

# Institutional Practices for Internationalization of Curriculum at the University of Juba, South Sudan

Irene Etomaru<sup>1</sup>, Adrew Kiri<sup>2</sup>, Kadian Wanyama<sup>3</sup> & Akuei Kuol<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> East African School of Higher Education Studies and Development (EASHED), College of Education and External Studies (CEES), Makerere University. P.I Box,7062, Kampala Uganda

<sup>2</sup> Directorate of Research and Publications, University of Juba. Box, 82, Juba South Sudan

<sup>3</sup> School of Management Sciences, University of Juba. Box, 82, Juba South Sudan

<sup>4</sup> Directorate of ICT, University of Juba. Box, 82, Juba South Sudan

Correspondence: Andrew Kiri, Director of Research and Publications, University of Juba, Juba, 82. Juba, South Sudan. Tel: 256-772-438-291. E-mail: kiri\_adnrew@yahoo.com

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## Abstract

In recent decades, internationalization has become a significant focus in global higher education. Curriculum internationalization plays a key role in this process. This article assesses the practices for curriculum internationalization at the University of Juba, using data from the respondents purposively selected participants. The findings reveal limited integration of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions in the curriculum, which may hinder the university's international competitiveness. Consequently, the University of Juba should develop a comprehensive strategy and framework to effectively implement curriculum internationalization.

**Keywords:** curriculum, integration, international, intercultural, multicultural, University of Juba

## 1. Introduction

Today, universities across the world use internationalization as a means of status building. Admitting international students can enhance the institution's profile and ranking, the employability of its graduates, revenue generation, and the quality of teaching, learning, and research outputs and collaborations (De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Marginson, 2023).

Internationalization of higher education grew to become pervasive in the twentieth century during the period of the two world wars with increased focus on international cooperation and exchange in higher education. This was seen in the creation of the Institute of International Education (IIE) in 1919 and through the Fulbright program in the United States, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) in Germany in 1925, and the British Council in the UK in 1934. During this period, the declared focus of internationalization was on fostering peace and mutual understanding under the umbrella of the League of Nations (De Wit et al., 2015).

The Cold War period fueled the focus on national security and foreign policy in the internationalization of higher education. This led to the development of foreign language programs and area studies in the United States; the country provided technical assistance and capacity-building to developing countries in Europe and other parts of the industrialized world. (De Wit et al., 2015). Competition developed between the United States and the USSR to provide aid for the development of education in developing countries; both nations sent academic staff to develop curricula and train staff in the developing world. (Holzner & Greenwood, 1995).

Internationalization of the curriculum is one of the contributing factors to the internationalization of institutions of higher learning. Leask (2009) defined internationalization of the curriculum as "the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the preparation, delivery, and outcomes of a program of study, so that it purposefully develops all students' international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens." Leask later revised her definition of internationalization of the curriculum as "the incorporation of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study" (Leask, 2020).

Drawing from Leask (2009, 2020), in this study internationalization of the curriculum is defined as the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning activities, assessment, and support services of programs of study. Furthermore, an internationalized curriculum is regarded as engaging students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity; purposefully developing students' international and intercultural perspectives to give them the knowledge, skills, and self-awareness they need to participate effectively as citizens and professionals in a global society; and moving beyond traditional boundaries and dominant paradigms and preparing students to deal with uncertainty by opening their minds and developing their ability to think both creatively and critically. Such a curriculum is supported by services and co-curricular activities focused on the development of intercultural competence and international perspectives.

This study adapted Theodore Schatzki's principles of practice as a theoretical framework to examine the institutional practices for internationalization of the curriculum at the University of Juba. Schatzki defines practice as a temporally evolving, open-ended set of doings and sayings linked by four principles: practical understanding, rules, tele-affective structure, and general understanding (Schatzki, 2002).

Practical understanding comprises the know-how and implicit knowledge of those responsible for internationalization to conduct, recognize, and react to other activities presumed necessary in the internationalization of a university. Rules, in this context, refer to policies, strategies, governance, procedures, and statements that will make internationalization possible. Tele-affective structure refers to the goals to be achieved through internationalization and how these goals are shaped by various emotional components and motivations (Clegg & Cunha, 2019). The goals of internationalization, such as enhancing the institution's profile, improving graduate employability, and improving the quality of teaching and learning, are shaped by the institution's vision, mission, and policies. The last principle, general understanding, refers to the values that shape practices; in this context, the values of a university as expressed through its vision, mission, and policies must be upheld in the university's drive for internationalization.

