLEMENTATION OF IOC



According to the study participants' common views, the existent definitions of international curriculum are blurry and do not necessarily address the institutional strategies for teaching and learning at Protea University where the curriculum is already filled with international and intercultural perspectives dominated by Western and Northern paradigms. De-Westernization of international curriculum is a perspective that aligns with findings in previous studies which underscore that internationalization of curriculum can be a model of instruction that promotes other education principles across disciplines than Western values and practice (Borghetti & Zanoni, 2020; Breit et al., 2013). It is also the highlight of a more recent critical analysis of the colonial and postcolonial socioeconomic and cultural context within South Africa, the home country of the research site in this study. Heleta and Chasi (2022) raised the issue of the

colonialization of education in South Africa, and they offered a meaningful definition of internationalization that would better fit the academic needs of institutions of higher education within South Africa. In Heleta and Chasi's definition² of internationalization, the elements of decolonization from the Western and Northern paradigms represent the nucleus for a more inclusive and more nationally customized internationalization of higher education where all academics, research methods, teaching, and learning strategies have equal representation.

Likewise, interviewees also perceive IoC as a strategy that advances researchers and students as active players in the international academic arena. Students have the opportunity to develop IIS across disciplines, which facilitates competencies or global employability. This characteristic is supported by Bosio and Torres (2019), who affirmed that international and intercultural competencies enrich a global citizen in education. Clifford (2009), Green and Whitsed (2013), and Leask (2009, 2015) also highlighted that the internationalization of curriculum supports the progression of professional competencies from multilingual or monocultural to a complex set of international and intercultural skills, which vary across disciplines. Still, they are adapted to fit the professional needs of graduates.

For participants in the study, the design of a tailored IoC goes beyond the development of cognitive skills and positions the institution among its peers for global education. This aligns with the perspectives of theorists on collaborative learning and research. According to Bryman (2016), institutional stakeholders engage in a democratic way of learning to explore their local communities and develop social and economic transformations that would positively impact their own lives. Ultimately, scholars and researchers from various institutions bring their democratic views on local socioeconomic transformations to international academic conversations promoted through virtual collaborations (O'Dowd, 2023).

For all three groups of interviewees, leadership plays a strategic role in research and funding through international partnerships with constituencies across borders to promote IoC as a scholastic model to situate the institution in the global realm of research and innovation and to secure participation in international academic activities. Theorists in international education have highlighted funding as one consistent challenge to institutionalizing internationalization in general (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; Leask, 2015). In this study, however, the motivations for the leadership to address this challenge are the positionality of Protea University on the stage of global education and to make transparent a local democratic approach to IoC shaped by the norms of inclusiveness of all students within the international and intercultural academic learning setting. In this perspective, the integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum at Protea University becomes unnecessary if there is no balance between indigenous and foreign cultural aspects of teaching and learning. Just as in theories put forth in previous studies by Almeida et al. (2019), Jackson (2019), and O'Dowd (2023), the balance may be achieved through international collaborative learning, usage of technology, and experiential learning which are identified in the study as strategies to implement IoC. Strategies, challenges, and opportunities to enact IoC are findings that respond to the second research question.

Across all three groups, participants in the study disclosed that using technology brings the world of international education closer to students at Protea University. While, for example, language is the icebreaker to promoting cognitive understanding of local communities in various national contexts (as explained by Michaela, a French instructor at Protea University), the technology represents an instrument that helps students develop multilingual skills (Jackson, 2019; O'Dowd, 2023). As previous studies underscored, (Hagenmeier, 2017; Huang, 2006; Jackson, 2019; Jon, 2013) technology sustains participation in international collaborative learning and teaching and positions students, faculty, and researchers also from Protea University as active players in global learning without the need to travel. The addition to the theory on the role of technology is that in this study, the participants explained the government and institutional involvement to make technology accessible to underprivileged groups of students during unprecedented times. The government provided free data to students to continue their education during the pandemic while constituents from Protea University delivered laptops to students' doorsteps.

Previous studies also emphasized that experiential learning is an element of the international curriculum, mostly of the cocurricular activities to enhance students' academic performance (Karim et al., 2013; Leask, 2009, 2015). At Protea University the participants in the study considered that hands-on

experience needs to be integrated within the teaching module; it needs to be “in the studios and study halls” (Dr. Paul, Visual Arts), it needs to happen at the time of students’ participation in study abroad (Dr. Moek, School of Education)—the concept of hands-on experience should not simply float around as an idea that one day students will put into practice what they have learned in theory.

