ROUTLEDGE

Research with International Students

Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations

Edited by Jenna Mittelmeier, Sylvie Lomer and Kalyani Unkule

'*Research with International Students: Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations* is an essential text for anyone researching or teaching in the area of international education. This edited volume invites readers to take a reflexive, intersectional, power-conscious, and complexity-focused approach to research with international students. This approach challenges paternalistic research engagements and one-dimensional representations, and positions international students as knowledge producers. The authors go beyond simply critiquing the inequities that characterize international student experiences in order to grapple with the many epistemological, theoretical, and methodological challenges and possibilities involved in tracing the multiple systems, forces, and hierarchies that shape and are shaped by these experiences.'

Sharon Stein, *Assistant Professor, University of British Columbia*

'As a researcher currently examining the "Integration of international students into the entrepreneurial ecosystems within higher education" and situated between the realms of a former international student during my teens and returning as an international student as an adult, reading these chapters was personal. I say this because they allowed me to reflect on the path my personal experiences have led me. In addition, the "suggestions for researchers" and "reflection questions" were delightful and necessary additions.

The chapters were genuinely insightful, thought-provoking, and challenged the positionality of international students within research. I love that the writers call for us to move towards creating a humanized and equitable experience for international students, which is something inherently missing within the fabric of higher education. The book has also allowed me to think critically about what "true integration" of international students means as it relates to truly understanding and acknowledging our nuanced experiences, cultures, sexuality, race, and beings.'

Toritse Ikomi, *International Master's Student,*
Erasmus Mundus Masters in Research and
Innovation in Higher Education Programme

'Research with International Students addresses an important but not yet fully researched contribution to the field of internationalization of higher education. The chapters in the book provide a critical and diverse overview of the study of international students and introduce the subfield of research with international students in a comprehensive and innovative way to the broader field of internationalization of higher education.'

Hans de Wit, *Distinguished Fellow and Professor Emeritus, Boston*
College Center for International Higher Education

'The book brings together a collection of essays based on the premise that a great deal of current research on international students fails to recognize the diversity, contingency and complexity of their experiences and aspirations – as well as the ways in which the project of internationalization is transforming the character of higher education. Collectively, these essays point to the need for research that aims to develop a more critical understanding of internationalization by utilizing theoretical and political resources from the emerging decolonial, intersectional, and radical strands in educational studies.'

Fazal Rizvi, *Emeritus Professor, The University of Melbourne and The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

This must-read book combines carefully selected contributions to form a collective scholarly critique of existing research with international students, focusing on key critical and conceptual considerations for research where international students are participants or co-researchers. It pushes forward new agendas for the future of research with international students in global contexts, posing new sets of problems, provocations, and possibilities.

Bringing together a range of interdisciplinary scholars, this book explores the many facets of research, which centres international students and their experiences. Each chapter concludes with practical reflection questions, suggestions for researchers, and examples in existing research to support research designs and aid in developing high-quality, critical research on this topic.

Bringing fresh perspectives to the topic of research with international students, the book focuses on:

- Outlining current problems with existing research, including the ways that international students may be stereotyped, homogenised, Othered, or framed through deficit and colonial narratives
- (Re)-conceptualising key ideas that underpin research which are currently taken for granted
- Developing reflection points and practical guidance for new research designs which centre criticality and ethics
- Outlining ways that discourses and narratives about international students can be made more complex, particularly in reflection of their intersectional identities

This key text is essential reading for researchers at all career stages to reflect on issues of power, inequality, and ethics, whilst developing understandings about critical choices in research design, analysis, and the presentation of findings.

Jenna Mittelmeier is Senior Lecturer in International Education at the University of Manchester, UK.

Sylvie Lomer is Senior Lecturer in Education Policy and Practice at the University of Manchester, UK.

Kalyani Unkule is Associate Professor at O.P. Jindal Global University, India and Visiting Professor with the Center for the Study of Global Change at Indiana University, USA, ISDE Law School, Spain and Stockholm University Faculty of Law, Sweden.

Internationalization in Higher Education

Series Editor: Elspeth Jones, Emerita Professor
Leeds Beckett University, UK

This series addresses key themes in the development of internationalization within Higher Education. Up to the minute and international in both appeal and scope, books in the series focus on delivering contributions from a wide range of contexts and provide both theoretical perspectives and practical examples. Written by some of the leading experts in the field, they are vital guides that discuss and build upon evidence-based practice and provide a clear evaluation of outcomes.

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Research with International Students
Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations
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RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Jenna Mittelmeier (she/her) is Senior Lecturer in International Education at The University of Manchester. She was born in the United States and migrated to the United Kingdom initially as an international PhD student, which is now home. Her research focuses on the treatment of and practices with international students, including how higher education curricula and pedagogies are shaped through internationalisation. Jenna was interested in developing this book after reflecting on her own research journey, initially as a rather pragmatic and instrumentalist researcher who became more critical as her thinking progressed. She wanted to create the book she wished had existed as an early career academic to start that journey sooner.

Sylvie Lomer (she/her) is Senior Lecturer in Education Policy and Practice at The University of Manchester. She was born in the United Kingdom and raised overseas in Indonesia, Benin, and the United States. With a year abroad in her country of second nationality, France, followed by MA study in the United Kingdom officially categorised as an international student, she has been an international student of some kind for most of her education. Her research focuses on policies and practices with international students, specifically their discursive representations. Sylvie wanted to contribute to this book after several years of reviewing research with international students and supporting PhD researchers, seeing dominant deficit narratives recur. She saw a need for a book that would advance the subfield in critical and radical directions.

Kalyani Unkule (yin/yang/both) is Associate Professor at O.P. Jindal Global University and Visiting Professor with the Center for the Study of Global Change at Indiana University, ISDE Law School and Stockholm University

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CONTRIBUTORS

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SERIES EDITOR INTRODUCTION

This series is concerned with the evolving and highly topical field of internationalisation in higher education, seen as a powerful force for change and the enhancement of quality. The series reflects current and emerging issues, with contributions by leading thinkers and authors from around the world in addition to early career researchers. Key questions in the field of internationalisation are examined, and the books provide a bridge between theoretical perspectives and practical applications.

Internationally informed research and collaboration represent crucial foundations for the teaching and learning processes which can help develop knowledge, skills and understanding relevant for the global contexts our students will face in the future. These are equally important for living and working in diverse multicultural societies, and internationalisation therefore has both global and more local intercultural interests at its heart.

Increasingly visible in institutional strategies as well as national, regional and international agendas since the latter part of the twentieth century, internationalisation has been informed by diverse specialisms but, importantly, varies in interpretation by geographical, institutional and disciplinary setting. Seen as a whole, the series offers wide-ranging viewpoints on the breadth and inter-disciplinarity of the field, from different global contexts.

The already compelling drivers for an integrated approach to internationalisation were subject to added complexity through the COVID-19 pandemic, and the very concept of internationalisation has been subject to challenge. Student as well as staff experiences were significantly affected by restrictions on mobility and the rapid shift to online learning during the pandemic. Meanwhile, geopolitical, environmental and social justice concerns are continuing to have an impact on the field. It could be argued that international students have been particularly affected by recent circumstances.

While universities compete for global talent on the one hand, there is an undeniable need for collaboration on a global scale and they must continue to respond to societal change in a complex and evolving landscape. All of this provides further impetus to prepare all of our students for a multicultural and interconnected world, regardless of their origin. *Research with International Students: Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations* is thus an extremely opportune and important addition to the book series, bringing into focus and exploring the many aspects of research with and about international students. The broad range of topics covered, the global and interdisciplinary nature of contributions, along with the depth and insights provided, means that the book will provide support for researchers at various stages of their careers.

The editors have assembled an impressive group of authors from around the world who collectively critique existing theoretical, methodological and practical dimensions of research with international students. Assumed positionalities, identities and conceptions are challenged, while questions for reflection, offered by each chapter, point to potential ways forward for research in this important subfield. It thus offers a unique and essential contribution to international education and those who wish to better reflect on and understand the varied experiences and concerns of international students. It makes a very welcome and timely addition to this series.

<div align="right">

Elspeth Jones, Series Editor
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INTRODUCTION

Jenna Mittelmeier, Sylvie Lomer and Kalyani Unkule

The idea for this book started with a simple observation: there is a lot of research produced about international students, and much of it is not very good. This was initially an informal observation, which was later substantiated through several systematic reviews developed across various projects (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023; Mittelmeier et al., 2022; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022). Along the way, we started creating online resources to support better research designs, which organically garnered attention from fellow scholars. This edited volume formalises and builds upon that work by bringing together 49 critical researchers to form a collective scholarly critique of existing research, pushing forward new agendas for the future of research with international students as a subfield within higher education studies. We met throughout the writing process, both in our editorial team and as larger consortiums of authors, to discuss and dream about what that future might contain.

Research with international students makes an important contribution to higher education studies – the broader research field[1] which focuses on higher education as a site of study – because international students are a significant group at many institutions. The OECD, for example, estimates that there are currently over five million students who are studying across borders for higher education (OECD, 2023), numbers which have grown exponentially in recent decades. Historically, migration flows have favoured institutions in Anglophone countries, particularly countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. One reason is that international student mobility is often influenced by colonial legacies and historically extractive international relationships (Perraton, 2020). Yet, mobility between countries in what has been called the 'Global South' or 'Global Majority' is also a rising trend, where countries such as China, Turkey, Brazil, and South Africa have

become hubs (Kondakçi et al., 2018). The prevalence of international students in higher education is, therefore, a global phenomenon, despite tendencies to assume particular directions of travel.

International students' growing presence has led to an interdisciplinary subfield of research which seeks to understand, unpack, and problematize their experiences and contributions (summarised in brief in Chapter 2). A recent scientometric review of research with international students identified over 3,600 published articles with a 'rapid development phase' since 2006 (Jing et al., 2020). Research with international students is also a growing topic of postgraduate research, often led by international students as researchers themselves (Montgomery, 2019).

Yet, although research on this topic is prolific, it is a subfield that is imperfect and flawed, held back by conceptual and methodological limitations. Research, often unintentionally, has a tendency to dehumanise and stereotype international students (as outlined in Section 2). We collectively hold our own prior research up to these criticisms, recognising the pervasiveness of deficit thinking about international students.

One challenge is that, before this book, there has been limited attention to research with international students *as a subfield*, with very few reflections on interdisciplinary issues about research processes and approaches with this specific population. This book is our answer to that by being, to our knowledge, the first targeted resource for researchers who include international students as participants or co-researchers in their work. We believe it is an essential starting point for developing new research designs on this topic.

The focus of this book: critical research *with* international students

International students form one part of the wider internationalisation and globalisation of higher education. Research about internationalisation has been plentiful, with thousands of articles published in recent decades (Tight, 2021). Within this, researchers have theorised, analysed, and debated the contributions and purposes (or lack thereof) of the varied approaches institutions take to internationalise their operations (e.g., Marginson, 2006; Mok, 2007; Rizvi, 2019). Scholars have both attempted to define (e.g., Hudzik, 2014; Knight, 2004) and, then, subsequently, critiqued existing definitions (e.g., Buckner & Stein, 2020; Marginson, 2022) of what internationalisation means, how it operates, and what it assumes. While internationalisation provides an important context and background for this book, it is not our intention to contribute to ongoing theorisations of broader internationalisation projects. For that, we refer readers to other volumes in this series or to the reading lists provided on our companion website: https://researchintlstudents.com/reading-lists/.

This book, instead, purposefully centres on the subfield of empirical research that focuses specifically on international students. International students are one example of internationalisation in practice, but such terms should not be conflated. Research with international students may take many forms, but most commonly refers to research which includes international students as participants and/or focuses on their experiences, behaviours, attitudes, outcomes, and/or preferences in higher education. We focus on the *process* – the conceptual framings, methodologies, and methods – of how research with international students is designed and developed. In doing so, we evaluate and critique how existing studies have tended to problematically frame and approach international students.

One of the more difficult things about writing a book about research with international students is defining 'international student'. There are, after all, many conflicting national approaches to this definition (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2023), all of which tend to centre visa status without recognising the complexity of individual identities and how people may relate in different ways to 'difference' (Rizvi & Walsh, 1998) or 'international' (Jones, 2017). Many of our own personal migration histories serve as good examples of this complexity. Therefore, we have chosen not to provide a universal definition of 'international student' for this book. We have, rather, given this task to a collection of scholars who *are* international students, who have written in great depth in Chapter 1 about the importance of and challenges with defining this student population. We argue that there is no single definition that makes sense for all places, but it is nonetheless essential for researchers to start their work by reflecting purposefully on this when situating their research designs within their own contexts.

We have also emphasised 'critical research' in this volume but recognise that this term is often flung around broadly. In using the word 'critical', we are not talking about Critical Theory in the Frankfurt School sense, although some of those intellectual influences are probably evident. Nor do we solely mean 'being negative' or finding out all the problems (although we do some of this, too). Instead, we aimed to question *why* certain assumptions, norms, and trends in research with international students dominate and *who benefits*. We wanted this book to challenge established norms and question in whose interests these norms function, and who is marginalised or sidelined in that process. We see critical scholarship as that which problematises and overturns the power dynamics present in research with international students.

We have defined our task as exploring research *with* international students, not *on* or *about*, because talking about research *on* international students maintains the exploitative dynamic of the researcher extracting information from the research 'subject'. We wanted to undermine this assumption and look, instead, at how international students are scholars themselves, how we/they take agency as knowledge creators, and how research that positions

international students as partners has greater critical potential. This not only is more ethical, in that it is less exploitative, but also has more capacity to generate relevant, interesting, and meaningful knowledge. For this reason, we have included the voices of current and former international students as authors throughout the book.

It is important to state plainly that this book is not a how-to guide. There is (purposefully) no prescribed recipe or formula within its pages for designing the 'best' research design with international students. Rather, we provide a set of critical provocations and suggestions in the hopes that readers will take it to the next step by embedding the issues raised into their own research designs, or debating them further where they may disagree.

Complexities and tensions within this book

This book features 49 authors who represent a great diversity of research disciplines, backgrounds and identities, personal migration stories, and current working contexts. For that reason, we recognise that there are complexities and tensions regarding any shared vision of the subfield, due in part to the varying conceptual traditions our work derives from and the discourses we use. We have decided to embrace this rather than attempt to make our ideas uniform. Rather, reflexivity is the common thread running through the critical stances in each chapter.

From the resultant flowering of contradictions, we came to the sobering realisation that simultaneously addressing the myriad concerns with research practices, conceptual underpinnings, and unstated normative framings may be an unrealistic aim. This particularly applies to this book as it builds on a set of propositions that are inevitably subject to review and revision over time. We hope that the book serves as an essential starting point for these discussions and equally that the subfield may eventually develop beyond the book's original purpose.

This means we cannot imply that the volume exhausts all the possibilities of critical imaginations. For instance, as widely dispersed as our network of contributors is, aspirations of reach and representation are tempered by facts of structural imbalance in knowledge creation and English as the sole language of our writing. To partially address the latter, we have invited authors to adopt spellings and phrasings relevant to their context, meaning that there is purposeful variation in style and terminology across chapters. Whether the former is addressed is contingent on the extent to which readers feel encouraged to probe the worldviews which underwrite and are buttressed by their endeavours. At the same time, we recognise this is the start of a conversation which needs more voices in more languages, which we hope readers will continue to develop.

One other point of contention is grappling with the flattening of real-world complexity which occurs when we deploy terms such as 'Global North',

'Global South', and even 'international student'. We particularly recognise the problematic complexity and geographic inaccuracy of terms such as 'Western', 'Eastern', 'Northern', or 'Southern'. However, many authors have used such phrases variably across chapters in reflection of their common use in the literature in their discipline. We invite readers to consider their own uses of such terms in their work through the 'anti-glossary' developed on our companion site: https://researchintlstudents.com/anti-glossary/.

Chapter and book format

This book has five sections, which follow the typical progression of research development:

- **Section 1** starts by considering the context and background of existing research with international students, answering the question: how is current research positioned? This section encourages readers to consider how international students are defined (Chapter 1) and the history of the subfield (Chapter 2).
- **Section 2** shifts to the epistemological foundations of existing research with international students, questioning: what currently inhibits critical research? This considers issues of dehumanisation (Chapter 3), stereotyping (Chapter 4), Othering (Chapter 5), coloniality (Chapter 6), and deficit narratives (Chapter 7) currently embedded in the subfield.
- **Section 3** encourages readers to consider how research can develop more intersectional depictions of international students (Chapter 8), focusing on the intersections of migrant student status with race (Chapter 9), disability (Chapter 10), LGBTQ+ identities (Chapter 11), gender (Chapter 12), and class (Chapter 13). While not comprehensive of the varied identities international students hold, this section questions: how understandings of international students can be made more complex?
- **Section 4** considers conceptual and theoretical framings of key topics in research with international students, asking: what concepts might be reconsidered? Readers are encouraged to evaluate previously taken-for-granted concepts such as global (Chapter 14), mobilities (Chapter 15), transitions (Chapter 16), language (Chapter 17), culture (Chapter 18), and intercultural relationships (Chapter 19).
- **Section 5**, finally, focuses on research methods and methodologies, considering: how research can be designed better? Here, readers can consider issues of researcher positionality (Chapter 20), decolonial research designs and ethics (Chapter 21), co-designed research approaches (Chapter 22), voice in qualitative data (Chapter 23), social constructs in quantitative data (Chapter 24), multilingual approaches (Chapter 25), and writing about international students (Chapter 26).

