A MULTIPHASE MIXED METHOD APPROACH TO ASSESS INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION POLICIES

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Abstract

Higher education internationalization (HEI) has become a significant priority to policy makers and education providers around the globe. Motivated by globalization, HEI has become politically strategic and economically promising for nations, governments and universities to position themselves in a global market. The paper’s aim is to provide a methodology for the study of a dynamic and reformative South African HEI framework based on the transformative force (i.e. adjustment of change, learning, shared knowledge, internationalization, globalization an institutionalized memory) of HEI in the People’s Republic of China. A multiphase-mixed methods approach is used in determining a South African higher education reformative internationalization framework based on Chinese experiences. The interpretivist paradigm constitute the underlying research approach. Multiphase mixed methods will be employed to collect, analyze and integrate quantitative and qualitative data and will allow for a more complete and synergistic usage of data than separate quantitative and qualitative methodology. The multiphase mixed methods design includes three phases that come together to answer the focal research question. The focal research question and will be addressed through content analysis (Phase I), in-depth interviews (Phase II) and surveys (Phase III). The significance of this research is aimed at arousing a better understanding of higher education policy issues in South Africa from a transformation perspective. This research will contribute to theory with respect to how internationalization and globalization influence higher education and the position of higher education in economic and social development. Furthermore, this research may also have practical significance for higher education policy and practice in South Africa and other comparatively positioned countries. It might expand knowledge and awareness of how internationalization influences the unique circumstances and challenges of higher education reform in developing countries, especially a country in search of positioning itself in a globalized knowledge economy.

Keywords: Higher Education Internationalisation (HEI), Multiphase Mixed Methods, Transformative Forces, Reformative Framework, Internationalisation.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, governments and higher education (HE) institutions worldwide are subject to significant functional and organizational changes to meet the growing demands of the global knowledge-based economy. In the existing global competitive landscape, governments and HE institutions also need an inward-looking approach responding to local, regional and national socio-economic needs and conditions [1], especially in developing countries. Consequently, globalization and higher education internationalization (HEI) are global change drivers, with HEI moving from the periphery to priority in strategic planning and policy development of governments and institutions [2], [3], [4]. Current scholarly research on HEI focus primarily on descriptive analyses, endeavoring to characterize internationalization rather than analyzing internationalization as a distinct conceptual policy field [5]. In the broad range of internationalization research, limited research exist of the theoretical, disciplinary or methodological links with higher education policy [6], [7]. In line with the findings of Teichler [8] and Tight [9], research of HEI policy is in a pre-paradigmatic phase with limited conceptual base, implicit theoretical perspective and broader engagement with theory. By exploring internationalization in the global competitive HE landscape, suggestions for policy formulation, strategic planning, development strategies and academic endeavors can be formulated consistent with existing circumstances of governments and institutions.

The aim of this paper is to provide a multiphase mixed method approach to assess internationalization of HE policies based on the transformative force (i.e. adjustment of change, learning, shared knowledge,
internationalization, globalization an institutionalized memory) of HE institutions. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the principal question: How can a South African HE reformative internationalization framework be developed based on Chinese experiences? Within the limits of the aim of the paper, the accompanying three secondary questions are formulated and will guide the data collection and data analysis process: What are the internationalization factors in the various reform phases of China’s HE?; How appropriate are the internationalization factors of China to HE transformation in South Africa?; and How can China’s HEI framework be contextualized for South Africa? The selection of China as reference research setting is based upon the rationale that China is the world’s largest HE provider [10]; cast to adjust to modern-day challenges [11]; its HE historic system evolution is well documented [12]; has given priority to HE and promulgated various laws and policies to govern HE [13]; accentuates the global reputation of universities to develop the country [14]; and the opening up of China present severe challenges to China’s HE system [15].

Hence, the paper is structured as follows. The first section of the paper concisely assess literature on internationalization of HE to focus on existing challenges in current research. The second section presents a multiphase mixed method approach to assess HEI policies, whereas the paper will conclude with the anticipated contribution of the methodology for HEI policy assessment.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Governments and HE institutions, as part of the global competitive landscape, are simultaneously pushed and pulled by globalization forces [16], [17]. Globalization forces is consequently redirecting the raison d’être of HE and is considered as an academic revolution phenomena [18]. As interlocutors of the knowledge society [19], [20], institutions of HE are challenged to strategically respond to these global transformative forces. The knowledge society is thus transforming HE systems and directing knowledge creation, dissemination and utilization that influences education, research and innovation policies of countries [21]. Institutions of HE, as loci of knowledge creation and innovation, is centrally located in the global knowledge society and a country’s global competitiveness largely depends on the application of knowledge and innovation [22]. Equally, internationalization is creating a platform to expand specialized forms of knowledge superseding country borders by redefining spatial context in which scholars, universities and HE stakeholders coexist. HE institutions for this reason are a cognitive driver and an innovation locale [23]. From this perspective HE policy makers and governments are focused on improving strategies and policies to advance international competitiveness [16].