The University of Juba aspires to become an internationalized university; this is seen in the vision and mission expressed in the Juba University Master Plan (Akec, 2014). The university has established a directorate for international and alumni affairs, though anecdotal evidence points to the inadequacy of its operational practices in comprehensively approaching internationalization (Akec, 2016). Internationalization of the curriculum is one of the contributing factors to the internationalization of institutions of higher learning; however, the extent of the institutional practices for internationalization of the curriculum at the University of Juba is not yet well understood. This scenario may retard the attainment of the university's aspirations toward internationalization.

This study addresses the challenges and shortcomings in integrating international perspectives into the curriculum at the University of Juba, emphasizing the urgent need for a cohesive framework that promotes global competencies, intercultural awareness, and adherence to international standards within academic programs, which are essential to preparing students for a globalized world. The research identifies significant obstacles, including limited faculty training, inadequate resources, and a lack of established policies, which collectively hinder the effective internationalization of the university's curriculum. By examining these issues, the study seeks to formulate actionable strategies that enhance the university's educational offerings and create a more globally oriented learning environment, which will benefit both students and the broader community. Furthermore, the findings provide valuable insights for policymakers at the University of Juba in developing sound policies for curriculum internationalization, and they offer guidance for administrators and managers in planning and implementing activities related to this endeavor.

Therefore, the objective of this study was to explore and analyze the current practices, challenges, and perspectives related to the internationalization of the curriculum at the University of Juba. It aimed to assess existing strategies and stakeholder insights, identify barriers to implementation, highlight opportunities for development, and provide recommendations for creating a comprehensive framework that enhances the integration of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions into the curriculum, thereby better preparing graduates for a globalized world.

## 2. Literature Review

In a study conducted in Spain, O'Dowd (2018) explored the role of online intercultural exchanges in enhancing language learning and cultural awareness among university students. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data from participants involved in an online exchange program with students from various countries. The findings showed significant improvements in students' language proficiency and intercultural competence as a result of their participation in structured, technology-mediated exchanges. Students reported increased confidence in their ability to communicate across cultures and a deeper understanding of cultural differences. Despite these positive outcomes, the study also highlighted some knowledge gaps, particularly concerning the long-term effects of such exchanges on students' intercultural skills and the potential barriers that some students face in fully engaging with online partners.

López and Sánchez (2020) conducted their research in a multinational educational setting, focusing on the efficacy of digital collaborative projects in developing intercultural competencies among higher education students. Employing a quasi-experimental design, the researchers compared student groups who engaged in digital projects with international peers against those who worked locally without cross-cultural collaboration. The study's findings indicated that students participating in digital collaborative projects exhibited significant gains in their intercultural competencies, including better communication skills, increased appreciation for diversity, and enhanced teamwork abilities. However, the authors recognized a knowledge gap in understanding how different cultural contexts and educational backgrounds among participants might influence the outcomes of such collaborative projects, suggesting the need for further research in diverse settings.

Zhao and Liu (2023) conducted their research in China, investigating the effectiveness of virtual reality (VR) technology in bridging cultural gaps within multinational teams. The researchers employed an experimental design, dividing students into two groups: one that engaged in VR-based experiences and another that participated in traditional instructional methods. The findings indicated that students exposed to VR experiences reported higher levels of engagement with diverse cultures and improved dynamics within their teams. Participants noted that the immersive nature of VR created a more empathetic understanding of their peers' cultural backgrounds. Despite the promising results, the study identified knowledge gaps regarding the accessibility of VR technology in various educational contexts and how such resources can be effectively integrated into existing curricula to enhance their impact on learning outcomes.

## 3. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing phenomenology design. The phenomenology design allowed for a rich and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions of the institutional practices for the internationalization of the curriculum at the University of Juba (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), which is particularly relevant in this context given the University's unique historical and cultural context.

The study was conducted at the University of Juba in South Sudan. Both primary and secondary data were collected through interviewing and review of relevant documents, such as university policies, strategic plans, and reports on internationalization initiatives. These provided a contextual understanding of the university's practices on internationalization of the curriculum. Data collection encompassed the period from the start of the implementation of the current strategic plan for the university of Juba to date, which corresponds with the period when the university is implementing its strategic direction of becoming an internationalized university.

Using purposive sampling, primary data was gathered from participants in key positions, including top management; the Directorates of International Relations and Alumni Affairs, Academic Affairs, Human Resource Management, Internationally Funded Projects, and University Enterprise Development; the research department; and the university board. Participants were selected based on their roles and contributions to the university, which are essential for comprehending institutional practices and decisions regarding the internationalization of the curriculum, as noted by Creswell (2007).

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to represent the participants. Those from top management were represented as TM1, TM2, and TM3; Directors of the units were represented as PD1, PD2, PD3, PD4, and PD5; while members of the university board were represented as UB1, UB2, UB3, UB4, UB5, and UB6. Participants were asked about their experiences with and views on institutional practices for the integration of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions in the content of the curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment, and support services for programs of study.