Funding, bureaucracy, and the role of leadership as blockers to the enactment of IoC are not unique findings of this study; other theorists such as de Wit and Hunter (2015), Leask (2015), Almeida et al. (2019), and Green and Whitsed (2013) already mentioned these challenges. Academics’ unique perspective in this study, however, is that there is an opportunity to enact IoC in each challenge. First, members in the study understand that there must be a more inclusive approach to the internationalization of IoC, in which the voices of a wider range of institutional stakeholders need to be heard. Second, the participants in the study suggested new policies when dealing with funding issues, such as fee waivers for students and participants in international education conferences, internal funding allocated for the implementation of IoC, and strategic international partnerships without challenges from bureaucratic procedures and institutional policies. Lastly, the role of leadership is essential to creating opportunities to implement IoC. The leadership needs to be “personally involved and invested” (Dr. Moek, executive dean of school of education) in the process of IoC, as well as a facilitator to create a comfortable space for communication (Dr. Craft, deputy vice chancellor for learning and teaching)

Decolonialization for and Effective Institutional Definition of International Curriculum

The participants in the study stated repeatedly that international and intercultural dimensions are already integrated in the content and delivery of the curriculum. If this means internationalization of curriculum then, international curriculum is colonialized and ignores local diversity and local needs. The participants in the study cannot grasp how, according to the internationalization strategies implemented so far, IoC helps students at Protea University to develop competencies to solve global issues that affect the local communities in which they live. According to the results of this study, a rationalized approach to implementing an effective IoC is to first decolonialize its content, teaching, and learning methods from the Western and Northern influence. This does not necessarily mean the elimination of all intercultural and international dimensions already present in curriculum content; rather, there is a call for transparent and more complete definitions and understandings of IoC.

The participants linked the responses on the definition of international curriculum to the status quo of internationalization as a Western and English process and not to Leask’s (2015) definition of international curriculum which serves as a point of reference in PFIHESA (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). While Leask’s (2015) definition of IoC mentions “international and intercultural and/ or global dimensions” as general terms as theorists perceive them, the responses from participants in the study are more aligned with Heleta and Chasi’s (2022) definition which highlights the transparency of local diversity as a main characteristic of internationalization of higher education.

The participants were specific that the definition needs to be transparent, and each individual must be able to find a reflection of their own identity within the definition. International skills can also reside in the definition of IoC as attributes that make an individual competent to communicate, work, and solve issues affecting the quality of life within the local multicultural communities. Once an individual masters IIS as they apply to the benefit of the local communities, then these competencies may be redirected and applied within global settings. The progression from local to global international competencies promotes multicultural critical thinking and integrates local communities and their way of solving socioeconomic, political, and cultural issues within global contexts. This view on the definition contradicts the so-called Western and English perspectives, where global dimensions need to be integrated within the existing curriculum content and learning process (Knight, 2003; Leask, 2015). According to participants in the study, the curriculum is already filled with such perspectives and does not benefit learners; moreover, it does not acknowledge local diversity. It is important to highlight that the pandemic did not seem to influence the overall views of participants on the meaning of international curriculum. In the participants’ perspectives, IoC remains a scholastic model that can be customized to alienate the content of programs of

study and delivery of knowledge from colonial influence to develop set of competencies to solve issues caused by ongoing socioeconomic and political transformations.

Questions in the interview protocol were directed to also understand the pragmatic aspects of the internationalization of the curriculum. The responses underscored that the internationalization of curriculum as an institutional policy was *fluid*, a characteristic caused by the pandemic which changed the practical aspects of such a policy. If before the pandemic, international academic mobility, such as incoming international students and visiting scholars, as well as study abroad experiences, influenced the design and practice of international curriculum, during the pandemic, these activities were at a standstill—phenomena that were also underscored by theorists of internationalization (Altbach & de Wit, 2020a, 2020b). Therefore, a more static initiative to implement international academic collaboration and research took place at Protea University during the pandemic. Such a shift required more technological resources to facilitate online collaboration and teaching within the institutional setting and with peers across borders. Regardless of whether in theory or practice, the views that emphasized local diversity, multilingualism, and indigenous cultures, as well as decolonization of curriculum, as essential characteristics of the international curriculum were not associated with the pandemic.

Diversity and Inclusion in International Curriculum in the Institutional Context

The consistent perspective among the responses from interviewees was that the development of social good in the local context through teaching and learning, as underscored by theorists (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Heleta & Chasi, 2022; de Wit & Hunter, 2015; de Wit et al., 2017; Leask, 2009), cannot be achieved unless diversity and inclusion are at the core of the institutional approach to internationalizing the curriculum. The assumptions based on the responses from the participants in this study highlight that local multiculturalism should be represented in the internationalization policies and international curriculum strategies, rather than implementing global diversity within the existing teaching and learning methods. The indigenous cultures and languages should be preserved, and the genuineness of local cultures and languages should not be lost in the process of internationalization at large.