Since the mid-twentieth century, a robust transformation of internationalization of HE was observed relating to role players, rationales, scope, objectives, terminologies, activities, institutional approaches and the role of internationalization [24]. Whereas internationalization as a transformative change driver, guide the development of HE in numerous countries [25]. Apart from the global transformation, the main thrust of internationalization in Africa and Asia remained marginalized until the 1990s following mostly Euro-American reform ideas. In the beginning of the 2000s, Asia restructured their education policies and became a global contender in HE and a preferred choice for international scholars [26], [27]. The Asia internationalization reform created a geographical alteration from Euro-American popularity to specifically China. In contrast, Africa’s HE remains marginalized [28] and is in need of innovative structural transformation to adapt to the global knowledge-based economy.

The establishment of an effective and enduring HE system is an imperative prerequisite for the advancement of HE to ensure the positioning of intellectual capacity to improve national strength and competitiveness of any country. The underlying principle of internationalization of HE is to create prominent social and cultural networks [29], improve economic development [30], share knowledge [31], and contribute to an inclusive, caring, affluent and multinational world [32]. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the significance of internationalization in HE, current research on the topic are primarily done by occasional researching practitioners and applied higher education researchers that focus their research on practical, rather than methodological issues [8:212].

Internationalization has been the focal point of a significant body of knowledge in the last decade [33], [34], [35], [36], with an escalation in scale and scope since 2007 [37], [38]. As the most studied theme in HE policy [39], numerous scholars regard HEI as a reaction to globalization [40]. Although the term internationalization of HE is in high regard on institutional, regional, national, and international agendas, internationalization is inconsistently defined [41], [42] and regarded as a portmanteau term [43], [44], [45]. Due to evolving political, economic, socio-cultural, global, national, local, institutional and academic demands, internationalization of HE is treated differently by countries, HE institutions and their programme offerings [46].
While nearly all national governments and HEIs globally are keen to promote internationalization, internal and external forces influence the direction and extent of internationalization endeavors [47]. Internationalization of HE encompass a variety of forms and characteristics and attaining a typical definition of internationalization has not proven easy [18]. The most widely acknowledged definitions of internationalization of HE were developed by Altbach [48], De Wit [49], Elkin, Devjee and Farnsworth [50], Elkin, Fransworth and Templer [51], Knight [52], [53], [4], [54], Knight and De Wit [55], Knight and the International Association of Universities [56], and Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry [57]. The most cited definitions vis-à-vis internationalization of HE conclude that: Internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international/ intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution [55:8]; and Internationalization involves the incorporation of global, international, intercultural dimensions into goals, objectives, content and delivery of higher education [54:2]. The latter definition was amended numerous times, but in essence has stay largely unchanged.

For the purpose of this paper, internationalization of HE is framed as the dynamic engagement in the development of policies, plan, programmes, strategies and approaches at various management levels to propel internationality in HE.

Since the 1990s internationalization of HE developed into a significant area of research for scholars as well as in policy dialog [58], but remains at the pre-paradigmatic stage [59]. Internationalization endeavors have since then progressed from periodic activities to transformational efforts in HE. A positive relation exist between internationalization and the economy [60], politics [61], society [62], culture [63], academia [64], international security [65], education [55], and science and technology [66]. National policies on internationalization may be constructed based on a combination of the latter rationales driving internationalization policy and to remain a global contender, HE institutions need to maintain these rationales [49]. It is essential that HE institutions adopt a responsible internationalization approach in achieving the transformative agenda to uphold global reputations and competitiveness. The preceding is often associated with transformation of structures, standards and systems that may redefine HE policies [67]. Transformative internationalization creates not only new possibilities, but also debates for forward thinking institutions in reviewing the rationales, needs and procedures of HE [68]. Developing countries should not omit internationalization policies because they will risk becoming irrelevant in the global HE landscape. A transformative framework may be a fundamental instrument to understand countries, regions and institutions responses to internationalization including gaps between strategic aspiration and strategic reality [69].

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to answer the research aim of the paper, the research is located within the interpretivist paradigm to understand a complex education phenomenon, namely to propose a dynamic and reformative HEI framework for South Africa based on the experiences of China. The essential premise of applying mix methods is that it will allow for a more complete and synergistic usage of data than separate quantitative and qualitative methodology. Further strengths include the recognition of various perspectives and paradigms, inclusion of more difficult questions than can be answered by only a quantitative or qualitative study, the need to simplify, contextualize, clarify and comprehend the research problem, and combining data collection and analysis to breach limitations in utilizing one method exclusively. The research will follow a three-phase approach, combining a multiphase mixed methods design and will be addressed through content analysis (Phase I), in-depth interviews (Phase II) and surveys (Phase III). The three-phase approach are discussed in the following sub sections.