Thematic content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data obtained from key informant interviews and document reviews using Atlas. Ti 9 software. This enabled the extraction of meaningful patterns, themes, and relationships from the data.

#### 4. Findings

This study investigated the institutional practices related to the internationalization of the curriculum at the University of Juba in South Sudan, focusing on participants' experiences with and perspectives on integrating international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions into curriculum content, teaching, assessment, and support services. Document reviews revealed an absence of specific policies or frameworks for curriculum development and review. Participants expressed limited knowledge about the internationalization of the curriculum, suggesting that such practices were not widespread at the university.

However, they recognized the importance of these practices and mentioned nascent efforts toward internationalizing the curriculum. For example, TM3 stated, "I believe that it is essential for our students to have a global perspective, and that's why we are committed to developing more internationally-focused courses and programs." Additionally, UB3 noted, "We've introduced some new courses, but we need to do more to integrate international perspectives into our curriculum."

While participants expressed optimism, the current extent of internationalization efforts remains unclear. The University has been benchmarking with institutions in neighboring countries and encouraging faculty to incorporate international perspectives into the curriculum. As illustrated by PD1, "We have been working to develop more internationally focused courses and programs . . . [T]he curriculum has been designed with similarities to other regional universities, such as Makerere University, University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Moi University, Egerton University, [and] University of Eldoret, among others." Furthermore, TM2 emphasized, "We also have been encouraging faculty to incorporate international perspectives and case studies into their teaching." Despite these strides, challenges remain, as UB3 remarked, "We're working on developing more globalized courses, but it's a challenge."

The findings indicate that the internationalization of the curriculum at Juba University is in a nascent stage. While there are aspirations for this process, the institutional practices to actualize those aspirations are not sufficiently developed. This is evidenced by the lack of clear policies, frameworks, or guidelines for curriculum development and review at the university, resulting in limited incorporation of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions in curriculum content, teaching and learning, assessment, and support services. Moreover, technology-enhanced teaching and learning resources are underutilized.

Several challenges impede the actualization of curriculum internationalization at the University, including limited resources (human, financial, and technological); insufficient understanding of internationalization principles and practices among academic staff; and inadequate support for lecturers wishing to enhance their teaching skills and knowledge in this area. TM2 expressed, "We have been working to develop more internationally-focused courses . . . but we need to do more to integrate international perspectives into our curriculum." This lack of prioritization risks leaving students unprepared to engage effectively with global issues. The absence of clear guidelines and procedures for curriculum development further exacerbates inconsistencies, potentially affecting the quality and international competitiveness of the curriculum.

The findings highlight a critical need for the university to develop a comprehensive framework that guides the integration of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions into its curriculum, teaching, assessment, and support services, while also emphasizing the development of technology-enhanced learning resources that support these efforts. The statement on "technology-enhanced learning resources" emphasizes the need for the university to develop a structured framework for incorporating international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions in its curriculum while prioritizing digital tools and resources. Through integrating multimedia resources, e-learning platforms, and collaborative tools, the University can create a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment that enriches students' experiences and prepares them for success in a global context.

## 5. Discussion

This study assessed the institutional practices for integration of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions in the content of the curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment, and support services for programs of study at the University of Juba. The findings show that the University of Juba aspires to actualize the internationalization of the curriculum, but the extent of the institutional practices to actually do so was not clear. This implies that limited attention was given to the internationalization of the curriculum. This is demonstrated by the lack of clear policies, frameworks, guidelines, and procedures for curriculum development and review at the university. As such, there was limited integration of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions in the content of the curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment and support services for programs of study, and use of technology-enhanced teaching and learning resources.

Several challenges limited the actualization of curriculum internationalization at the University of Juba. These included limited resources (human, financial, and technological), limited understanding of internationalization principles and practices among academic staff, and limited support for lecturers to develop their teaching skills and knowledge of internationalization. This suggests a lack of prioritization, potentially resulting in students being ill-prepared to engage with global issues. The absence of clear guidelines and procedures for curriculum development and review further compounds the problem, leading to potential inconsistencies and affecting the quality and international competitiveness of the curriculum at the University of Juba.

The findings reveal the need for the University of Juba to develop a comprehensive strategy and framework to guide the actualization of curriculum internationalization. These findings are in congruence with previous studies. Marginson (2023) indicated that key issues to be considered in the internationalization of the curriculum are the flow of resources, knowledge, and people; the setting of program terms and contents; the division of labor; and the level of independence or dependency. All of these issues can only be addressed by means of a clear institutional strategy. Van der Schee et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of internationalization as a strategy for fostering global citizenship. Similarly, the study conducted by Al-Shammari et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of considering the complex interplay between curriculum design, cultural context, and student learning outcomes in the internationalization process. The University of Juba faces similar challenges in implementing effective curriculum internationalization.