The book includes 26 short chapters in total, each about 3,000 words. We have designed it so readers can dip in and dip out, as relevant to their research design process and personal interests. However, there is value in reading the book as a whole, particularly as chapters and ideas speak to one another.

Chapters are structured to reflect on both conceptual and practical considerations for research. Each chapter includes the following:

- **Critical considerations** which provide conceptual critiques and ideas on the chapter topic in relation to current literature
- **Reflection questions** for researchers to consider how the critiques raised in the chapter relate to their own research
- **Suggestions for researchers** for developing more critical research designs
- **Examples in practice** where authors have provided a reading which demonstrates their critiques well either through further conceptual reflection or in their research design

Companion website

We see developing research with international students as an ongoing, living conversation. Beyond this book, the conversation continues on our companion website: https://researchintlstudents.com/.

This website is frequently updated with new resources, including reading lists, a theoretical framework bank, research design ideas, an 'anti-glossary' of terms, and many others. We also host a blog and post recorded video lectures from scholars on the website, where we invite readers to contribute, should reading this book spark new ideas and debates. We have, for that reason, not written a formal conclusion for the book so that readers may draw their own.

Note

1 We note that there are debates about whether higher education studies is a 'field' or a 'discipline' (Tight, 2020).

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SECTION 1

How is current research positioned?

1

WORKING TOWARDS INCLUSIVE DEFINITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Reflecting, refiguring and reconceptualising as international students *and* researchers

Summer Bennett, Asuka Ichikawa, Yuqi Lin, Meena Pannirselvam, and Thornchanok Uerpairojkit

Note: All five authors are joint first authors

Introduction

Alongside a notable increase in the internationalisation of higher education in recent decades, there has been a growing body of research that includes international students as participants, as well as an increasing number of international students researching this very group they are a part of. However, while greater global interconnectedness has given rise to more complex identities and diverse communities, much extant research remains dominated by traditional conceptualisations of 'the international student.' These approaches risk oversimplifying aspects and relations of identity that make up contemporary international students. They may also be camouflaging or even perpetuating underlying assumptions and discursive understandings about international students, many of which are denigratory and manifest as invisible baggage through the course of their educational journey and beyond. Crucially, these considerations bring into question not only methodological but also social justice issues.

Writing this chapter as international students *and* emerging researchers, we recognise the foundational importance of critically reflecting on who international students are, how they are defined, and researchers' own positionalities in every phase of a research project. As we came together to collaborate on this chapter, it struck us how our personal experiences share many commonalities despite diverse cultural backgrounds, different educational journeys, and

being geographically dispersed. While our accounts are by no means exhaustive nor representative of 'the' international student experience, we believe that they surface important issues pertaining to such a broad category, bearing important implications for research. We begin by problematising conventional definitions and exploring the complexities of being labelled as international students. We then share questions and practical suggestions for researchers to critically reflect on as they design, conduct, and report on their research. Through this, we seek to challenge deeply embedded misconceptions and advocate for more nuanced, inclusive, and humanised understandings that will be explored in further detail throughout this book. We hope that our collective voice will offer grounds for more reflective and critical research with international students.

Critical considerations

Problematising nationality-based and visa-based definitions

Despite the interconnectedness of people across borders in modern times, nationality tends to be a default approach used by institutions and researchers alike for identifying international students. This was evident in Summer's reflections: "Becoming an international student revealed how thoughtlessly and quickly lines are drawn based on nationality. Nationality is a label thrown about in introduction sessions, and identities are immediately generalised despite a multitude of cultures and identities within and across political borders." This suggests a normative centrality of national citizenship in how individuals' identities are understood, which risks concealing the expansive diversity transcending political territorial borders. Reductive definitions of identity connected to nationality assume that political boundaries function as a 'national container' (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013) for differences between international students, despite regional differences in culture and language within many countries. Nationality-based definitions also assume that people fully identify with their 'home' countries, with international students often imagined as having little experience in intercultural settings before their 'overseas' journey. As Jones (2017) states, this simplified understanding lends itself to the false dichotomy between 'domestic' and 'international' students, obscuring the diverse, sometimes overlapping, needs of both groups. We would argue that this also perpetuates false cohesion *and* division between students, paradoxically working against visions for a more intercultural learning environment.

Nationality-based understandings of identity are further challenged by the global realities of the 21st century. Given rapid developments in information technology and adjustments to work and life following the COVID-19 pandemic, defining who an international student is can no longer be based on the notion of being *away* from home; in other words, having '*left*' their country

of origin and *moved* to another country for the purpose of study' (OECD, 2020, n.p., italics added for emphasis). On the one hand, the criteria of physical mobility bring into question visa-based classifications, which will be discussed later. At the same time, the possibility of studying overseas *from home* (i.e. virtual or remote learning) suggests the many ways that boundaries between education and other aspects of a person's life may no longer be so clear-cut (Mittelmeier et al., 2020). Particularly when viewed through the lens of the life-cycle approach (Glass et al., 2021), an international student's journey is an extensive entity that rarely begins – or ends – with the singular pursuit of an academic degree. Plural identities and a sense of belonging can be held, acquired, and developed within and beyond our host countries, often changing the location(s) and meaning(s) of 'home' (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). In this light, defining a population for research purposes is a never-ending conceptual challenge taking into account how identities can be complex, overlapping, and in flux. Therefore, researchers must strive to address the heterogeneity and multiplicity of identities and lived experiences of international students – both as individuals and as a population group.

A closely related conceptualisation is visa-based classification, which defines students based on their legal status in their host countries. While this appears straightforward and neutral, its use can hide those who identify as 'international' but may not be on student visas, camouflaging the countless challenges they experience (Jenkins, 2014). In Europe, for example, non-European international students are subject to longer visa processing times compared to their counterparts; they are often placed in a legal 'in-between' where they are not yet legal residents but are simultaneously not allowed to return if they leave. This suggests that different classes of international students exist and are intricately tied to the ways that differential nationality-based treatments are informed by broader international relations and global power asymmetries (Lomer, 2016).

Examining visa-based classifications also sheds light on conflicting policy constructions of who international students are, or should be. In the United States, for example, international students are perceived as both threat and talent. Discriminatory policies have framed some types of international students as threats to national security, in effect coupling ideas of fear and surveillance with the notion of being international students. A recent example is Executive Order 13769 in 2017, which enforced an entry ban on people from primarily Muslim countries (Wang, 2020). Increased surveillance after 9/11 (Mittelstadt et al., 2011) and policies targeted at specific countries and/or populations (Castiello-Gutiérrez & Li, 2020) have also compounded the social positioning of international students and researchers as threats to national security over time (Allen & Bista, 2021). This points to geo-political tensions that underlie and surround what may appear as a neutral legal category.

When positioned as 'talent', international students are valued in policy discourse for their contributions to diverse institutional communities, potential fee revenue, strengthened international relations, and increased knowledge production (Yao & Viggiano, 2019; NAFSA: Association of International Educators, n.d.; American Council on Education, 2020). International students are sought out and recruited to research institutions, as they are important to US innovation. According to Chellaraj et al. (2008), an increase of 10% in international graduate students correlates to an increase of 6.8% in university patent grants and 4.5% in patent applications. This seemingly positive view should nevertheless be problematised, given that international students tend to be viewed as commodities (Yao & Viggiano, 2019). Similar approaches are also felt in Australia, where Yuqi noticed the lack of support for international students during the COVID-19 pandemic: "I was deeply hurt by the way international students were treated as cash cows fueling the Australian international education industry." These dehumanising experiences reveal the shadows of neoliberal practices in higher education, where processes of alienation are intertwined with artificial categorisations of international students.

Alienation embedded in the legal infrastructure of international higher education has serious implications for social justice research, as the seemingly objective demarcation between who is 'domestic' and who is 'international' in visa regulations underpins the lack of legal protection for the 'Other' in the host country (Lin & Zhang, 2022). In addition, the legal status of being an outsider informs how international students make sense of their own identities, roles, and the extent of their (un)expected participation in their host countries – considerations which can inform practices of self-marginalisation (Hayes, 2018). In sum, we urge researchers to question legally defined classifications of international students and to instead lean towards conceptualisations of international students as unique individuals in order to achieve richer and more nuanced understandings.

Unpacking the baggage of being Othered, disempowered, and unsupported

Beyond the baggage of legal and immigration definitions, there are various other ways that the labelling of international students can weigh down on individuals' subjectivity and educational experiences. Many of these relate to how international students often find themselves as Other in the communities they seek to participate in (Chapter 5). Despite policy visions of inclusive and diverse societies, international students can still find themselves positioned as the exotic cultural subject. Thornchanok's (Joyce's) experience of being invited to share about her home country in class – "Let's hear some comments from our foreign students" – demonstrates how attempts to promote multiculturalism and inclusion can be felt as performative. She reflected: "Despite their good intentions, I feel that these instances actually work to further exclude

me from the discussion, casting me as Other and inviting me to speak as one, especially when the topic being discussed does not concern nationalities."

The term 'foreign' in particular positions the subject as an outsider, and Asuka's discovery of its embeddedness in academic research has left a critical impression that there may indeed be a structural permanence to the Othering of international students. Searching for peer-reviewed publications on 'international students', she sought help from a librarian who "apologetically advised me to use keywords such as 'foreign student' instead." This suggested to her that the 'foreignness' of international students may not be easily erased from the body of extant literature; rather, it is ingrained in foundational pieces across academia, and the rhetoric of strangeness surrounding international students continues. This begs the question: How might researchers interrupt these discursive understandings that position international students as Others and promote more inclusive approaches instead?

The discursive Othering of international students can also manifest in power differentials where the 'overseas', 'foreign' or 'international' party is assumed an outsider to the host environment and, as a result, not expected to contribute to the same degree as 'home' students. Joyce's anecdote demonstrates this: "There have been times that I was asked to 'Tell us about Thailand' in a broad gesture that reassures me it doesn't have to be about the topic being discussed. While I appreciate the willingness to engage me in the conversation, it also suggests to me a vague interest in 'the exotic' and 'the faraway'." Such confounding between exchange and integration, where international students are invited to 'share' their experience as Other, discourages reciprocal engagement and undervalues their potential contribution to the collective educational experience. These disempowering effects may be further compounded and leave long-lasting implications on some international students, particularly when operating under a deficit narrative where international students are primarily perceived as 'non-native' language speakers or coming from 'non-Western' educational traditions (Chapter 7; Liyanage et al., 2021).

Other forms of baggage include how 'the' international student identity can be tokenised for institutional prestige and public image. Bearing the 'international' label in marketing materials, or representing the faces of 'internationality' in recruitment leaflets, or even in research, can be a drastically different experience in practice. Summer reflected that "assimilation is encouraged under the guise of integration, where we must work to understand the local culture while there seems to be no push for understanding us in return." In other words, international students may be expected to not only represent their nationality but also suppress their cultural identity and 'blend in' to what is loosely defined as the 'international community'. This can negatively affect the students' mental and emotional well-being, as demonstrated by Meena's experience of having to compromise her cultural background and family ties: "I had significant exams and assignments due during Deepavali, and I missed celebrations with my family. The worst part is that I couldn't get an extension

because 'it was not fair to the other students'." Such perception of institutional indifference towards global cultures, when juxtaposed to visible presentations of being 'global universities', presents complexities when researching international students. We contend that critical examinations of such potentially ironic experiences at 'global' campuses – in other words, not regarding assimilation as an inherent and unproblematic good – are necessary for critiquing systemic biases, as well as making the research itself a meaningful, and possibly empowering, engagement for the researcher and the researched alike.

In the above sections, we analysed how conventional categorisations could interfere with a deeper understanding of international students. As our identities evolve at the intersection of lived experiences and national boundaries, we advocate for exploring and expanding the definitions of who international students are in our chosen context of academic inquiry. Keeping in mind the implications for the researched, the researcher, and the role of research in society, the points we raised can be summarised as follows. First, researchers need to consider the multiple identities of international students. From a person-centred perspective, it is also important to situate research projects within international students' broader life trajectories, acknowledging that one research project can only partially capture individuals' lives and experiences (Chapter 16). Second, researchers need to examine their pre-existing biases and stereotypes toward international students, avoiding any deficit-based understandings influencing the research and thereby further marginalising the population (Section 2). Third, researchers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the local *and* global political, economic and cultural contexts of the international students in their study, as the interplay among these factors contributes to the experiences of international students (Chapter 14). Finally, researchers must reflect on the purpose of their research with international students, keeping in mind how research can inform policies and practices that could, in turn, affect international students. For example, while economically driven arguments may be a favourable practice for informing policy, we urge researchers to exercise caution around perpetuating dominant discourses that dehumanise international students. As emerging researchers, we recognise the power that comes with knowledge creation, and we believe that it needs to be anchored in a sense of integrity and an intention to contribute towards greater social justice.

Moving towards more humanised, equitable, and inclusive research with international students

Given the critical considerations above, we wish to highlight a growing body of research that aims to challenge deficit narratives (Chapter 7) surrounding international students (e.g. Glass et al., 2022; Lee, 2021; Yao & George Mwangi, 2022). These works exemplify productive collaboration between scholars and current/previous international students, an approach that

encourages methodologies that are reflexive and sensitive to the researched subjects (Chapter 21) and positions international students as equal partners in knowledge co-creation (Chapter 22).

Researchers may also find themselves at a convergence of identities, where we study the population we belong to and identify ourselves simultaneously as (former) international students *and* researchers.[1] This situation calls for particular attention to how we reflect on our positionality as researchers (Chapter 20) because our 'apparent and hidden identities' can influence how we design and conduct research (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Since the subject under study is close to our hearts, it is vital for researchers to reflexively account for personal biases, assumptions, privileges, and intersectional identities (Section 3) whenever we find ourselves navigating the dualities of being both 'researcher' and 'researched'.

How might we begin this process of self-reflection? One way could be to visually explore the researchers' own identities using a Social Identity Map (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). Another way may be to explicitly ask 'why' questions before thinking 'how' to conduct research, incorporating our positionality throughout the process of research (Ramirez, 2015). It must also be noted that our status as international students does not automatically grant us inherent expertise on intercultural competencies. Even as 'insiders', it would be helpful for us to step into research sites and engage with participants with cultural humility (Murray-García & Tervalon, 2017). That said, our lived experiences as international students are an asset; they keep our research grounded in reality. Especially for those from marginalised backgrounds, whether by gender, race, ethnicity, or migratory experiences, among others, Chang (2015) highlights the importance of owning your lived experiences and translating them into scholarly work.

The opportunity to write this chapter has enabled us to engage meaningfully, critically, and humanistically with our individual subjectivities and personal experiences as international students. We invite you to further reflect on the different facets of researching with international students and engage with the opportunities for self-reflection offered in the following chapters of this book. It is hoped that our reflections as international students/researchers can be a beginning point for working towards more humanised, inclusive, and equitable research with international students in the future.

Reflection questions

- Why am I interested in researching (with) international students?
- Who do I understand international students to be? What assumptions or biases might I have about this population?
- How am I planning to engage with the perspectives of international students in my research? What will their role be in my research?

- How might aspects of my identity influence potential power dynamics in the study?
- How might my study incorporate more nuanced and humanised understandings of international students?
- How am I planning to build rapport with international students before, during, and after the study?
- How might I challenge prevalent discursive understandings that position international students as Others and instead promote more inclusive approaches and understandings?

Suggestions for researchers

Define international students in the specific context of your research. To acknowledge heterogeneity among international students, it is vital to develop a deeper understanding of the specific group(s) of international students you aim to study, and describe the population in the context of your research site(s). When writing the findings and/or recommendations for policy and practice, attend to the nuances and avoid making generalisations that cover all international students.

Be in community with international students. Rapport that is built on a genuine relationship can facilitate a better understanding of international students' lived realities and their nuanced and evolving needs. Research rooted in such relationality could foreground larger systemic injustices and contest the deficit perspective of international students.

Explore and use literature from (sub)fields outside of international higher education. The subfield emerged from interdisciplinary perspectives (Chapter 2), and it can grow further from them. Being intentional about seeking and borrowing theories, concepts, and ideas from other disciplines beyond higher education can help you grow as a scholar and contribute to the subfield through new perspectives and understandings.