3.1 Research approach of Phase I using qualitative content analysis

Content analysis, as a conventional qualitative research analysis, will be used to determine the internationalization factors in the various reform phases of China’s HE. The theoretical sampling technique is selected for Phase 1. Sampling in content analysis follows a similar process as in survey research, but as opposed to sampling people from a population, texts are sampled from a corpora. In Phase I, the corpora alludes to all the policy documents of China’s HE. The sampling units is the corpus, the six selected HE policies (HEP). These HEP, selected for their influence on internationalization, will be examined from a policy content perspective and organized according to subject classification. The six national policies include: Chinese Communist Party Central Committee (CCP CC) Decision on Educational System Reform; Outline for Reform and Development of Education in China; Action Plan for Revitalization of Education in the 21st Century; 2003-2007 Action Plan for Revitalization of Education;
The National Outline for Mid- and Long-Term Education Planning and Development; and Implementation Measures to Coordinate Development of World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines Construction as part of the Thirteen Five Year Plan on Education.

These six national policies on HE incorporate both independent national internationalization policies, as well as general HE policies that refer to internationalization. These policies have been selected for analysis for various reasons. Firstly, these policies are all guideline policies, which affected the discourse and development of education in China. Moreover, they are exhaustive policies vis-à-vis all aspects of education governance. The depiction of internationalization in these policies demonstrates the degree to which the government perceives and is receptive to internationalization. Lastly, they are milestone policies defining the directions of education development within various timeframes. An examination of these policies issued during the 1980s to 2018 can thus demonstrate the evolving nature of internationalization over nearly four decades.

The policy documents will be analyzed using the qualitative content analysis technique. Three sequential stages will be utilized in the analysis of the data. The initial stage of Phase I will only use the first stage of the grounded theory methodology for data analysis, instead of a full grounded theory approach. To achieve the preceding, a core category at a high level of abstraction is pursued by using a progressive coding procedure of the collected data [70:205]. Open-coding, based on the first stage of grounded theory, will be used to search for conceptual articulations and substitutes of internationalization for instance international, world and global in every policy to shape similar concepts into categories or subcategories with conceptual names allocated to them [71]. It will be furthermore be used to determine the internationalization factors in the various reform phases of China’s HE, as opposed to creating a new theory. In the second stage of Phase I, comparison and differences of the recurrence of the articulations will be undertaken and categorized in relation to the characteristics of internationalization. During the last stage, the contexts in which the articulations are used will be analyzed to determine the objectives of HEI and the methods for achieving these objectives. Thus, the core categories central to HEI.

NVivo 11 (Version 11) will be used as qualitative analysis software to administer the research data. Applying this tool will enrich the analysis phase by arranging the different codes and categories quicker, and discovering relationships and connections more effectively.

3.2 Research approach of Phase II using qualitative in-depth interviews

The objective of Phase II is to determine the appropriateness of the internationalization factors of China to HE transformation in South Africa and will follow a qualitative approach framed within the interpretivist paradigm. The qualitative method of in-depth interviews is an applicable method for gathering data for Phase II as it permits open-ended exploration of topics and elicits responses that are couched in the unique words of the respondents [72:290]. In-depth interviews will therefore allow for credible, rich data collection, provide structure to direct discussion and flexibility to the respondent to provide further information. To ensure the preceding, selected respondents should have knowledge of and experiences in the HE environment [73].

The interview questions will be open-ended questions to provoke information from respondents [74]. Purposive homogeneous sampling will be adopted [75] and will focus on one subgroup where all sample members are similar, such as from a particular occupation or level in an organization [76]. The goal is to sample respondents that are relevant to the research question. Therefore, only government, university management, international offices, international students and other relevant HE stakeholders will be included in the sample.

The sample size estimation will not be statistically calculated as sampling will be based on extensive and rich data rather than representativeness. The guiding principle in determining the sample size, will be the attainment of saturation. The sample size estimation is grounded on the justification of Galvin [77], which indicated that saturation is largely achieved after 12 to 30 interviews and will last between 45 to 60 minutes. An interview schedule will be employed and interviews will be recorded to afford a complete verbal record, transcribed and analyzed by extracting critical items from the professional opinion of the interviewees [72:320].