At Protea University, the instruments used to implement international curriculum are international collaboration and research, technology, and cross-border experiential learning. While using these instruments, the international curriculum should be the engine that drives the creation of a learning space that promotes diversity, and inclusion of indigenous cultures, and languages within the global academic arena, and not a learning space that promotes foreign understanding of local diversity. Further, it is suggested that the process for internationalization of curriculum within the institutional context that uses international collaboration and research, technology, and cross-border experiential learning should be designed following criteria that acknowledge the local cultural differences related to wider global diversity.

CONCLUSION

Implications for Future Practice, Limitations, and Future Research

This study was not designed to yield a model of IoC that fits all, but it does stand out. The fact that the research site is not a Northern or Western institution eradicates the norm established by Northern and Western paradigms for the implementation of international curriculum, showing that it is not always the case that the only institutions that embrace internationalization are from Northern and Western higher education systems. Further, four practices are suggested in this study for implementing IoC as an inclusive policy which may serve as guidance for other metropolitan institutions to design and implement a customized international curriculum.

The first practice is an inclusive approach to defining and implementing IoC which accounts for the voices of various institutional stakeholders in the design of international curriculum. It is also a practice that accepts all aspects of diversity and not a collective institutional identity. In the second practice, the geographic positionality of the institution matters. The academics who design IoC are invited to acknowledge global issues that affect local communities and even more, to identify international interdependence, which would help students learn how to solve global issues that affect their communities.

Sometimes, international interdependence does not need to transcend continental borders. By applying this type of practicum, the institution identifies specific international and intercultural dimensions that would speak to local needs and challenges for academic enhancement and development of skills that would support employability on regional, yet international markets.

The third practice emerged from interviewees' understanding that in each challenge there's an opportunity to implement IoC if there's a deep knowledge of the institutional academic community, its positionality within national and international academic systems, and the issues that impede implementation of IoC. Lastly, defining each element in the meaning of IoC according to local traditions and socioeconomic diversity is a must for an institutional customized international curriculum. Various cognitive skills, social behaviors, and attitudes to collaborative international learning may impact the design of international curricula.

If accepting the previous theory developed by theorists in the field that IoC needs to be tailored to fit institutional possibilities and needs, then the theory that emerged in this study is that the design and practice of international curriculum is a bottom-up strategy. Previous research established that there's no one model to follow for IoC however, institutions and national policies in higher education accepted as the framework Leask's (2015) definition of IoC and other working definitions for the internationalization of higher education in general (Knight, 1994, 2004), Comprehensive Internationalization (Hudzik, 2011,2015), Internationalization at Home(Beelen & Jones, 2015),and Internationalization with a purpose, for social good (de Wit & Hunter, 2015). According to this study, the enactment of IoC should not start from a pre-established definition but from an inclusive perspective of institutional stakeholders on the meaning and practice of IoC as it applies to the needs of the students to become wider thinkers and to promote diversity of thought. Suppose a clear understanding of IoC as well as instruments for its implementation are identified at the institutional level. In that case, institutional stakeholders might be able to offer solutions to each challenge that affects the enactment of the international curriculum.

Despite the progress made through this study to add to the empirical literature on the interpretation of IoC, more research needs to be done on the topic of international curriculum. According to this study, essential elements that need to be transparent in the definition and that shape unique models of IoC at the institutional level are socioeconomic inequalities, local diversity, representation of geographic regions, and indigenous cultures. In further studying on unique models of IoC researchers should consider a missing element in this study, such as a more inclusive approach to the equal cultural, social, and racial representation of participants. The responses from members might be influenced according to their social, cultural, and racial status. Other future studies may research students' perspectives on the internationalization of the curriculum.

ENDNOTES

1. *NFT* stands for Non-Fungible Tokens, which is a digital artifact used to reflect real-world assets such as art and music.
2. As explained by Heleta and Chasi (2022): "Internationalization of higher education is a critical and comparative process of the study of the world and its complexities, past and present inequalities and injustices, and possibilities for a more equitable and just future for all. Through teaching, learning, research and engagement, internationalization fosters epistemic plurality and integrates critical anti-racist and anti-hegemonic learning about the world from diverse global perspectives to enhance the quality and relevance of education" (pp. 9–10).

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