Example in practice

Article: Brooks and Waters (2022)

Article focus: How 'international' is conceptualised in international student mobility

Article strengths: In this conceptual article, Brooks and Waters (2022) explore the meaning of 'the international' in international student mobility, demonstrating the nuances in defining the increasingly diverse and transnational body of international students. In particular, the authors critique the dominance of nation-based and bilateral conceptualisations within extant mobilities literature. The article offers a critical perspective on how future research could prevent the Othering of international students and avoid perpetuating problematic understandings.

Note

1 While the title of researcher/scholar is often associated with those in the professoriate, we consider international students engaging in research – not least researching and writing about ourselves, as we are currently doing – as emerging researchers too.

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2

MAPPING THE SUBFIELD OF EXISTING RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Introduction

Research with international students is a vast subfield, yet many scholars fail to adequately engage with prior work. A recent scientometric review by Jing et al. (2020), for instance, identified over 3,600 published articles about international students, with a rapid increase in publications since 2006. A challenge for researchers, then, is identifying research gaps and developing critical reflections on why identified omissions are problematic for knowledge, theory, or practice. Given the adage that research is about joining a conversation, it is important to recognise that research with international students is already a large, diverse, and vibrant conversation, and here we offer a primer on its recent history.

A (brief) history of the subfield

Research interest in this topic has increased alongside exponential growth in international students' global numbers. Yet, research with international students is not new, with early publications on their experiences published in the 1950s or earlier, predominantly in psychology. This early work was often "clinically focused" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 36) through medical and psychological understandings of how migration stressors affect the mind and body.

Research interest grew in the 1980s with a pivot towards psychosocial adjustment, focusing on "culture shock" and "stress and coping" (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Although still set in psychology, this shifted recognition towards the cultural learning opportunities which students proactively navigate. Yet much research still viewed international students through assimilative

lenses, focusing on normative values of "successful" adaptation despite experienced stressors, highlighted in depth by Zhou et al. (2008).

In the broader social sciences, researchers in the 1980s and 1990s began examining international students' identity formations through reflections of "in-groups" and "out-groups" on campus (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Scholars also increasingly investigated the role of social relationships in supporting adjustment (Furnham & Li, 1993). This shift marked international study as an inherently social experience which could be evaluated through different disciplinary lenses.

International students' growing numbers on campus also drew attention from education scholars, limitedly in the 1980s but with greater intensity in the 1990s and beyond (e.g., Singh & Shrestha, 2008). This was framed by theoretical reflections about broader internationalisation in higher education (defined by Knight, 2004), where a wide range of research has since (re)conceptualised its contributions, operations, and the roles of international students within it (e.g., Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Rizvi, 2011). Another strand of this is more practical, considering issues such as internationalising the curriculum (Leask, 2015). A body of publications since has also reflected on developing inclusive pedagogies in internationalised higher education spaces (e.g., Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023), including in areas such as teaching English for Academic Purposes.

Alongside education, there is significant research within human geography, focusing on the causes, impacts, and experiences of education-centred mobilities (Chapter 15). This research became more prominent in the 2000s and 2010s, as international students became a patterned subsection of internationally mobile populations. Human geography research has frequently centred on the mechanisms and motivations for mobility, alongside spatial and temporal aspects of "being mobile" (e.g., King & Raghuram, 2012).

Research on this topic has permeated across other disciplines. For instance, international students' experiences have been interpreted through sociological lenses of power and dominance, and more recently through theories such as Critical Race Theory (e.g., Yao et al., 2019). Historical analyses of international students in archives and historical documents are similarly a growing area (e.g., Friedrich & Ku Bradt, 2021). Other interested disciplines include business, economics, and law, among others.

Alongside disciplinary shifts, there have been changes to methodological approaches used to conduct research. Earlier psychology research relied substantially on questionnaire-based research which approached knowledge through (post-)positivist lenses. However, a pivot in the last two decades has centred students' voices, particularly through qualitative research. More recently, interest in more creative methods has grown, such as diaries or photo-elicitation, as well as co-designed research (Chapter 22).

Another shift is towards critical approaches, particularly through the work of Stein (2021) and the emergence of the Critical Internationalization Studies

Network (https://criticalinternationalization.net). Scholars have developed growing awareness about how internationalisation (and, thus, international student mobilities) is globally unequal, often influenced by uneven power relations between contexts or shaped through coloniality (Chapter 6). This impacts international students who may experience dehumanisation (Chapter 3), stereotyping (Chapter 4) and "Othering" (Chapter 5). Thus, there is growing recognition of pervasive deficit narratives (Chapter 7) which underpin research. This has moved the subfield away from earlier assimilative research about struggles and culture shock.

Research with international students, then, is an interdisciplinary subfield that intersects different lenses and approaches (Chapter 8). While this is not intended to be a comprehensive history (and references are only examples), this highlights that researchers should be prepared to engage with large volumes of literature across disciplines. Projects without this foundation tend to repeat already well-established conclusions.

Mapping the current subfield

A regularly updated list of published literature reviews about international students is available at https://researchintlstudents.com/published-literature-reviews/.

As shown through this link, previous systematic reviews offer a starting point for researchers by synthesising research about the broader internationalisation of higher education. There have also been systematic reviews which focus specifically on research with international students, although they tend to be limited to specific regions, topics, or disciplines. There have been limited attempts to holistically synthesise research with international students (the scientometric analysis of Jing et al., 2020 is one exception), meaning one consequence is that the subfield remains disparate rather than cohesive. Therefore, one suggestion is to start a new research project by conducting (and publishing) a systematic review of prior evidence related to the research questions.

Within broader higher education studies, Macfarlane (2012, 2022) has developed a helpful visual mapping of the "ideological seascape" of research, whereby key research topics and ideological positions are mapped across allegorical islands and waterways. Using this creative approach, we have recreated a similar mapping of research with international students (Figure 2.1). We note this is not intended to be fully comprehensive but provides a generalised "lay of the land" of current interests. We also highlight that this image is a reflection of the research subfield as it currently exists and is not necessarily the direction we wish to see it travel in the future.

Figure 2.1 highlights several critical points about the subfield. First, there is an overwhelming focus on international students' "experiences" in higher education. Within this research, conceptualisations of "experiences"

feminist studies

queer studies

critical internationalisation studies

Critical Cay

critical disability theory

Critical Race Theory

decolonial theories

Activist Point

social justice   power

interaction

Intersectional Seas

Performance Peak

student satisfaction

quality assurance

rankings

discourse

Sociologist Bank

Social Network Bay

identity   resilience

liminality   neo-racism

neo-nationalism

agency

mental health

stress & coping

counselling

Acculturation Alley

Psychology Peak

Functionalist Bank

History Island

norms

fields   capital   habitus

Experience Rock

faculty views

challenges

perceptions

Vague Valley

Transitions Point

decision-making

marketing

recruitment

-ization Ire

marketization

neo-liberalization

Critical Pedagogies Island

ecological systems

anxiety

adjustment

Employability Cliffs

Deficit Strait

internationalisation of the curriculum

global citizenship

engagement & participation   writing

language/ linguistics

academic literacy

Culture Shock Cape

migration flows

Policy Atoll

indigenous knowledge

Isla Curricula

Group Work Cove

Pedagogy Peninsula

Technology Fjord

materialities   imaginaries

Mobility Bay

virtual mobility

decolonisation

place-based learning

assessment   feedback

student-centred approaches

subject-based pedagogy archipelago

spacialities   geographies

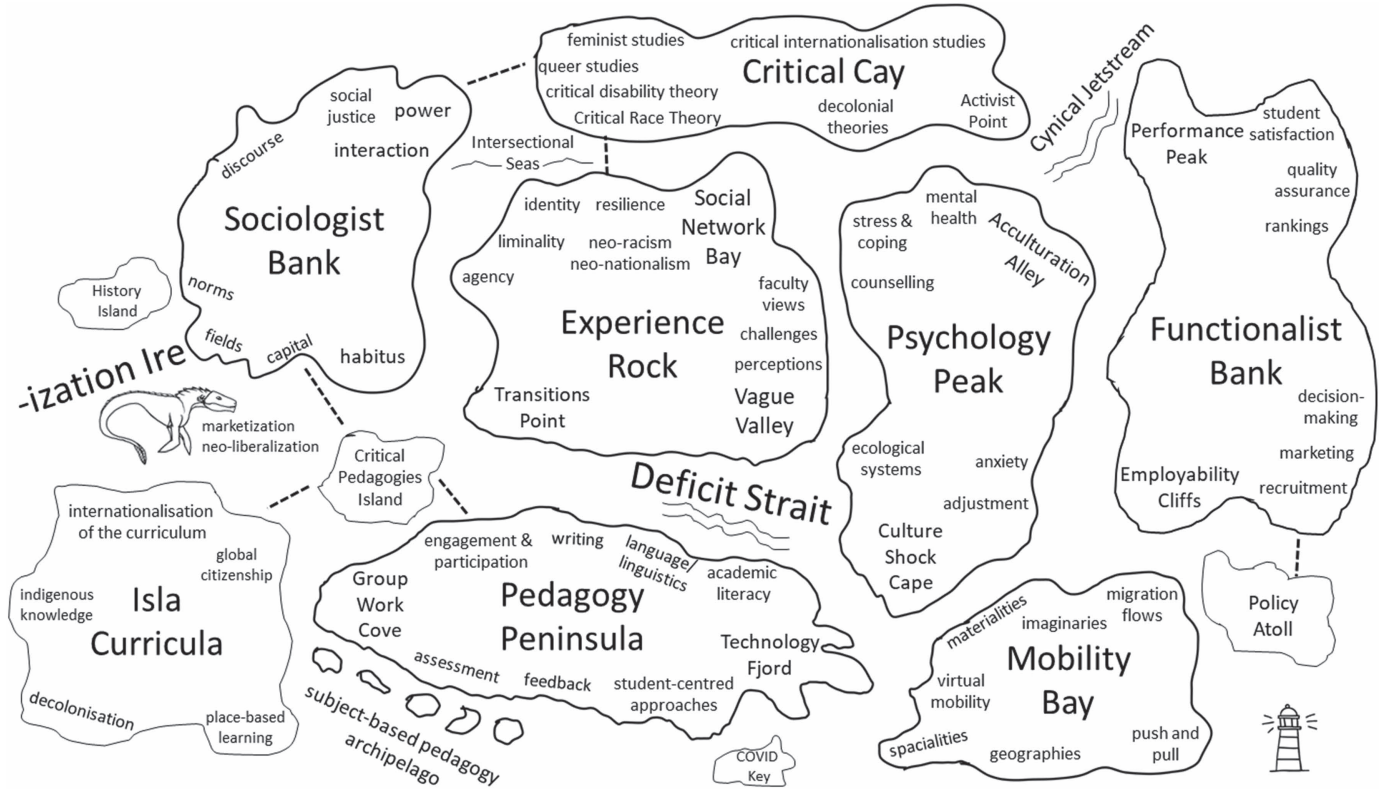push and pull

COVID Key

Cynical Jetstream

FIGURE 2.1   The 'ideological seascapes' of research with international students.

are often undefined (Deuchar, 2022) (i.e., the "Vague Valley") and are typically exploratory about broader "perceptions" or "challenges". Experiences have frequently been viewed as static and passive (Chapter 16), although they are increasingly approached by the "Intersectional Seas" through reflections on issues such as agency, liminality, or different identity facets. While work of this nature was important to push back against the dominant assimilative research of the 1990s and 2000s, today simply giving voice to international students' experiences is unlikely to constitute a contribution to knowledge.

Research also tends to remain siloed within disciplines. As MacFarlane (2022) observes in higher education studies generally, the "banks" of psychology, sociology, and in the case of research with international students we add mobility, often exist separately. MacFarlane also depicts a "subject-based pedagogy island chain", which is applicable here. For instance, research about pedagogies with international students often ignores research produced within other disciplines (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). This lack of interdisciplinarity stymies research as scholars are not always pushed outside of their epistemic comfort zones.

Although there have been shifts towards critical internationalisation studies, we argue (in line with George Mwangi et al., 2018) that criticality does not permeate through all research with international students. Much research adopts deficit narratives of international students (Chapter 7), depicting them as wholly experiencing "challenges" or "struggles". Pedagogic research often attempts to "fix" perceived deficits through assimilative lenses, symbolised by the "Deficit Strait". Nonetheless, we hope criticality will become a foundation for all research in the future.

Critical considerations: challenges for the subfield

Thus far, we have highlighted key themes in existing research with international students. In doing so, we note several challenges which constrain this subfield.

Sampling limitations

Within this subfield, scholars often fail to define or describe who "counts" as an international student within their study (e.g., Chapter 1; Jones, 2017). For example, Lomer and Mittelmeier (2023) highlighted that the majority of papers in a systematic review did not define international students or define the population being researched. For researchers, this highlights a need to reflect explicitly on the labels and definitions used for groups in focus, particularly given that each national context uses different policy or legal definitions.

Where international students are defined, it is often solely according to their nationality or citizenship (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). This represents a restrictive recognition of difference, a methodological nationalism that ignores other factors such as intra-national cultures, racialisation, religions, genders, disabilities, sexualities, and more (Hosein & Rao, 2019). In general, intersectional research (Crenshaw, 2017) is sorely lacking, although there are growing exceptions (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2019; Hutcheson & Lewington, 2017), as described in Section 3.

There has also been unevenness with the student groups in focus, with an overwhelming focus in research on international students from China (Zhu, 2016), often with limited reflection on intra-national diversity within China. This may also lead to the conflation of "the" Chinese international student experience with those of all international students.

Uneven geographic distributions of research

Previous reflections about higher education studies generally have critiqued the overwhelming tendency for research to focus on Anglophone contexts (Tight, 2021), particularly in Europe, North America, and Australia. Higher education in other contexts, such as countries in Africa (Zavale & Schneijderberg, 2022), is generally under-researched, including in research with international students (exceptions include Thondhlana et al., 2021).

This is driven by assumptions about "East-to-West" or "South-to-North" migrations, whereby the so-called Global North is predominantly depicted as "receiving countries" and the so-called Global South as "sending countries". However, Kondakçi et al. (2018) argue that research needs to be "freed" (p. 517) from this orientation. For instance, the role of emergent regional hubs (such as Turkey or South Africa), new global host destinations (such as China or Brazil), and shifts towards "South-to-South" migration is often missing. The experiences of international students based in countries beyond the major recruiting countries in Anglophone contexts also receive comparatively less attention.

Yet, many of these reflections focus on publications *in English* and the hegemonic position of English in global publishing practices. Other scholars have noted thriving higher education research in regions such as Latin America, where open-access journals flourish in Spanish, Portuguese, or English (Guzmán-Valenzuela & Gómez, 2019), albeit only limitedly engaged with by scholars in Anglophone contexts. Other scholars have synthesised research across languages (Xu, 2022), highlighting ethical imperatives for scholars to broaden their reading and citation practices beyond English-language publications. For example, Francophone literature outlines forms of international student mobility that do not conform to the global colonial imaginary of Global South-to-North, instead highlighting students travelling from Senegal and

Burkina Faso to destinations such as Saudi Arabia and back again (Bredeloup, 2014). If the subfield is to develop away from coloniality (Chapter 6), future research needs to adopt multilingual literature review strategies however possible (Chapter 25).

Limited criticality

As noted in the introduction, critical scholarship seeks to problematise and overturn contemporary power dynamics which are present in multiple forms in research with international students. However, many studies fail to engage with socially critical issues that underpin experiences. After all, international study, like higher education generally, is shaped by profound global, regional, local, and individual inequalities. These are reproduced by systems of disadvantage and discrimination, organising the world into differential geopolitical positions (Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016) which shape how individual students are represented and responded to.

International higher education, and international students' experiences as a result, is structured by intersecting inequalities, including (but not limited to) epistemic exclusion (Section 2), racism (Chapters 9 and 18), ableism (Chapter 10), linguistic oppression (Chapters 17 and 25), heteronormativity (Chapter 11), gendered norms (Chapter 12), and coloniality (Chapter 6). These are reinforced through policy, pedagogy, and institutional practices with international students.

For research with international students to take up an "equity-driven lens" (p. 549), as George Mwangi and Yao (2021) advocate, scholars need to address structural inequalities rather than placing responsibility for social change on individual students (Chapter 17). Demonstrable inequalities need to be tackled through research on institutional and sector levels, with awareness of critical theoretical frameworks, such as intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, critical pedagogies, critical discourse analysis, and so on, built into the design and purpose of research.

Another prevailing issue is the power dynamics at play in the marginalisation of knowledge about international students produced *by* international students as researchers or co-producers (Chapters 1, 22, and 25). Madge et al. (2015) have critiqued the common representation of international students as simply mobile bodies, which disregards their role as "knowledge agents" (p. 690) who (particularly during research projects) actively construct and circulate knowledge. However, the knowledge produced by international postgraduate research students is often devalued, deposited in repositories and rarely cited (Montgomery, 2019). Research that seeks to systematically amplify research conducted by and with international student researchers is, unfortunately, rare.