Data will be gathered as indicated previously by means of in-depth interviews utilizing the Repertory Grid Interview Technique (RGT). Thematic analysis (TA), build on the theoretical six-phase approach of Braun and Clarke [78], will be used to find constructs and construct relationships. The six-phase approach includes familiarization of data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and
naming themes, and writing up. To analyze the indicators of internationalization, cluster analysis will be applied. NVivo (Version 11) and SPSS (Version 25) will be used for data analysis.

3.3 Research approach of Phase II using quantitative exploratory survey design

A quantitative research method will be employed for Phase III and an exploratory survey research design was selected to contextualize China’s HEI framework for South Africa. The exploratory survey will be cautiously planned and organized in design with the goal that the collected data can be statistically inferred on a population and will include the administration of a researcher-designed questionnaire, based on the results of Phase II. Questionnaires are appropriate due to its broad application in economic and management research, guarantee confidentiality, provide information in a brief timeframe, and acquire data about opinions, perceptions, behaviors and attitudes of a specific group in the HEI milieu. Phase III will use a non-probability, purposive, maximum variation sampling strategy to identify and select respondents. By means of maximum variation sampling the researcher intentionally identify respondents who will include opposing elements to the sample and have an extensive range of characteristics, behaviors, experiences, attributes and situations [79]. It is additionally suitable to manage sample bias. The objective in using maximum variation sampling is to create a reasonable small sample, mirror the diversity of individuals, represent a broad range of perspectives including average to more extreme perspectives and to gain greater insight into the current research phenomenon by viewing it from every angle. A sample will be selected from a specific population of senior managers and policy makers in the South African HE industry. The questionnaire will be designed using the Internet-based survey creator Survey Monkey to ease distribution of questionnaires as well as its capability to guarantee confidentiality.

SPSS (Version 25) will be used to analyze the survey data. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, factor analysis and construct analysis will be performed. Firstly, descriptive statistics will provide basic explanations and will include measurement of frequencies, percentages, averages and standard deviations. Secondly, to confirm scale reliability, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient will be used to measure the reliability or internal consistency of the questionnaire and will be set at the minimum required alpha coefficient of .70 or above [80]. Followed by factor analysis using the principal components extraction method and Varimax rotation. Lastly, to confirm the presence of construct validity, this research adopted the approach to assess convergent and discriminant validity simultaneously [81]. The purpose of construct validity is to logically analyze and test predicted relationships with other variables that should theoretically be related (convergent validity) or vary independently (discriminant validity). Convergent validity will be assessed by factor loading, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), whereas discriminant validity will be assessed by chi-square difference test and the average variance extracted analysis.

3.4 Field journal

A research journal will be kept to record subjective observations, spontaneous discussions, reflections and body language amid interactions with interview and survey respondents. The field journal will be beneficial in drawing conclusions that cannot solely be obtained through the interviews and questionnaires. Furthermore, the research journal may provide insight into the perceptions of the respondents, which they were not able to articulate verbally during the interview phase.

4 CONCLUSIONS

No country has all the solutions for the challenges posed by the 21st century, particularly in the HE environment. National conditions including economic, social, political and education realities are too complex to transfer from one country to another. However, views from different countries can propose methods that may prompt potential solutions to existing problems. An interpretation of the functioning of HEI policies can enable countries to observe themselves considering other countries’ performances. Through international comparisons, countries may perceive qualities and shortcomings in their own HE frameworks and may evaluate variations in HE practices that are unique or reflect differences observed in other countries. Governments are carefully considering international comparative policy analysis because it may improve social and economic conditions, and enable governments to organize resources to meet increased HE demands. Furthermore, South Africa and China are also members of the emerging national economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) consortium and
share some comparable positions and perspectives towards numerous international issues. Therefore, this research may provide a decision-making base and reference for HEI for both China as well as South Africa. Hence, the exploration of this topic is worth investigating from a global as well as comparative perspective.

In the landscape of HE, internationalization policies cannot be studied in isolation from transformative forces in the political and economic environments of countries and regions. Internationalization policies of countries and regions are advancing towards repositioning strategies, knowledge alliances and transforming knowledge into innovation and should thus not be regarded as a solution for the challenges of HE, but rather be treated as an exceedingly established foci with robust political inclinations [7]. Although internationalization has developed as an essential response to globalization, further analysis is required to align policies with opportunities and priorities of the global knowledge society that will respond to the 21st century's human capital needs and ideas. Alignment of internationalization policies could assist practitioners to align priorities of countries and regions strategically. The challenge however is to adopt internationalization policies that act in response to innovation advances, institution priorities and changes in HE.

Additionally, inadequate theoretical conceptualization, empiricism and methodological approaches about internationalization policy in reaction to the knowledge society remains a challenge. This paper contends that a multiphase mixed method approach may assist systematic knowledge collection in directing policy design, provide a novel methodology for analyzing HEI policies and the methodology can be replicated in other policy fields of HE.

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