The limited attention to internationalization in curriculum development, limited integration of internationalization principles, and lack of clear guidelines and procedures for curriculum development and review are all issues that have been identified in previous studies. This study shows the limited integration of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions in the content of the curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment and support services for programs of study, and use of technology-enhanced teaching and learning resources. This is contrary to current global trends. Al-Shammari et al., (2020) Demonstrate that virtual exchanges play a major role in actualizing curriculum internationalization, especially in the Global South. Ndaipa et al. (2023) found that in the context of Mozambique, some curriculum internationalization practices highlighted opportunities for a more decolonized approach, as seen in the integration of local languages and the practice of ethnoscience (focusing mainly on ethnomathematics), and some practices related to local languages and cultures. Similarly, according to Wit and Altbachs (2021), new approaches to decolonizing the curriculum now put less emphasis on the Anglosphere and Western dominance in the internationalization of the curriculum.

In light of these findings, it is clear that there is a need for further research to develop a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved in the internationalization of the curriculum to guide institutions in their efforts to enhance the international dimensions of their curriculum. Thus, more studies are needed to address knowledge gaps in the field of curriculum internationalization in the developing world, particularly in Africa. Research into the institutional practices for internationalizing the curriculum in the context of African countries has been a neglected area. Shahjahan et al. (2024) identified the underrepresentation of curriculum internationalization literature published in English from the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Similarly, Al-Shammari et al. (2020) highlighted a knowledge gap in terms of understanding the specific strategies and approaches that can effectively address the challenges and leverage the opportunities for curriculum internationalization in the UAE higher education context.

In summary, the findings of this study highlight the importance of considering the complex interplay among the institutional context, cultural context, and above all student learning outcomes, in the need for strategic planning and resourcing in the internationalization of the curriculum. In terms of implications for practice, the findings of this study suggest that institutions must prioritize the development of global citizenship among future educators by integrating internationalization principles into their curricula. Additionally, institutions need to provide training and support for academic staff to develop their understanding of internationalization principles and practices.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the internationalization of the curriculum at the University of Juba was in a nascent state. Failure to integrate international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions into the curriculum may potentially result in students being ill-prepared to engage with global issues. This will affect the international competitiveness of the curriculum at the University of Juba. Although the University of Juba aspires to actualize the internationalization of the curriculum, the extent of the institutional practices to actually do so was not clear. This was demonstrated by the lack of clear policies, frameworks, guidelines, and procedures for curriculum development and review at the university. As such, there was limited integration of international, intercultural, and multicultural dimensions in the content of the curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment and support services for programs of study, and use of technology-enhanced teaching and learning resources.

## 7. Recommendations

Internationalizing the curriculum is an important step towards creating a globally relevant learning environment. The University of Juba should integrate international perspectives, cross-cultural understanding, and global issues into its curriculum. This can be achieved by incorporating international case studies, offering courses on global topics, and providing opportunities for intercultural learning. Aligning the curriculum with international standards and promoting critical thinking and global citizenship will prepare students for the challenges of a rapidly changing global landscape.

Embracing technology-enhanced learning tools and resources is also recommended. The University should invest in e-learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and digital libraries to enhance online and distance learning opportunities. By leveraging technology, the University can provide access to a wider range of educational resources, promote interactive and engaging learning experiences, and cater to the diverse needs of international students.

## 8. Integrated Curriculum Internationalization Framework

To advance the internationalization of its curriculum, the University of Juba can implement an integrated curriculum internationalization framework based on Theodore Schatzki's principles. This framework emphasizes practical understanding among faculty, the establishment of specific policies and guidelines for curriculum development, and the alignment of internationalization goals with the institution's vision and mission. Essential components include developing robust policies, enhancing faculty training programs, and allocating necessary resources. Additionally, fostering international partnerships with benchmark institutions, promoting student involvement in global initiatives, and implementing evaluation mechanisms will strengthen the integration of international, intercultural, and global perspectives into the academic offerings of the University (Leask, 2020; Schatzki, 2002).

To ensure effective implementation, the university should establish an internationalization task force composed of faculty, administrators, and student representatives to oversee the framework's development. This task force can facilitate a community of practice among faculty to share strategies and experiences regarding curriculum integration. Moreover, regular workshops can be organized to emphasize the importance of global citizenship and multicultural competencies. Continuous feedback and assessment mechanisms will allow for ongoing improvements to the framework, ensuring that the University of Juba remains responsive to the evolving demands of higher education and effectively prepares students for engagement in an interconnected global landscape (De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Ndaipa et al., 2023).

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