Limits to theorisation

A necessarily partial list of theoretical frameworks commonly used in research with international students is available at https://researchintlstudents.com/theoretical-frameworks/.

Given the volume of available theoretical frameworks, we do not argue that there is a "theory deficit" (p. 468) in this subfield (Hamann & Kosmützky, 2021). However, not all research on this topic is developed through an embedded theoretical framework (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). Those that are often rely on off-the-shelf theories imported from associated disciplines like sociology, anthropology and psychology, rather than developing frameworks specifically for research with international students (a notable exception is Kudo et al., 2019). This is not necessarily a disadvantage, except that it contributes to the ongoing siloing of academic disciplines and makes it difficult to synthesise a body of confirmatory evidence. This approach also misses an opportunity to push conceptual boundaries by reviewing textbook definitions in light of international knowledge and knowledge creation in internationalised learning spaces. This is particularly pertinent as common theoretical frameworks used (such as concepts by Bourdieu or Foucault) were developed by European scholars and are then applied in culturally and nationally diverse settings elsewhere with limited reflection on applicability or alternatives. There is, to our knowledge, very little scholarship on this topic that engages with theoretical frameworks originating in the spaces considered the "Global South" (Moosavi, 2020).

A conceptual weakness in the subfield is also the disjuncture between research designs and theoretical frameworks. Often, research with international students leaves the reader with the impression of a "generic" research design that has been associated with a relevant theoretical framework rather than fully embedding theory throughout the research design and analysis (as with Xu, 2021). This might include the "tacking on" of theoretical framings to introductions or conclusions, which shows a limited connection between theory and the engagement with literature, as well as in the research process. For the subfield to progress, it is important that researchers more comprehensively link their research designs and literature reviews with their chosen theoretical frameworks (Chapter 4).

Reflection questions

- What existing research has already been undertaken on my topic?
- Have I reviewed the research in other disciplines?
- Have I critically reviewed how this topic has been researched historically or over time?
- Have I reviewed what scholars in other geographic regions are researching? In particular, have I actively sought perspectives beyond Anglophone and Eurocentric canons?

- Have I considered options for including literature not published in English (such as using translation software or collaborating with multilingual colleagues)?
- Have I reflected on how criticality will be demonstrated and embedded into my literature review?
- Have I considered the range of theoretical frameworks available to frame my research? Have I considered how my chosen theoretical framework can be embedded into every step of my research design?

Practical suggestions for researchers

Conduct a systematic interdisciplinary literature review. A literature review is the first step in any research project, but we argue this is particularly important for research with international students because the subfield has a history of disparate, interdisciplinary studies in various languages. Given that there are limited published systematic reviews about research with international students, we highly recommend scholars use this approach and publish their findings. This offers particular opportunities for doctoral or graduate researchers as a first publication or literature review chapter.

Reflect on theoretical frameworks. Theoretical frameworks are essential scaffolds for research projects that should be reflected on from the offset of a project and embedded throughout the research design. This provides fundamental support for critically reconceptualising and reimagining "international students" and relevant key concepts in the subfield (Section 4).

Link methodological designs with literature reviews. Methodologies are the practical mechanism for researchers to achieve research aims (Section 5). However, "generic" research designs arguably limit more dynamic, diverse, and robust developments in this subfield. Therefore, critical methodological innovations should be linked to existing knowledge and perceived gaps. This does not necessarily mean research instruments, but considering more broadly how micro methodological decisions align or misalign with critical theoretical underpinnings of the project.

Example in practice

Article: Lee and Bligh (2019)

Article focus: A critical systematic literature review of research about international students learning online and at a distance

Article strengths: This paper highlights a replicable methodology for a systematic literature review that critically evaluates research about the authors' chosen research subtopic

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What currently inhibits critical research?

3

UNPACKING THE DEVALUATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND MOVING TOWARDS THE HUMANISATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Ly Thi Tran and Trang Hoang

Introduction

Developing research with international students requires researchers to explicitly acknowledge the current discourse in which international students are positioned, as highlighted throughout Section 2. International student experiences are situated at the nexus of transnational mobility, in-between residence and education (Chapter 15). Their experiences are often linked with and subject to a range of interrelated aspects such as study, employment, physical, virtual or blended mobility, intercultural connectedness, accommodation, geopolitics and potential migration. Policy representations in the host country often depict international students as much-needed economic, educational and cultural subjects (Tran & Hoang, 2019). However, international students are vulnerable due to both their non-citizenship in the country of education and the discourse that tends to devalue them, their experiences and their contributions.

Traditionally, international education discourse has economised, over-simplified, essentialised and othered international students (Chapter 5). An evolving discourse associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed more clearly than ever not only how unsustainable the transactional orientation driving international education is but also how international students have been devalued. This chapter will focus on elucidating three main ways in which the devaluation of international students occurs in the current discourse: the dehumanisation of international students, the essentialisation of international students and the Othering of international students. It calls for a critical reflection of the literature on the devaluation of international student experiences and for a more concentrated push towards humanising their experiences in practice, policy and research.

Critical considerations

Dehumanisation of international students

International education fosters popular rhetoric that the internationalisation of higher education is motivated by academic, social, cultural and economic forces. Yet in practice, the internationalisation of higher education, particularly in English-speaking countries, is predominantly driven by neo-liberal trade principles and framed within a transnational model (Rizvi, 2020) or a commercial enterprise (Bamberger et al., 2019). In line with economic imperatives, international education is often referred to as an 'industry' rather than a 'sector' or an educational endeavour. To ensure effective marketisation and commercialisation of international education, nations and universities have invested significantly in boosting international student recruitment and creating destination attractions by building their international branding and reputation. This discourse has made countries and institutions geared towards a more competitive approach, instead of a cooperative one, towards international education (de Wit, 2013; Knight, 2015). Some emerging studies have challenged economic rationality and promoted international student mobilities within the idealist as well as educationalist goals of promoting humanist values such as interculturalism, cosmopolitanism, empathy, human-to-human connections and global citizenship (Rizvi, 2008; Tran, 2020b).

The commercialisation of international education has resulted in a range of negative impacts on the framing of international students in practice and research. First, international students are seen largely in economic terms when the discourse around international students is mainly concerned with revenue generation from international student recruitment and their economic contributions to the host country (Tran, 2020a). This discourse dehumanises international students as they are often seen exclusively as numbers. It overshadows international students' potential value in enriching the social, cultural, educational and geopolitical fabrics of the host communities beyond economic terms (Tran, 2020a). Second, the overemphasis on the economic value of international students might create a widened division between this cohort and the local host communities, who often challenge the economic motivations of international education and might have a range of anxieties about the implications of international students for local (un)employment, job competition, university place allocation, housing and migration (Chapter 5; Tran & Hoang, 2019). Third, the discourse that is predominantly concerned with the marketisation of international education positions international students as users of educational services and as commodities. It overlooks the diverse human experiences and aspirations that international students attach to their transnational mobilities (Chapter 1). Fourth, the overemphasis on the economic value of international students may "represent a missed opportunity to

recognise and optimise the diverse cultural, intellectual and experiential values that international students can offer" to enrich the host communities (Tran, 2020a, p. 1). There is, therefore, a crucial need for research on international education to elucidate its humanisation, bringing to the fore the diverse experiences and aspirations of international students as human beings in transnational mobilities, while continuing to point out the problems associated with the commercialisation of international education.

Essentialisation of international students

A considerable body of the literature directly or indirectly frames the experiences of international students from an essentialised lens, where they are seen to have a set of fixed attributes that underpin their identity (Chapter 4; Tran, 2020a). This literature stream views international students' experiences related to inadequacies (e.g., language proficiency and learning skills) and challenges (e.g., lack of familiarity and understanding of academic culture) (Chapter 7). International students are often essentialised as lacking desirable skills and capabilities to effectively perform and engage in the host environment (Sherry et al., 2010). Pendse and Inman (2017), in their 34-year content analysis of international student literature, noted that "existing research on international students seemed to focus on adjustment problems and psychological distress" (p. 31). A review of current literature on international students reveals that, although cultural strength-oriented variables such as cultural knowledge, experiences, skills, friendship networks and family support (Tran & Pham, 2016; He & Hutson, 2018; Tran, 2011) have been explored, a theoretical framework viewing these variables as valuable assets in enriching teaching, learning and the educational experiences for all have not been consistently incorporated (Chapter 4).

In addition, international students in countries that have promoted the education-migration nexus like Australia have been stereotyped as a homogenous group of migration hunters or 'PR' [permanent residency] hunters who are not genuinely interested in learning but simply use international education as an instrumentalist means to pursue migration (Tran & Vu, 2016). This essentialisation ignores international students as human beings with aspirations for their education, professional and personal development, and future life. Tran and Vu's (2016) research elucidates the real dire impacts of such labelling on international students' emotional well-being, learning and connectedness with people and the workplace.

The discourse situating international students in a deficit frame (Chapter 7; Lomer et al., 2021) has a range of negative implications. First, the essentialisation of international students tends to indicate that their experiences and challenges are uniform while ignoring the homogeneity of the international student cohorts, their human aspirations and their capacity to transform

their experiences through transnational mobility (Tran, 2016; Tran & Vu, 2017; Marginson, 2014). Second, this discourse links international students' 'inadequate' language proficiency or different language expressions to their cognitive deficiencies, particularly in English-language contexts (Tran, 2016). Third, the stereotyping of international students and their characteristics leads to a range of dire impacts on their education, well-being, employability and connections with the host institutions and communities (Chapter 4; Tran & Vu, 2016). Fourth, as a result of placing international students in a deficit frame, research projects tend to focus on fixing 'problems' rather than leveraging opportunities and resources to optimise international students' capabilities and experiences.

Moving away from the essentialising discourse, a body of literature sheds light on international students' multiple facets of identity and agency (Karaman & Christian, 2020; Tran, 2016; Bennett et al., 2013). This stream of literature underscores how geographical mobility could have a transformative effect on the individual identity-formation process, as "experiences of mobile subjects become a process of self-researching, self-reflection, transition and transformation" (Christou, 2011, p. 253). International students bring along multiple identities that might be shaped and reshaped by their transnational mobilities experiences and their interaction with the home and host communities and a wide range of people, practices and circumstances (Karaman & Christian, 2020; Tran & Pham, 2016). Furthermore, studies of international students' experiences have shown that participants developed strategies to empower themselves and enhanced their learning as they negotiated a new transient identity (see Chapter 16). In other words, international students' identity construction in the host environment is a temporary strategy to achieve desired goals as the 'subject invests in the position' (Hall, 1996, pp. 5–6). More studies are needed to highlight international students' resilience and strategies to achieve their desired goals and foster this body of research undermining essentialist discourse.

There is a need to re-conceptualise international students as human beings with agency and capacity for ongoing learning. Agency refers to how international students as human agents have the potential to navigate international education experiences and 'enact self-changes' (Tran & Vu, 2017, p. 4). Exploring the development discourses surrounding their ways of enacting agency, being and becoming, is crucial in the emerging research paradigm. While it is important to acknowledge and identify the challenges international students encounter in their transient journeys, their capacity as human beings to negotiate cross-border experiences and mobility needs to be brought to the fore in the emergent international education research paradigm. Recognising international student agency, it is critically important to acknowledge and address agency as a concept that is interconnected with the socioeconomic, cultural, educational and familial histories of individuals, rather than the

dominant narratives featuring international students as "autonomous, race-less/genderless mobile subjects" (Stein & Andreotti, 2017, p. 135). In recent years, however, various perspectives centered around the notion of "desire" seem to have gained momentum in research on international students and international education (Chow & Yang, 2019; Collins et al., 2014). Tran (2016) coins the concept of mobility as *becoming* to capture how international students' multiple identities have been shaped and reshaped through their aspirations to engage in geographical, educational, cultural and 'life' border-crossings. Such ideas are reflected further in Chapter 16.

Othering of international students

As explored further in Chapter 6, a colonial discourse shaping the historical context of international education tends to position international students as 'others' rather than 'equal partners' in the host country. This colonial discourse has been around since the eighteenth century when the British, French and European colonisers drew on international education and student mobility as a mechanism to promulgate their colonial principles (Rizvi, 2007). During the post-colonial decades, international education was used by developed countries for dual purposes of providing aid and exercising soft power (ibid.). Since the 1980s, international education as part of a colonial project or "recolonisation of knowledge" (Ng, 2012, p. 454) is intrinsically linked with the increased commercialisation of education. The teaching and learning for international students and the treatment of international students reflect the Westernisation of education (Tran, 2013; Singh & Han, 2010) or the universalisation of 'Western' culture and practices (Edwards & Usher, 2000; Ryan, 2011). This colonial discourse is based on the assimilation assumption to assist international students as the 'others' or 'outsiders' in adjusting to 'our' education system (Chapter 5; Ninnes & Hellstén, 2005; Hellstén, 2008). Such an assumption is manifested in research designs where international students are positioned as having the responsibility of adapting to the host systems.

There are a range of issues and emerging discourse that tend to 'other' international students (as discussed further in Chapter 5). First, this colonialist frame leads to the coercive assimilation experiences of international students based on the assumption that international students are expected to assimilate into the host environment (Volet & Jones, 2012, p. 246) and the onus of adaptation is on international students who need to adjust to what is required of them (McLean & Ransom, 2005; Tran, 2016). Second, this ethnocentric perspective indicates that 'we' as teachers in the host countries, especially in the West, are responsible for "simply educating students in 'our ways' or 'our values'" (Ryan, 2011, p. 637). Third, this colonisation frame lacks equality and inclusivity because it does not treat international students as equal partners in international education and equal co-contributors to knowledge

(Green, 2019). In so doing, this discourse precludes reciprocal learning and the development of the 'new possibles' in international education by drawing on international students' transnational experiences, knowledge, skills and multilingual capabilities as valuable assets to enrich learning for all (Tran, 2013). Therefore, it is critical for research to not only critique the Othering discourse but also explore the theoretical foundations and build empirical evidence on the practices and nuances around treating international students with respect for their full rights as equal learners and equal human beings in the host country. These ideas will be developed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Reflection questions

- How does existing research on my topic area essentialise or humanise international students?
- How do my research design choices capture these discourses?
- How do I frame a research project that captures the nuances about the humanisation of international students?
- How can I design a study that explores the diverse ways international students are positioned across different countries, especially including Global South and Global North countries (while keeping in mind that these two concepts remain contested)?
- What are the key factors I need to consider in designing a study on what represents the humanisation of international student experiences?

Suggestions for researchers

Engage in critiques of simplifying international students as a homogeneous cohort with uniform patterns of adaptation. It is critical for research to challenge existing myths about international students and take into account their diverse characteristics, needs and aspirations in designing research projects (see Section 3). It is equally important to adopt a research approach that allows for the conceptualisation of the nuances of international student agency and their capacity to navigate transnational mobility and cross-border education. In so doing, research on international students can consider co-designing research activities and outcomes with international students themselves (see Chapter 22).

　　Focus more on the humanisation of international student experiences. It is worthwhile for research on international students to continue to highlight the implications of commercialisation of international education and the associated positioning of international students as commodities. However, moving forward and underscoring the humanist lens on international students and what this means in international education research is more critical than ever.

Design a mixed-methods study. Consider how different methods might allow for more complex understandings of the topic you are researching. For example, consider how combined qualitative and quantitative design can help provide much-needed insights into international students' diverse transnational knowledge, cultural, professional and language resources in blended and online curricula, teaching and learning.

Example in practice

Article: Tran (2016)

Article focus: This article illustrates how the researcher conceptualised the lived experiences of international students in the host country and introduces the concept of mobility as becoming to the literature on international students.

Article strengths: The article underscores the integrated nature of Bourdieu's forms of capital in understanding international students' aspirations for educational, social, personal and professional development. Introducing the concept of mobility as becoming which allows for the re-imagination of international students' aspirations attached to transnational mobility, the article challenges and changes the orthodox notions of international students as being fixed, static and homogeneous.

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4

STEREOTYPES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Reflecting on our scholarly responsibilities through conceptual framings

Tang T. Heng and Nannan Lu

Introduction

When we encounter the phrase "international students," instead of associating it with the abstract definition of students who cross national borders, under visas, to study in an accredited institution of the host country (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001), we tend to associate it with an image of international students. This "typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group" is defined by Dovidio et al. (2010, p. 7) as a stereotype. A stereotype draws upon information that may, or may not, be explicitly evident to create perceptions of a group that may be positive or negative. Additionally, it produces a response predisposing a person to associate behaviours or attitudes aligned with the stereotype that, again, may or may not be true. Stereotypes are problematic as they can trigger explicit prejudicial words or acts directed at international students, the internalisation of stereotypical beliefs by students themselves, or predispose students to stereotype threat (Quinn et al., 2010).

Stereotypes of international students

International students are subjected to different stereotypes in and beyond research involving them. To begin, they tend to be discussed as a homogeneous group, devoid of differences across them, be it in their nationality, gender, socioeconomic status, year, or field of study, to name a few (Heng, 2019; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). Next, they tend to be portrayed from a deficit framing (Chapter 7), where their ways of doing and thinking are seen as in need of fixing or inferior to those of host countries (Haugh, 2016; Heng,

2018b). While the deficit narrative is more subtle in research literature today as compared to 20 years ago (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023), it continues to emerge in both implicit and explicit ways. Terms such as "barriers, challenges, problems, stresses, needs, struggles" have been used to describe international students more frequently than descriptors like "capable, able, coping, managing" in research on pedagogical practices (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023, p. 1251). Mittelmeier and Yang (2022) found a similar trend where articles about internationalisation reflected international students through the perspective of challenges, absence of skills, or need for support structures to help them "integrate".

Chinese international students, in particular, have been associated with the above stereotypes, in part because their sheer number worldwide offers more opportunities for interaction and research. They have likewise been portrayed as homogeneous and deficient Heng, 2018b; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023; Song, 2020; Xu, 2021). More specifically, they have been typecast as struggling with critical thinking (Xu, 2021), used to teacher-centred instruction (Dervin, 2011), reticent (Heng, 2018b; Xu, 2021; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018), dishonest, or prone to plagiarism (Abelmann & Kang, 2014), amongst others. Beyond homogeneity and deficiency, Chinese international students have been further stereotyped as rich, cash cows (Abelmann & Kang, 2014; Song, 2020; Xie et al., 2020; Xu, 2021), collectivistic or valuing "face" (Dervin, 2011, p. 45), unassimilable or unsociable (Abelmann & Kang, 2014; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Xie et al., 2020), Chinese Communist Party spies or digital thefts (Song, 2020), and competitors/enemies of host countries (Heng, 2017; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018). Chinese international students themselves have reported perceptions or experiences of prejudicial words or acts (Heng, 2017; Nam et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020), reflecting the pernicious impacts of these negative stereotypes. Although this chapter uses Chinese students illustratively, stereotyping in and through research negatively impacts all international students.

Fingers have pointed towards the media for creating stereotypes around international students (Abelmann & Kang, 2014; Song, 2020; Zhang, 2015), as Song (2020) cautioned about the potential seepage of the media's negative portrayal through images and narratives into higher education. As a scholarly community, we need to confront the possibility that our research can contribute to stereotype formation around international students, rather than relegate blame to the media. Thus, this chapter invites readers to reflect on their research approaches, specifically their conceptual framing, and, consequently, scholarly responsibilities. To this end, we first discuss the role of conceptual framing and highlight the kinds of framing that persist in research with international students. Thereafter, using a literature review of the experiences of international students, we explore the relationship between framing, research methods, and research focus/findings. While scholars have documented a

trend in English-language research embracing alternative perspectives that challenge the homogenising and deficit discourse around international students (Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022; Xu, 2021), the movement is nascent, and we hope to contribute to its expansion.

Critical considerations

Conceptual (and theoretical) framing in research

Conceptual (or theoretical) frameworks are core to research (Chapter 2), as they shape how research is problematised (and, conversely, justified), what questions are asked and methods chosen, as well as how data are interpreted, reported, and discussed (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002). Defined as a network of theories, concepts, or ideas drawn from extant literature, conceptual (or theoretical) frameworks are interwoven with a researcher's assumptions and expectations. Different sources contribute to a framework. A researcher's experiential knowledge – shaped by his or her daily experiences – may pave the way to a "tentative theory" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33) that catalyses the research or the personal theories, observations, and reflections formed throughout the research. Extant research and theories offer data or theories that can develop or challenge a researcher's thoughts and approach, compensating, to some extent, the potential bias associated with experiential knowledge.

Even though conceptual and theoretical frameworks are often seen as synonymous, some scholars argue otherwise, claiming the latter is a subset of the former (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017; Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). Conceptual frameworks include theories and other ideas, concepts, as well as personal assumptions, while theoretical frameworks comprise established and hypothesised relationships across data and ideas. Instead of delving into the etymology associated with different research traditions, in this chapter, we use the word "conceptual framework" as it encompasses both concepts and theories.

Regardless of nomenclature, a framework is closely intertwined with a paradigm, or interpretive framework, as qualitative researchers prefer to call it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A paradigm, or "philosophical position" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 36), comprises a "researcher's view of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows reality (epistemology), the value-stance taken by the inquirer (axiology), and the procedures used in the study (methodology)" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 18). A researcher's experiential knowledge, ontology, and epistemology are in turn shaped by his or her life circumstances, sociocultural environment, and other external variables. Assumptions tied to our fundamental beliefs and value systems are eventually embedded in our paradigms (Kuhn, 1970). Thus, paradigms are, arguably, value-laden. When researchers reflect on their paradigm and contemplate how and where they are located in relation to the social and political context of their research, they are "positioning

themselves" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24) and being reflexive. Reflecting on our paradigms, positionalities, and their impact is, therefore, critical in recognising the strengths and limitations of research with international students.

Framing in research on/with international students

Scholars have observed peculiarities in how research on/with international students has been framed. For one, there appear to be limited ways of framing the research. Mittelmeier and Yang (2022) reported that out of 151 internationalisation articles reviewed, only 3.31% framed the research through power and privilege, and 2.65% through dominance, pointing towards limited framing from the critical paradigm, echoing other scholars' observations (Buckner & Stein, 2020; George Mwangi & Yao, 2020; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). Instead, research has been rooted in "assimilationist and psychology frameworks focused on coping to understand international student adjustment in their new environment" (George Mwangi & Yao, 2020, p. 22). Such paradigms implicitly place the responsibility of adjustment on students, scrutinising their deficits, and evaluating them against the host community's yardstick. International students are expected to acculturate, with their maladjustments foregrounded, as opposed to strengths (George Mwangi & Yao, 2020; Heng, 2018b).

Relatedly, seeing international students as subjects that need improvement reveals a subtle "Othering" (Said, 1979) of international students that researchers may or may not be aware of (Chapter 5; Xu, 2021). Dervin (2011) observed that researchers seldom acknowledge their subjectivities and, therefore, are predisposed to Othering. Likewise, framing international students as a homogeneous group "implies the salient characteristics from the perspective of the teacher and researcher is simply their difference: They are 'international'" (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023, p. 1252). Seeing international students as the Other may sway researchers to omit nuances within the group and begs the question of other assumptions held of their research subjects (Chapter 1).

Researchers' positionalities are not always made explicit (Chapter 20), bearing implications on the ethics of how international students are framed (Chapter 21; Dervin, 2011; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). Scholars argued that the negative stereotypes of international students in English-language literature can be linked to the fact that scholars researching the phenomenon are mostly based in the Global North (Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022; Tight, 2021; Xu, 2021). A combination of the colonial mentality behind higher education and the superiority complex that the Global North is more advanced and has much to teach the rest of the world has been inferred to subtly shape how researchers view, relate to, research, and represent international students (Chapter 6; Buckner & Stein, 2020; George Mwangi & Yao, 2020; Song, 2020). Xu's (2021) comparison of English- versus Chinese-language literature

on Chinese international students illuminates how researchers' positionalities are intertwined with the portrayal of the former. She found that Chinese-language literature tends to centre Chinese international students within the long history of educational movement between China and the West, highlighting the continuities and changes in Chinese international students' stances and knowledge contributions. Additionally, Chinese scholars are more inclined to portray Chinese international students as political or ideological subjects, reflecting the responsibility scholars themselves aim to uphold to the society and state. English-language literature, conversely, tends to portray Chinese international students through pedagogic, neoliberal, or racialised stances. These observations illustrate how researchers' positionalities, and consequently interpretations, of a phenomenon are deeply shaped by their contexts. Both Chinese- and English-language literature offer valuable perspectives. What becomes troubling, though, is when some perspectives dominate within (or beyond) their context, creating partial ways the phenomenon is understood, invariably fostering stereotypes.

Indeed, we recognise that our own positionalities have shaped our work and this chapter. As scholars who are both female and ethnically Chinese (Tang grew up in Singapore, Nannan in China), we were both international students studying graduate education, at separate times and institutions, in the United States (with Tang having completed her undergraduate in the United Kingdom and Nannan currently pursuing her doctorate in Singapore). As such, we seek to diversify the ways in which narratives of (Chinese) international students are told.

How framing shapes research design: a case study of Chinese international students

To further illustrate how conceptual framing affects the entire research process and, to some extent, the portrayal of international students in research, we briefly discuss Heng's (2020) literature review of Chinese international students next. While Chinese international students are used as an illustrative case here, many of the insights gleaned below may apply beyond this particular student group. Following a search of Chinese international students' experiences in 16 higher education journals, 43 articles were analysed according to various characteristics, for instance, method/ologies, framing, and research focus (see Heng, 2020, for more detail).

Heng (2020) found that more than half of the articles centred on investigating Chinese international students' struggles and problems, with less than half examining student agency and changes over time. Research that engaged with theories primarily utilised sociocultural (39%) and acculturation (33%) theories. Articles using acculturation theories tended mostly to focus on students' challenges and problems, with only three addressing their changes and

agency. Conversely, articles using sociocultural theories tended mostly to focus on understanding students' changes and agency, with only four solely investigating their challenges (Table 4.1). Method/ologies for all 43 articles overwhelmingly clustered around interviews (84%) and surveys (39%), followed by artefacts/document analysis (14%) and focus group (14%); only 5% involved reflection journals.

These patterns unveil the relationship between conceptual frameworks, research focuses, methods, and, ultimately, findings. There appears to be a stronger association between sociocultural framework and more fluid or asset-based ways of understanding (and, eventually, representing) Chinese international students. In a nutshell, sociocultural frameworks tend to foreground the environmental context and its dialectical relationship with human development (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Such frameworks recognise that learning and development are embedded in the cultural production process and subjected to change. Premises underlying these frameworks appear to predispose researchers to more asset-based approaches to studying their participants; conversely, one could argue that researchers who assume strengths in Chinese international students are more inclined to select these frameworks, reflecting the role of researchers' paradigms and positionalities.

Acculturation frameworks seem to predispose researchers to fixed ways of studying and representing students and/or their problems. As Dervin (2011) cautioned, these frameworks tend to uncritically essentialise culture into "solid" (p. 39) perspectives, Othering international students (see also Chapter 5). These examples reflect the intimate relationship and interaction between a researcher's experiential knowledge and worldviews with paradigms and conceptual frameworks (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kuhn, 1970; Maxwell, 2005). Additionally, we see how framings intertwine with method/ologies: Only two articles used reflection journals to collect data that are participant, as opposed to solely researcher, driven, respect participants' time preference, and support participants' metacognitive and development process. This begets the question: To what extent do researchers value international students as equals?

TABLE 4.1 Summary of conceptual framing and research focus cross-analysis (Heng, 2020)

Conceptual framing	Research focus	Number of articles
Sociocultural	Struggles/Problems	4
	Agency/Changes	9
Acculturation	Struggles/Problems	8
	Agency/Changes	3
Identity related		5
Internationalisation		4
Total		33

The purpose of discussing the roles of conceptual framing is not to vil-lainise or glorify certain frameworks. Our summaries of the aforementioned frameworks are necessarily reductive, the small number of studies limits gen-eralisability and quantitative research has been omitted. Both sociocultural and acculturation frameworks have been criticised for not sufficiently engag-ing with issues of power and questioning how historical, institutional, and global structures contribute to seeing international students as different or deficit (Chapter 7; Buckner & Stein, 2020; George Mwangi & Yao, 2020; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). In fact, more than half of the articles on Chi-nese international students in Heng's (2020) study focused on reporting their problems points to potential issues these framings yield and how, as a research community, we may unconsciously be creating certain stereotypes of Chinese international students by excessively relying on particular framings. There-fore, researchers hold great responsibilities in recognising our paradigms and positionalities and in diversifying our choice of conceptual framings in our research, as each comes with its affordances and limitations. Yet, this issue is not restricted merely to Chinese international students, as the chapters to fol-low will reveal. When approaching subsequent chapters, it may thus be helpful to contemplate if/how/what stereotypes of international students are created, perpetuated, or overturned by the choice of conceptual framings. We hope that with greater reflexivity and epistemological diversity, we can aspire to cre-ate a more balanced, inclusive, and comprehensive perspective of international students as well as achieve more ethical and equitable relationships with them.

Reflection questions

- How might the literature I read reflect stereotypes of international stu-dents? Why might these stereotypes exist?
- What are commonly used paradigms or conceptual frameworks? What are their affordances and limitations? What alternative paradigms or conceptual frameworks hold promise?
- What stereotypes do I hold of international students? How are these stereo-types formed and developed?
- How might my work produce/reproduce stereotypes? Specifically, how might my theoretical framework perpetuate stereotypes of international students?
- What can I do to reduce the production/reproduction of stereotypes?

Suggestions for researchers

Converse with and include more voices of international students and scholars based and educated in the Global South. By interacting with and involving scholars from a wider variety of backgrounds, we can capture differ-ent ways of seeing and knowing that may help to dispel stereotypes of inter-national students.

Beware of the assumptions and biases behind our perspectives. The credibility and significance of our research can be undermined without interrogating our assumptions and biases. The greater our awareness of these assumptions and biases, the better we understand the complexity of international students' experiences.

Engage in reflexivity and lay out our positionalities. Carefully consider the potential impact of our positionalities in our research and clearly articulate its limitations and advantages. Pay attention to the positionalities of others so that we can gain critical insights from each other's scholarship to move the subfield forward.

Explore new paradigms/ways of framing or research focus. Diversify the paradigms and conceptual frameworks beyond those typically used. Some underexplored framings include, but are not limited to, feminist, intersectional, and post-structuralist perspectives. Action research, likewise, is rarely used, reminding us of the need to have more "conversations *with* them, not *about* them" (Heng, 2018a). Deuchar (2022) suggests investigating international students' "practices" as opposed to "experiences".

Expand methodological choices (Section 5). Related to new ways of framing, incorporating a wider variety of how we value and collect data can yield new or more nuanced perspectives. For instance, Klemenčič et al. (2017) incorporated digital ethnography and Dervin (2011) dialogical methods and critical discourse analysis to capture new ways of collecting and analysing data.

Example in practice

Article: Heng (2020)
Article focus: This article synthesises qualitative research about Chinese international students' experiences as an analytic example to illustrate the role of theories in shaping research designs, focuses, and findings.
Article strengths: This article discusses the implications of a lack of theoretical engagement or diversity in how we research and support international students.

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5

CAUSES, MECHANISMS AND CONSEQUENCES OF OTHERING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Yang Liu and Yizhu Qian

Introduction

Numerous intercultural communication studies have addressed how to facilitate international students' cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural development in receiving countries (Jing et al., 2020; Liu & Kramer, 2019). However, the literature can be problematic because many researchers view international students' differences from the receiving cultures as something that should be solved through successful adaptation (Chapter 7). As a result of the difference-as-problem viewpoint, international students' identification with the receiving cultures is set as a universally desirable outcome as well as a prerequisite of acceptance in receiving countries, and their incongruence is deemed unwanted and unfavourable for their intercultural adaptation in receiving countries (Liu, 2021; Liu & Kramer, 2019). Eventually, international students' identity of being 'the Other', defined as someone not from the receiving cultures, has long been underestimated and disregarded, and critiques of such underestimation and disregard have been made by very few scholars in current intercultural scholarship (exceptions include Inokuchi & Nozaki, 2005; Liu & Kramer, 2019, and Liu, 2020). Like other international migrants, international students constantly encounter their Other-identity ascribed by Othering, which can be intentionally initiated or justified as conventional acts. Othering can be manifested in both admiring and derogatory ways. Whether seeming positive or negative, Othering can cause discomfort to international migrants by making them feel separated and even excluded. Specific to higher education institutions, there has been a problem of Otherizing international students in and outside the classroom, and it has become rapidly intensified following the strike of COVID-19 globally (Ji & Chen, 2022; Liu,

2020). It is also worth mentioning that Othering is a reciprocal process. When international students perceive themselves as categorized as the Other, they are implementing the Othering to others at the same time. Given the scarcity of research exclusively attending to international students' Other-identity, this chapter will place Othering as the core concept and elaborates on its causes, mechanisms and consequences. To make this chapter more focused, empirical research on international student mobility between Western countries and Asia is mainly scrutinized. Special attention is made to international students in China and their Asian peers in America and Europe, for the concept of Othering is developed based on Said's (1979) elaboration on the binary opposition between Occidental (us) and Oriental (them), and a large number of Chinese and Western international students are currently being researched.

Critical considerations

Understanding Othering of international students in three steps

As alluded to in Chapter 1, based on Said's (1979) classic analysis of the us-and-them binary social relationship, Othering is defined as "the way a power works to construct particular subject positions for 'us' by designating a certain category of people as 'them'" (Inokuchi & Nozaki, 2005, pp. 62–63). As a three-step process, Othering can be described as follows: (1) the Other is barely recognized as not-Self in the first place, (2) then the Otherness is attributed to the Other and (3) finally, such attribution is linked to specific motivations and/or payoff (Brons, 2015). Grounded in marked differences, international students are distinguished as the Other in receiving countries on two levels: phenotype and culture (Liu & Kramer, 2019).

Due to its racial and ethnic distinctiveness, the phenotype is widely used as an essential marker to separate international students as out-groups on campus. For example, the non-White skin colour constantly renders Asian international students visible in distinctive ways in American and British higher education institutions, while those with phenotypically White features from such countries as Canada and New Zealand can merge into predominantly White college environments more effortlessly and are unlikely to be recognized as newcomers at first sight (Kim, 2011). When it comes to Asian higher education institutions, international students who are phenotypically distinguishable can be easily racialized as the Other. For example, White American students and their peers from African countries find themselves standing out as *waiguoren* (外国人 in Mandarin, "foreigner" in direct translation) in the Chinese gaze, given their prominent Whiteness or Blackness captured by Chinese people (Liu & Dervin, 2022; Mulvey, 2020; Chapter 9).

In addition to physical dissimilarity, language is widely taken as a strong determinant in categorizing international students as the Other (Chapter 17). For

Asian international students studying in North America and Europe, their limited proficiency in the official languages of receiving countries can expose them to blatantly marked differences from local students during in-class seminar discussions (Kim, 2011; Lan, 2020). Similarly, international students' out-group membership is frequently made salient by their difficulties in fully and naturally expressing themselves in Mandarin and keeping up with Chinese people's culture-based daily conversation (Li, 2015; Ma & Wen, 2018; Tian & Lowe, 2018). Although some international students have mastered Mandarin at an advanced level, their Other-identity is still spotlighted since Chinese acquaintances' surprise at their Mandarin proficiency is attributed to their violated expectation that *waiguoren* cannot speak Mandarin as well as Chinese people (Liu, 2021).

Following phenotype and language, nationality can also bring international students' Otherness into prominence, as noted in Chapter 1. With an emphasis on sojourning students' diverse nationalities, the term *international students* is widely adopted and used as a well-known label in current scholarship. However, this label is problematic as it differentiates non-local students from their local peers, and such a differentiation signals an Othering that usually goes unnoticed as a conventional discourse (Madge et al., 2009). Last but not least, cultural values function as less overt social categorizing criteria that ascribe out-group membership to international students for their cultural value discrepancies (Liu, 2021; Schiefer et al., 2012). For example, Chinese international students may perceive American friendship's individualism-oriented construction and operation as an alien concept, which engenders a sense of displacement in the United States (Liu & Dong, 2019). Similarly, American students sense their Other-identity when enmeshed in the collectivism-oriented network of Chinese friendship (Liu, 2019).

Attribution of Otherness to international students is embedded in asymmetric power structures since intercultural encounters rarely occur on equal ground (Nakayama & Martin, 2017). International student mobility on the global scale has been dominated by intellectual migration from the rest of the world to higher education institutions in Western countries (Chapter 6). Many international students' South-North mobile trajectories are launched out of their initial impetus of accumulating valuable cultural capital encapsulated in Western university degrees and utilizing the capital to exchange for an enhanced social class positioning back home (Chapter 13; Waters, 2006). Such an aspiration is framed by the academic imperialism-underlaid discourses constructed by media, policies and higher education institutions, which constructs the West as the centre of internationalized higher education and international students as pilgrims who aspire to study in a more advanced educational system (Lee et al., 2019; Madge et al., 2009).

As Rizvi et al. (2006) argued, education in higher education institutions is "an object of postcolonial critique regarding its complicity with Eurocentric

discourses and practices" (p. 257). When international students fail to align themselves with Western standards, they will be implicitly required to adapt to European and/or American cultural norms and values (Hanassab, 2006). Otherwise, these migrating individuals, as minorities in asymmetric educational structures, will be distinguished as incompetent, inferior and even unwanted Other and thus be susceptible to stereotyping, stigmatization and exclusion. The Othering of international students can be intensified when they are perceived to pose threats to people in receiving countries. The perception of threats, according to integrated threat theory, does not need to be real (Croucher et al., 2020). Being realistic or symbolic, the perceived threats can elicit the dominant groups' negative attitudes toward minority groups and lead to prejudice and discrimination against them (Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Therefore, Chinese international students fell prey to stigmatization in the United States due to the spread of COVID-19 (Croucher et al., 2020; Ji & Chen, 2022).

Besides the negative Othering depicted earlier, international students moving from the North to the South can also be Otherized in a seemingly positive way. For example, some Western international students receive compliments from domestic students on their Whiteness-anchored beauty, and some are offered profitable English-teaching jobs for merely being White due to the lingering global White supremacy in Asia (Fraser & Cheng, 2022; Liu & Dervin, 2022). Additionally, many Chinese higher education institutions intend to show their hospitality and care by offering international students better-furnished dormitory buildings and English-medium classes (Ding, 2016). However, these institutional arrangements can cause discomfort to many Western students since they uphold the value of equal treatment and are accustomed to international students mixing with domestic students on campus back home. Though benign and even enviable, such an Asian gaze is still experienced as Othering, which makes Western international students stand out as racial and national out-group members (Ding, 2016; Liu, 2020; Liu & Dervin, 2022).

Recognizing the reciprocal nature of Othering

Othering, as a two-way process, is mutual and reciprocal and can be exchanged between locals in receiving countries and international students (Liu, 2021; Liu & Dervin, 2022). When international students are constructed as the Other in receiving countries, they gaze upon and initiate the Othering of locals simultaneously. In American and British higher education institutions, for instance, Asian international students' diasporic nationalism emerges as a defensive mechanism to protect their self-esteem and dispel discomfort caused by Other-identity imposed upon them (Kim, 2011; Liu & Dong, 2019). In and through the British Orientalism-underscored gaze, international students

from South Korea and Japan disclosed that they had never felt their ethnic identities so strongly before coming to the United Kingdom and thus differentiated British people as "them", whose culture was not as appealing as their home cultures (Kim, 2011). By the same token, Chinese international students in the United States intentionally demonstrated Chinese identity via self-made Chinese cuisine, which was deemed more sophisticated and healthy than the Western diet consumed by Americans as "them" (Liu & Dong, 2019).

The defensive mechanism is evident in both South-South and North-South international student mobilities. Feeling excluded on campus and outside, Pakistani students closely bonded with their co-nationals and stressed in-group membership during their first-year studies in China (Tian & Lowe, 2018). From these Pakistani students' perspectives, most Chinese teachers, as the out-group members, were not linguistically competent enough to teach them. Likewise, American international students in China essentialized the Chinese who initiated the discourse of Othering in the form of staring by describing them as "uneducated" and attributing their stares to the comparative novelty of foreigners in a developing country (Liu & Dervin, 2022). European students calibrated Western higher education as the key reference point and attributed their less-than-satisfactory academic performance to Chinese pedagogy, which was perceived as "meaningless", "boring", "uninspiring" and "lack of independence" (Ding, 2016; Li, 2015; Ma & Wen, 2018).

Two-way Othering is deeply rooted in mutual ethnocentrism, a phenomenon that occurs when each group firmly believes in their superiority to the Other during intergroup interactions (Liu, 2021). As a result of its mutuality and reciprocity, Othering entails divergent and even contrasting perspectives between international students and locals in receiving countries. The divergence and contrast are partially attributable to individuals' different pre-agreements, both endowed and limited by their different horizons. Gadamer (1991) defines the horizon as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (p. 301). During intercultural encounters, individuals cannot escape from their preconceptions moulded by their horizons and fostered by their home cultures. When these preconceptions are incompatible with each other, individuals from different cultures may interpret the same intercultural encounter differently. In this context, discrepancies in interpretations given by international students and locals can result in miscommunication, which, if not handled properly, can further lead to prejudice, discrimination and even hatred in higher education institutions.

Contextualising Othering of international students

The Othering of international students is triggered by a combination of such factors as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender and history. For example,

European American students in China are immediately captured as the Other in many Chinese individuals' curiosity-driven staring for their bodily Whiteness, but female European Americans disclose more discomfort about being visually consumed as the White Other, especially when the gaze is from Chinese males (Liu & Dervin, 2022). Although Chinese American students are more likely to be accepted as in-group members in Chinese society, they are occasionally assumed by some Chinese acquaintances to be wealthy merely for being Americans, the economically abundant Other in the Chinese gaze (Liu & Croucher, 2022). Suffering from long-standing racism as the Other in American society, African American students in China may not feel the Othering as strongly as their White peers, especially those with immigrant parents (Liu, 2021). The interwoven factors discussed earlier create different representations of Othering, which requires researchers to contextualize their analyses in specific contexts. In this regard, intersectionality, an analytical framework coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), can help researchers identify multiple factors that trigger the Othering of international students and examine how these factors empower and/or oppress these migrating individuals' intersecting and overlapping Otherness.

Furthermore, the Othering of international students is enacted by different social agents. Given international students' steady contribution to the economic benefits of countries in Europe, North America and Oceania, this body of international migrants has long been perceived as cash cows for Western higher education sectors (MacDonald, 2013; Mittelmeier & Lomer, 2021). This perception fostered and sustained by internationalization policies in Western countries, has differentiated international students from domestic students and even exposed them to stereotyping that they are competent in nothing but merely rolling in cash (Fakih, 2019). On the meso level, higher education institutions institutionalize the Othering of international students in diverse ways. For instance, Asian international students studying in the West are expected to meet the Eurocentric pedagogical standard or will be regarded as deficient (Kingston & Forland, 2007 – see also Chapters 1, 3, and 7). On the micro level, people-to-people intercultural encounters can trigger the Othering of international students as well. As previously demonstrated, international students' differences are constantly brought into prominence, verbally or nonverbally, during their everyday interactions with locals in and outside the classroom. For instance, *laowai* (老外 in Mandarin, "foreigner" in direct translation), which is habitually used by the Chinese as a neutral way to categorize international migrants without noticeable Chinese phenotype, is commonly experienced by American sojourners as an Othering practice (Liu & Self, 2019). However, the everydayness of Othering has not received sufficient attention in the current scholarship.

Reflection questions

- In what ways might my research with international students problematize international students' distance from receiving cultures? How could I reverse or undermine this assumption in my research design and practice?
- What theoretical tools could I use to illustrate how international students' Other-identity is formulated and sustained on campus and outside?
- How could my future research attend to the mutuality and reciprocity of Othering in higher education institutions? How could I attend to and represent different groups' voices and understand their interpretations from their standpoints?
- Beyond the Othering initiated and implemented on macro and meso levels, how could my future research develop a holistic understanding of international students' Other-identity?

Practical suggestions for researchers

Scrutinize asymmetric power structures underlying international student mobility. Embedded in international students' transnational migration, different power structures are intersected and overlap with each other along both spatial and temporal dimensions. Noting these asymmetric power structures may generate a time and context-contingent understanding of why and how international students are distinguished as the Other in higher education institutions and the possible consequences brought by the Othering on campus and outside.

Employ etic and emic angles to capture the reciprocity of Othering. As a Chinese researcher working in a Chinese university, I (the first author) recognized that the answers given to me during the interviews with international students in China could carry bias. In and through their eyes, I was distinguished as the Other who could not be offended but impressed. Given the reciprocal nature of Othering, this chapter suggests employing both etic and emic perspectives to explore how international students feel Otherized and Otherize locals in receiving countries simultaneously.

Include and present different social agents' voices as participants in one research study. As illustrated earlier, international students and locals may interpret the same intercultural encounter in a diverse and even contradicting way. To analyze these encounters as accurately as possible, researchers are suggested to attend to not only international students' descriptions but also the narratives of domestic students, teaching staff and administration staff. By doing this, researchers can better map out how these viewpoints are divergent from each other and help higher education institutions in receiving countries create a more inclusive environment for international students.

Example in practice

Article: Liu (2020)

Article focus: This study elaborates on the formation of international students' Other-identity in China and detects challenges brought by the Othering to this group by examining American students' experiences on the Chinese mainland as a representative case.

Article strengths: Focusing on the classroom contexts, this study reveals how American students felt perceived as the generically disparate, linguistically incompetent and even unwanted Other in different contexts and demonstrates how the Othering negatively impacted them as minorities in Chinese classrooms. In addition to presenting American students' standpoints, this study points out the mutuality of Othering by critically examining these viewpoints from an etic angle. Moreover, this study provides practical suggestions regarding how to include the voices of Chinese teachers and students in future research and how to facilitate more inclusive communication between international students and Chinese higher education institutions.

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6

COLONIALITY OF POWER AND RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Hyacinth Udah

Introduction

While the push–pull theoretical framework has been used to explain factors influencing decisions to study abroad, underlying postcolonial trajectories continue to facilitate the current global flows of international students (Ploner & Nada, 2020). In many ways, colonialism has brought many international students from the Global South[1] to the Global North. Many of these students associate Global North education with higher value and attribute inferiority to their home education (Karimi & Bucerius, 2018). Such students are pulled by the desire not only to hold degrees from prestigious Global North universities but also to belong to the global standards and norms created by coloniality – a specific consequence of centuries of European colonialism – that established excellence, superiority and world-class reputation of high-quality education (Rizvi, 2007). As Heleta (2016, p. 2) writes, "One of the most destructive effects of colonialism was the subjugation of local knowledge and promotion of the Western knowledge as universal knowledge." Thus, the epistemic heritage associated with Global North education continues to influence, if not dominate, some international students' decisions to study abroad, reflecting prevailing postcolonial power/knowledge structures (Ploner & Nada, 2020). Seen from this angle, going abroad to study becomes a means for some students with a colonial mentality – characterised by a perception of their ethnic or cultural inferiority (Karimi & Bucerius, 2018) – not only to escape from restrictive and unfavourable social conditions (such as political oppression, limited educational and employment opportunities) in their home countries but also to gain prestige and career mobility and enhance social status. While the majority gain international educational experiences and a degree abroad,

it is important to emphasise that many international students with racialised ethnicities within Global North higher education institutions live under coloniality (Udah, 2021). The coloniality of power of their host countries and institutions continues to racialise and construct them as the inferior Other.

As a former international student and a non-Western immigrant researcher, I have learned how racialised international students are exposed to discriminatory epistemic violence, dominated by deficit discourses – focusing on what is wrong, broken, or pathological, not what is strong within them. Born and raised in Nigeria, I came to Australia, specifically, to further my education. I love Australia for its safety, high-quality education and vibrant multiculturalism, which are important elements for considerations among international students in choosing Australian universities. However, since arriving, living, studying and working in Australia, I have become interested in changing the negative stereotypes about racialised international students (see Chapters 1, 3 and 7).

Drawing on the concept of coloniality, this chapter examines colonial mentalities in research. The chapter contributes to the literature on research with international students and broader debates on global coloniality. It illuminates how coloniality shapes research and uneven relations create conditions that exploit, dominate, oppress and marginalise. In doing so, the chapter highlights the harms of framing research with international students in prevailing colonial perspectives and assumptions, which can perpetuate subjugation, impacting learning and engagement outcomes. The chapter concludes with practical suggestions for researchers.

Critical considerations

Coloniality

First coined and developed by Quijano (2016), the concept of coloniality captures the living structures of dominance and subordination within modern society. Coloniality refers to long-standing ways of knowing, being and power in contemporary societies associated with five hundred years of European colonialism. Despite its roots in colonial history, coloniality has survived formal colonialism and continues to operate at the heart of the macro-structures of modern society. As a process, coloniality manifests in three main ways: (1) systems of hierarchies through racial classification and valorisation of Whiteness – a category of power, domination, and privilege; (2) systems of knowledge through the construction of Western and Eurocentric perspectives as the universal scientific norm; and (3) societal systems through the creation of state and specific institutions (e.g., national institutions, international organisations and courts of law) to control, manage colonised populations and diminish decolonising systems of lived experiences. Thus, coloniality manifests in particular forms of domination, subjugation and exploitation and conditions of power,

defining people, culture, intersubjectivity, relations and knowledge production (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Coloniality is maintained in various aspects and levels of everyday experience in the classroom, university and society – media, curriculum, research, criteria for academic performance and aspirations (Quijano, 2016).

Coloniality not only highlights the structures of power and hegemony but also addresses the experiences of race, class and gender that still exist in many modern contexts. According to Quijano (2016), the idea of race and the social construction of racial classification legitimised colonial relations and structures of power after the end of colonialism and continue to shape all social, economic and political structures that persist today in varied forms of exploitation and domination. In fact, the existing colonial matrix of power affects all dimensions of social existence, ranging from hegemony over history, economy; authority; politics, gender and sexuality; language; to control over subjectivity, health and knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Coloniality of power is an important concept for understanding the continuities of varied forms of hierarchical unequal social relationships of domination in contemporary life, particularly the global racial/ethnic hierarchy. In the Global North higher education contexts, the power of coloniality affects all epistemologies – curricula and research remain largely Western and Eurocentric. Coloniality still operates at the centre of research practice (Heleta, 2016), influencing interpersonal interactions with, and responses to, international students as research subjects.

The problem of coloniality is that research practice is subsumed by the norms created and imposed by Western ways of knowing, being and doing. This imposition has led to a corresponding marginalisation of international students. In many ways, this imposition upholds systemic racist and colonialist ideologies and practices that underpin colonial mentalities and relations of rule in research. The concept of coloniality is, therefore, used in this chapter to understand the continuity of colonial forms of research practice and oppression. Moreover, the concept allows us to understand contemporary subjugation and offers a theoretical framework to consider new approaches for conducting research with marginalised groups, especially racialised international students.

Coloniality and international students

International students represent one of the most relevant and biggest sojourner groups. As described by Neto (2020), sojourners are "people who travel internationally to achieve a particular goal or objective with the expectation that they will return to their country of origin after the purpose of their travel has been achieved" (p. 457). As student sojourners, their goal is to study abroad and gain globally recognised qualifications, solidifying their status on return

to their home countries (Udah & Francis, 2022a). However, racialisation – the ascription of ethnic or racial identities – remains central to the ways many international students from the Global South are received, constructed, understood and dominated by people who represent, uphold and ratify the power of coloniality in their host countries and institutions (Arday et al., 2022).

Colonial education has promoted Eurocentric worldviews and ways as universal (Heleta, 2016), which inform attitudes and representations of international students (Udah, 2021) and subjugates them. This subjugation is nothing but epistemic violence, which Spivak (2015) defines as the subjugation of colonial subjects and undermining of non-Western approaches to knowledge. This explains why international students from Global South (determined along racial, social, economic, political and cultural lines) experience the power of coloniality. As a result of existing colonial mentalities, these students confront discrimination and feel marginalised, unsupported, dominated and subjugated in higher education (Udah & Francis, 2022b).

Studies examining racialised international students' experiences indicate that the power of coloniality maintained through hegemonic Whiteness continues to classify, disfranchise and exclude them (Chapters 9 and 10). In the Global North higher education institutions, Whiteness is the most silent, pervasive and invisible source of power and authority that continues to dominate research practice (Gatwiri, 2018), leading to racist, patronising and unjust colonialist practices with international students (see Chapter 7). Being measured and judged only as the inferior, unintelligent Other (Chapter 5), racialised international students are seen by some researchers as subjects to be defined, scrutinised, regulated, controlled and saved within the colonial project (Suspitsyna, 2021). In many cases, for example, they are denied agency (Arday et al., 2022) and engaged in research that does not reflect their lived experience (Chen, 2021). In fact, the valorisation of Whiteness as the invisible norm, by which they are judged, reinforces the living legacies of colonialism and the hegemony of Western and Eurocentric perspectives.

Indeed, the coloniality of power of contemporary Western societies continues to identify and turn many international students into the Other – forever lagging, lacking in something (knowledge, critical thinking skills, language proficiency and academic competence) and needing extra help (Burton-Bradley, 2018; Lomer & Anthony-Okeke, 2019). In classroom spaces, they are problematised and defined by their deficiencies. Existing colonial ideologies and discourses of race continue to shape social relations and influence research with international students, leading not only to their vulnerabilities but also to the cultural justification for their attainment gaps and misconduct prosecutions, including the microaggressions and treatment that they receive (Arday et al., 2022). It is, therefore, important to understand and consider what needs to be done towards decolonising research with international students within Global North and other Global South regions.

As Quijano (2016) argues, many non-White and non-Western Others still confront discrimination and experience domination through the existing colonial matrix of power, structures and knowledge control. What this means, then, is that we need to make some structural and sociocultural changes, adopting human rights-based and culturally appropriate approaches to research, that are respectful, safe and ethically just. As researchers for anti-racist, anti-oppressive and transformative practice, it is essential to break away from Western and Eurocentric hegemony and the narrow ways of thinking about colonial relations and become key players in decolonising research. Decolonising research means, therefore, interrogating various forms of hegemonic dominance produced and perpetuated through colonial and neo-colonial cultures and structures (Grosfoguel, 2007) and recognising alternative knowledge systems as legitimate (Welikala, 2015). Thus, we need to consciously engage in questioning, recognising and problematising colonial and racial ideologies that inform research and practice. This implies deconstructing colonial theories, standpoints, structures and values that shape and influence our research. Achieving this would also require both dialogue and engagement with, and taking seriously, the epistemic and cultural insights, theories and perspectives of non-Western ethnic/racial people, students, and critical thinkers from the Global South.

Coloniality and decolonising research practice

The first step in decolonising research is to decolonise our minds – decolonising minds shaped by Whiteness and imperialism. Without decolonising our minds (Moosavi, 2020), internalised colonialism would not allow us to challenge the passivity, colonisation and marginalisation, including the racialisation of international students (Maitra & Guo, 2019). Adopting a decolonising stance demands openness and willingness to map out coloniality and dialogue with marginalised and non-Western ways of knowing, doing and being in a praxis of solidarity, inclusivity and social justice (Chapters 21 and 25; Saraceno, 2012).

It is, often, in power relations and dominance that international students are constructed, racialised and subjugated (Spivak, 2015) by researchers, who silence and provide them with no voice (Arday et al., 2022). Thus, as researchers, we have a duty of care to work respectfully with international students, protect them from colonial mentalities, reframe counterproductive narratives and reject deficit discourses. Overcoming international students' marginalisation requires not only being responsive to unequal power distribution but also being critically reflective, and accountable as well as embracing decolonial practices. As researchers working with international students, we need to afford them agency (Arday et al., 2022), conduct interviews in the language of study rather than their first language (Chen, 2021) and conduct practitioner

research to dictate power dynamics (Casey et al., 2017; Gregson, 2020). We need also to be self-reflective and reflexive about our positionality/biases (Moosavi, 2020), exploring alternative ways of doing research that challenge dominant discourses and assumptions about race and power. In the Quijanoian way of thinking, we need to tackle and end the hegemony of Western and Eurocentric perspectives and paradigms. This implies that we rethink and reconstruct our research approach; use decolonial theoretical tools to reflect on practices, challenge intentions biases and assumptions; and avoid inadvertently contributing to oppressive practices that marginalise and affect international students' experience and well-being.

Humanising international students (Chapters 1, 4, and 7) can change how they are seen or how their problems are defined and conceptualised. Seeing their humanity and valuing them as capable individuals with experiences, knowledge and skills regardless of their shortcomings can be a profound and powerful way of working, and researching, with them. It can change how we research as well as open for them a world of hope and possibilities. Hence, there is a need to decolonise research with international students. A more profound way to decolonise research is to shift consciousness and problematise routine abuses of power relationships by incorporating their perspectives and thinking carefully about how we view them and our own practice (Moosavi, 2020). We need also to do more research that places them at the centre. When international students are valued, listened to, engaged, taken seriously and shown that they matter, they will be more prepared to engage and enrich what we do and explore (Arday, Branchu & Boliver, 2022; Udah & Francis, 2022a). Therefore, embracing decolonisation as a strategy in research is crucial, and we must ensure that we engage with theories from Global South.

Reflection questions

- How does coloniality affect my perception of international students?
- Do I focus on what is wrong, broken or pathological, not what is strong within international students? Do I particularly expect international students to need extra support?
- Do I perceive, construct and conceptualise international students in terms of their deficiencies or capabilities? Or could my research approach and design be reinforcing this (unintentionally)?
- Am I socially conditioned to question the credibility, integrity and intelligence of international students?
- In what ways do I value knowledge and practice from imperial centres/ Global North relative to those from Global South? How might this impact my research practices with international students?
- What obstacles hold me back from doing humanising, anti-oppressive, culturally appropriate and transformative research with international students?

• How do I self-reflect on my positionality in relation to coloniality and its impact on my research with international students?

Suggestions for researchers

Much of our society has become super diverse – different cultures, identities and languages (Chapter 8; Magazzini, 2020). With increasing diversity, there is potential for a new approach to doing research. As researchers, we need to break through our limited perspectives based on and rooted in Western and Eurocentric perspectives and engage in innovative and decolonising research. When researching with international students, we need to address important epistemological questions relevant to their issues; build cultural understanding and illuminate the multidimensionality of their experiences and nuanced subjectivity. Some international students might be marginalised by the way we speak and work with them when our research frameworks carry the unspoken yet somehow tangible oppressive effect of epistemological and cultural hierarchy (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). Hence, it is important that we recognise our positionality and privilege and embrace a decolonising strategy and alternative knowledge systems.

More importantly, we need to understand what we can and/or should do to decolonise imperial ideologies about the Other – international students – that underpin colonial relations of rule, especially, in terms of its racialised privileging of Whiteness and Eurocentric knowledge system (Maitra & Guo, 2019). As researchers, we should examine, consider, critically reflect and consciously engage in conversations around how the power of coloniality impacts research engagement and affects international students as individuals, groups or collectives (Prilleltensky, 2008). It may require also decentring Whiteness, working on and against racist and deficit discourses and transforming colonial mentalities and ideologies in our approach to research. This would also entail that scholars:

• Make visible and undo coloniality and its consequences on personal and professional levels.
• Recognise race privilege and White supremacy and do a power analysis and a critical discussion of Whiteness in relation to the research focus.
• Critically examine the structures of domination and oppression and how they are embedded in them.
• Explore and validate worldviews, perspectives, cultural knowledge and practices of international students.
• Engage in cross-cultural interaction with international students in a decolonising or anti-colonial approach.
• Recognise, name and problematise systemic discrimination, and champion the voices of international students.

- Become allies to historically marginalised and dispossessed people, working together to find solutions to address issues of racism and growing inequities facing people, especially international students.
- Adopt a human right-based approach with an ethic of, and commitment to, social justice and promotion of more inclusive conceptions of human rights for international students

Our goal as researchers becomes, then, to transform research using anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-oppressive, culturally appropriate and decolonised forms of research to build a more just, inclusive, sustainable, resilient and thriving world. Therefore, we need to make effort to decode the matrix of coloniality and make necessary changes by deconstructing, questioning, confronting and challenging colonial ideologies, theories and values that shape and influence our research practice. We need to critically rethink research from our experiences of marginality in relation to hegemonic dominance and their corresponding impacts on international students' experience, well-being, belonging and academic success.

Example in practice

Article: Udah (2021)
Article focus: This article examines coloniality of power and international students' experiences.
Article strengths: This article uses "coloniality of power and border thinking" to reflect on the systemic nature of discrimination and international students' racialisation. It highlights the need for critical, self-reflexive awareness about the legacies of colonialism and hegemonic Whiteness, which illuminate the critical issues of research with international students discussed in this chapter.

Note

1 Global South refers broadly to regions of, or people from, Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including 'Third World' and 'Periphery,' denoting regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalised or so-called developing countries. It marks a shift from a focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical power relations (Dados & Connell, 2012).

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7

DEFICIT NARRATIVES IN RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Sylvie Lomer, Sophia Hayat Taha and Aneta Hayes

Introduction

National policies and discourses position international students as economically essential, politically beneficial, and culturally enriching. Yet the lived experience of many international students is often one of epistemic injustice – silencing, exclusion, and undervaluing. In our professional context of the United Kingdom, student outcomes are structured by institutional racism (Chapters 6 and 9), and these inequalities are legitimated by centring Whiteness in the curriculum and reinforced through pedagogic and assessment practices (Arday, 2018). When students' practices appear different or structures are not set up to facilitate them to perform these practices, their difference is problematised as a deficit (Heng, 2018b). International students, particularly non-White students, become a 'necessary evil' – 'cash cows' lowering educational standards (Murray, 2016). Empirical research 'on' international students frequently fails to challenge these issues or develop intersections with decolonisation, anti-racism, or other radically inclusive initiatives, constituting international students as subjects of research ON, rather than WITH. Contemporary research 'on' international students often adopts deficit framings, with international students positioned as lacking skills, knowledges, or relevant aptitudes (Xu, 2022).

Below, we characterise deficit narratives in contemporary research with international students in higher education settings, before problematising them and seeking to reframe them through a decolonial lens.

Critical considerations

Coloniality of research and deficit narratives

Research shaped by deficit narratives often focuses on the 'challenges and adjustments' international students are likely to experience (Cowley & Hyams–Ssekasi, 2018). This literature developed from explorations of practices of teaching and learning, where international students are often described as lacking knowledge, language, and academic skills, with frequent descriptions of 'barriers, challenges, problems, stresses, needs, struggles' of international students (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023, p. 1252). Chinese international students, representing a majority of international students in many host countries, are a particular focus, treated, as Xu (2022, p. 159) describes, "as a homogeneous, deficient pedagogic group".

Common areas of focus are contested learning behaviours, like critical thinking, speaking in class, and language mastery. Research on critical thinking among international students often reinforces deficit narratives (Shaheen, 2016). Likewise, research holds that international students 'struggle' with verbal participation in classes (Heron, 2019). Language competence is often situated as underpinning perceived deficits, especially in Anglophone contexts. These 'deficits' challenge academic norms of active learning predicated on verbal, often spontaneous, speech, yet teachers resist teaching language in their discipline (Schneider & Li, 2022). However, findings from research rejecting deficit framings highlight students' agency and adaptability (Wang et al., 2022) in such situations. Nonetheless, the research highlighting international students' resilience, agency, and intrinsic motivations is insufficient, apparently, to overturn dominant deficit narratives.

This affects research at its conception through chosen research topics (Chapter 21). Teachers of international students not only empathise with students' 'difficulties' (Lomer et al., 2023) in both established and emerging destinations such as Turkey (Yükselir, 2018) but also lament their own struggles to support and teach rising student numbers. This leads to research underpinned by understandings of international students as needing more support, a strain when relative funding and resourcing decrease. This generates research that reinforces deficit narratives, even where it sets out to highlight and address challenges.

However, this aim is likely to fail, because deficit narratives stereotype and homogenise international students and their experiences. They fail to acknowledge the blurring of lines between international and home students in contemporary globalisation, eliding previous international experiences and variations within changing national contexts. Much of this research assumes

that, as Cockrill puts it, "internationalization of the student body and diversity of viewpoints are a cornerstone of a global education" (Cockrill, 2017). This implies students of different nationalities necessarily hold different viewpoints. International students, simply by virtue of their nationality, are assumed to have predictably 'differing' (Divan et al., 2015) needs. These generalisations do not account for variations, reinforcing the homogeneity of international students as a category (Chapter 1), drawing on concepts of 'culture' and 'language' to generate a narrative of cultural essentialism (Chapters 17 and 18).

There is an emerging body of scholarship which explicitly challenges and critiques deficit narratives (Heng, 2018b; Moosavi, 2020b). Despite these critiques, too much contemporary research continues to frame research questions as problems with international students, though perhaps in less overtly racist and imperialist terms. The enduring power of deficit narratives of international students is due to their entanglement with coloniality (Chapter 6).

Developing decolonial research methodologies with international students

Deficit narratives derive from colonial mindsets. As explained in Chapter 6, coloniality is the process of repressing indigenous, alternative modes of knowing, by imposing beliefs, symbols, images and language (Thiong'o, 1992) of colonisers, which outlasts formal colonialism (Grosfoguel, 2004). In research with international students, coloniality can be recognised through dominating Western and/or White conceptual frameworks; imposing classist standardised forms of imperial languages; and situating Eurocentric ways of learning as 'superior' (Moosavi, 2020a). These dynamics create epistemic injustices, including the absence of culturally responsive teaching, ethnocentric curricula, traditionalist pedagogies, and enduring awarding gaps (Iannelli & Huang, 2014). These might manifest to students as 'unclear classroom expectations' (Heng, 2018b), outright bias (Udah, 2021), or alienation from the curriculum. Highlighting epistemic injustice experienced by international students is key for future research (Xu, 2022). But empirical research with international students frequently fails to challenge these issues or develop intersections with decolonising the curriculum, anti-racist teaching, or other inclusive initiatives, constituting international students as subjects to research ON, rather than WITH (Heng, 2018a). These issues dominate particularly, but not exclusively, in research produced on international students moving from Global South to Global North.

Critical Race Theory approaches to research with international students highlight how structurally racist societies, such as the United States (Yao et al., 2019) and the United Kingdom (Madriaga & McCaig, 2019), racially categorise international students and associate them with deficit narratives. Particularly Black international students from the Global South report feeling disorientation, negative self-worth, and 'emotional issues' when racialised during their studies in the Global North (Bardhan & Zhang, 2017). This

issue is prominent in South-to-North student migration, the focus of our own research, but also occurs amongst, for example, international students in Korea (Kim, 2016). Yet, as Zewolde (2022) argues, most research takes a 'colour-blind approach' that ignores racialisation (Grosfoguel, 2004): how ethnic categorisations are socially constructed.

Research about international students produced in the Global North often racialises by, for example, aggregating findings at 'regional' levels, such as 'East Asian' or 'Confucian Asian', or using binary terms like 'non-Western students'. Ethno-nationalist stereotypes use culturally essentialist paradigms, like 'East Asian', to explain varied phenomena, including classroom interaction patterns, that reinforce Otherness and marginalise international students (O'Connor, 2018) within the broader context of coloniality. This can be understood as 'neo-racism' where 'culture' is inferred from nationality which, in turn, is inferred from perceived or ascribed ethnicity (Lee, 2007). Understanding racialisation as a process emphasises the importance of analysing concepts of ethnicity, and other externally imposed dichotomous categories such as 'Confucian Asian' or 'non-native speaker' (Rosa & Flores, 2017), as constructs – historically violent ones.

Critical scholarship with international students must interrogate racial categorisations, understanding racism as institutional, structural, systemic, and historically rooted, specifically in structurally racist national contexts, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, and challenge it and interrogate the transnational dimensions of racialisation (Chapter 9; Yao et al., 2019).

By locating the 'problem' in students, research ON international students avoids asking more radical and critical questions of internationalised higher education structures that systematically disadvantage international students (Chapter 17). For research WITH international students, this limits its capacity to be genuinely critical and decolonial.

Reflection questions

- To what extent does my research focus on deficits, challenges, or problems of international students, and who or what does it problematize?
- How has my framing of the research 'problem' been shaped by colonial assumptions?
- How might I reframe my research topic to centre international students as agents, empowered, and central to knowledge creation?
- How does my research frame and position international students – as equal or subaltern in knowledge creation, as co-researchers or subjects of research?
- How does my research incorporate understandings of racialisation and intersectionality?
- How does my methodology and research design highlight international students' subjectivities and agency?

Suggestions for researchers

Going forward, a newly critical agenda for research with international students requires researchers to take international students' agency, autonomy, and criticality as starting points, enabling decolonial ontologies in both methodology and framing of research. This challenges researchers to reflect on their own positionalities and entanglements (Archer, 2012). Below, we explain how we tried to implement these principles in a recent research project.

We offer the following suggestions for researchers WITH international students, aspiring to adopt more critical approaches:

Design research that assumes that international students are powerful agents of their own experience, education, and learning and the ultimate expert – not the researcher. Our research approach, including how we engaged with international students in the recruitment and data collection process, as well as a multimodal methodology, meant that international students explored and articulated their own systems of meanings and interpretations – their epistemic frames. Such a research approach destabilises philosophical assumptions about deficits and homogeneity of international students, which frames research as enabling their adaptation and assimilation (Chapter 2). Instead, the research ontology reverses these assumptions, centring competence, agency, and individuality. This entails methodological choices that may help other researchers with international students.

Develop reflexivity around researcher entanglements with coloniality. We originally intended to adopt ethnographic approaches, exploring how traditional ethnography, particularly around immersion in participants' lives, could be applied to indoor spaces, with restricted access. However, ethnography has been critiqued extensively as historically and currently extractive and objectifying the researched, ridden with power imbalances by positioning researchers as 'knowers' who can 're-interpret' and disseminate the knowledge used in colonial relations to 'fix' the other (Kaur & Klinkert, 2021). It is important for researchers with international students to understand the intellectual heritage of the methodologies we adopt since many are inherently colonial.

Humanise participants: engage with their stories, lives, and individuality; embed flexibility and autonomy for participants. We aimed to therefore *adapt* ethnographic approaches to be digital and remote (due to COVID-19 lockdowns) and to humanise the research process. The research was designed to be flexible and unintrusive and encourage autonomy. Students chose their media, received a stipend to fund materials, and then created, shared, and narrated their artefacts. Over five weeks, they chose which mode was most convenient, relevant, or expressive for them in relation to the prompts. By the end, students had shared an impressive range of entries: videos, paintings, multimedia art projects, sounds, pictures, clips of conversations, and

hand-drawn maps. This design encouraged at least one participant to use her creative skills to engage with her curriculum. Multimodality offered modes of participation outside spontaneous verbal communication, such as the overused semistructured interview. It created an opportunity to 'experience' students' learning in affective and multisensory ways. We did not only experience the 'spaces', as in ethnographic approaches, we also experienced the space with co-researchers, through their eyes, commentary, and reflections, thereby humanising our participants by honouring their own interpretations of their learning through the epistemic lenses that mattered to them. Yet the degree of agency ensured it was minimally intrusive – they could select and edit their contributions during the project and in the final exit interview.

This process was messy. Co-researchers shared different types of data, on different days, which required multiple analysis approaches. Lockdown restrictions were lifted halfway through the project, changing the material context. Updating our research approaches based on observations and analysis during the project further complicated the process. The 'messiness' of email conversations, follow-ups, and emotional engagement with co-researchers also made us question whether it is possible to truly decolonise research praxis in universities. Constraints of ethics approval procedures and research funding requirements often require researchers to be accountable, organised, and detached from the 'humanising' process that we argue is essential for genuine co-production. We hope that researchers with international students embrace the inherent 'messiness' of research and respond with joy to new ideas and directions during the research process, rather than fear.

Situate participants as co-researchers or co-creators of the knowledge generated through research. Reimburse for time and money on an equal basis with knowledge creators. Part of the humanising approach to this project was to normalise treating participants as research assistants, valuing their time as equal co-producers of knowledge (Thomas & Jivraj, 2020). We did not fully achieve our aim, often the case for decolonial praxis. Our original goal was to create mini-contracts on research assistant pay grades. However, the constraints of university finance systems, a restricted budget, and a hostile migration environment meant that this was not permitted. Instead, we used prepaid vouchers, an established compensatory mechanism, aiming to match the expected hours (one hour a week) with a research assistant hourly rate, rather than a token amount. We asked co-researchers to choose their own vouchers, which also challenged the finance system accustomed to treating all participants the same. We highlight these seemingly trivial challenges to illustrate the quotidian challenges and frustrations of adopting decolonial research approaches in colonial, hierarchical systems, such as universities, that researchers with international students are likely to encounter.

Our research design challenged the 'authority of authorship' (Coffey, 1996) for which traditional ethnography is often critiqued. We did this by using artefacts to centre students' perspectives, forcing us as researchers and audiences into students' positions. This was established in a group meeting with all researchers (staff and co-researchers), then reinforced in email conversations with Sophia, who consistently re-framed concerns about 'right' and 'wrong'. After students created the first round of artefacts, we realised we needed reflections and explanations. We encouraged students to articulate the processes of knowledge production for themselves by email to accompany artefacts. Sophia responded to each submission with thanks, acknowledgements, and often follow-up or clarifying questions. Emails became additional unplanned data points, and genuine dialogue, between the research team and participant co-researchers. For example, we followed up when concerns for mental well-being were raised in artefacts or emails, treating co-researchers as humans not producers of data. A truly agentic, egalitarian and humanising approach to research is time-consuming and emotionally draining, so researchers must be mindful of this when designing research.

The research surfaced students' deployment of epistemological resources, highlighting students' agency, emotional engagement with the curriculum material, and attunement to created artefacts. Engaging in research WITH students in this approach enabled us to develop a process to counteract assumptions about international students' deficits that sadly often philosophically drive research ON international students as research subjects rather than partners.

Ways forward

To implement a research agenda underpinned by similar ontologies, an intentional process of meta-reflexivity, following Archer (2012), is needed as a mode of self-deliberation and a framework for the enactment of research WITH international students. This requires reflection on our own embodiments as researchers, which affect our constraints and enablements (hooks, 1994), particularly when researchers are racialised or protected by White privilege. Listening to international students as contributors to knowledge-making requires researchers to question our relationships with students and research participants. This demands questioning our own binaries, positionalities and discomforts created by entanglements with coloniality and deficit narratives. This ontology invites reflection on epistemological positionality and embodiment (of power and hierarchies such as Whiteness) that can constrain options for sensemaking beyond the imaginary of our own group.

Our research methodology created a way to 'see' how students deploy their epistemological resources, enabling us to reflect on our entanglements with coloniality. We hope that our research design can help researchers challenge their epistemological and ontological orientations to research with international students. These issues are developed further in the next section on complex narratives and intersectionalities.

By understanding, through the multimodal methodology, how these situations are created, we can prompt critical reflection on students' knowledge creation in ways beyond the imaginary of our own group. This can lead to philosophical shifts in research and researcher positionality, from dominant (and White) to humble, reflexive and critical of the long-term impacts of coloniality of deficit narratives preventing research WITH international students.

Example in practice

Walking indoors project: The project adapted principles of ethnography to understand the epistemic agency of international students trapped in their rooms in university accommodation during a COVID-19 national UK lockdown of 2021. We asked six international student participants to contribute multimedia diaries over five weeks, supplemented by email exchanges and exit interviews.

Project focus: The project aimed to understand how students' agency within and beyond these spaces shaped their embodied construction of knowledge.

Project strengths: This multimodal, digital diary research methodology helped us understand how international students access and deploy their expressive ontological and epistemological resource to produce knowledge. The methodology provided a structure within which students' epistemic frames were related to and expressed.

Project challenges: The project generated a substantial amount of multimodal data. We observe a tendency to 'stage' photographic or video moments for the consumption of the research team, producing scenes that symbolise or represent 'study' rather than document it in the moment. The capacity to capture a full range of sensory information was necessarily limited to the narratives and interpretations presented by the student participants.

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SECTION 3

How can understandings of international students be made more complex?

8

DEVELOPING COMPLEX NARRATIVES ABOUT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Josef Ploner

Introduction

Following the arguments outlined in Section 2, the chapters presented in Section 3 shed light onto the complexities and multiplicity of identities, experiences, and sensibilities that permeate and characterise the contested notion of 'international student'. In so doing, they counter frequently identified reductionist uses of the term 'international student/s' (Chapter 1) as a simplistic 'shorthand' that either denotes cultural, educational, and linguistic 'Othering' or is used by universities to demarcate mere operationalist differences among students, for example, relating to finance or immigration (Chapter 5, see also Bond, 2019).

The functionalist workings of neoliberal universities in meeting recruitment and performance targets or marketing diversity and 'intercultural competence' as measurable assets or 'graduate attributes' tend to reduce the complexity that pervades internationalisation processes and the complex relationships between diverse agents therein. As such, and contrary to ongoing narratives about the complex 'super'/'hyper' dimensions (i.e., 'supercomplexity' and '-diversity'; 'hypermobility', 'hyperconnectivity') associated with education in the era of globalisation (Chapter 6; Cole & Woodrow, 2016), research seems to have further promoted reductionist myths about international students, rather than disperse them.

Developing complex 'narratives' about international students may seem contradictory at first, given that, from a literary perspective, 'narrative' is primarily associated with simplification: textual ordering and closure, intentionality, and structural linearity. As such, it may not be well-suited to conveying a sense of complexity, ambivalence, or multi-vocality (Ricoeur, 1991).

Indeed, it is fair to state that much higher education research and practice has generated simplistic narratives-come-myths about international students, some of which I seek to unpack in this chapter while highlighting the benefits of emerging complexity-embracing approaches to research with international students.

Critical considerations

Researching with international students in supercomplex higher education contexts

In an influential article, Ronald Barnett (2000) outlined some ways that the 'entrepreneurial university' of the 21st century may be able to adapt to the challenges of 'supercomplex*y*'. Defined in epistemological terms as a 'conceptual overload' and 'outcome of a multiplicity of frameworks', supercomplexity requires researchers to reconsider, if not abandon, 'right' forms of knowledge, towards embracing multiple knowledges that offer entirely new frames of understanding the world.

> This age of supercomplexity is marked by an abundance of new accounts of the world. New images, new technologies, new texts, new discourses; new forms of professional life: all serve to provide new knowledges.
>
> *(Barnett, 2000, p. 417)*

Ever since Barnett's call to embrace supercomplexity, much research with international students has continued to interrogate established epistemologies of Othering (Chapter 5), that is, by locating alternative ways of knowing, being, and becoming in the world of international higher education.

First, alongside growing international student mobility over past decades, 'other' and potentially 'new' forms of thinking and knowing across higher education systems have become abundant and easily accessible for researchers working in the sector. Second, much research has persistently pointed out the shortcomings of reductionist 'deficit discourses' (Chapter 7) about international students, moving towards more relational, that is, complex approaches. These embrace multiple and 'different' ways of knowing, regarding them as valuable resources for innovative pedagogical practices, enhanced student 'experiences', as well as the development of more equitable and sustainable higher education communities (Tannok, 2018). Third, and more recently, the 'decolonial turn' in research with international students (Chapters 6 and 21), seeks to empower subaltern voices and knowledges to challenge universalist and extractive (Western) discourses through the transformational power that lies within multiple, and previously silenced, truths.

In tandem, the emergence of research with international students as an inter- and transdisciplinary subfield (Chapter 2) has added further layers of complexity in understanding diverse forms of knowing and relating to the world of international higher education. While often rooted in a 'Western' disciplinary canon, the combined efforts of anthropologists, geographers, linguists, sociologists, or scholars of education, psychology, international relations, politics, etc., have added to a more holistic understanding of the complexities that permeate international students' transitions (Chapter 16), experiences, and ways of knowing.

Likewise, the recognition of international students as research subjects in booming interdisciplinary areas such as mobilities and migration studies (Chapter 15) has further enriched our understanding about the complexities that constitute their diverse experiences. Migration research has produced particularly rich insights into the multifaceted intersections between international student mobility and concurrent forms of (labour, forced, lifestyle, neo-colonial, etc.) global movement, displacement, or diaspora. These are not always a simple matter of choice but powerful and highly complex practices of aspiration, resilience, or survival (Ploner, 2017; Riaño et al., 2018). In this sense, migration research with international students has not only contested simplistic accounts about students' academic or mobility motivations (e.g., via 'push and pull' models) but also deconstructed existing grand narratives about international students as global educational 'elites' who, equipped with abundant financial and cultural capital, make seemingly effortless moves across international borders (Nada & Araùjo, 2018). Khoo et al. (2018, p. 182) emphasise the value of inter- and (particularly) transdisciplinary in higher education research in unpacking complexity. Understood as the synthesis, integration, and re-imagination of disciplinary knowledges and ethical structures to reveal previously 'hidden connections' (Bernstein, 2015), working across disciplinary and epistemic boundaries can offer new collaborative and potentially transformational "(. . .) methodological openings, possibilities and underpinnings to advance pluralistic, diversal, decolonial and social justice focused research" (Khoo et al., 2018, p. 182). Following this meta-theoretical approach, inter- and transdisciplinary research with international students might not only help to address recurrent sector-specific agendas such as intercultural learning, global citizenship, inclusion, or internationalisation strategies more widely but also explore what (international) higher education must do to face the complex crises of the 21st century, including climate change, migration, insecurity, violence, and conflict.

Such an agenda, however, requires the willingness of universities, faculties, and researchers to overcome deep-rooted disciplinary boundaries and inter-institutional hierarchies, as well as to engage more actively with communities, civic organisations, social movements, political stakeholders, activists, and learning spaces, that lie beyond clearly demarcated, and predominantly

'Western' higher educational settings. Inter- and transdisciplinary approaches can, thus, aid to further challenge perceptions of international students operating within cultural, social, and disciplinary 'bubbles', and critique life-cycle models that tend to write out their complex biographies and spatiotemporal mobilities (Collins & Shubin, 2017).

Complex narratives about international students' identities

In line with the above, developing complex narratives about international students also means interrogating the multiple ways internationally mobile students' identities are shaped, constructed, or transformed – a central narrative theme in much qualitative research (Marginson, 2014). Historically, the growing interest in international students' identities has emerged from the critique of methodical nationalism, that is, the functionalist classification and labelling of students' identities according to nationality, or otherwise weakly defined 'cultural backgrounds' within neoliberal and massified higher education contexts (Brooks & Waters, 2011). Challenging static categorisations of relatively homogeneous international student 'bodies', and often drawing on post-modern and post-feminist theory, researchers have problematised international students' identities as complex, hybrid, miscellaneous, fragmented, contested, rhizomic, negotiated, in flux, or processual (Singh & Doherty, 2007). Looking across these complexity-embracing terminologies, one underlying assumption is that the liminal spaces (the transitional or boundary spaces) they cross and inhabit through their mobility, transition, or learning are disorienting and troublesome, shaking up, transforming, and refracting their identities in profound ways. This challenges the established deficit narratives of 'adaptation', 'adjustment' or 'acculturation', which are still commonly used in the literature (Chapters 2, 3, and 16), suggesting that international students' complex identity work is linear and mainly about 'blending into' host environments.

However, scholars have increasingly embraced more 'positive' and agency-driven narratives that emphasise students' abilities to adopt and move across intersecting spheres of being and knowing, even if these are, at times, still loosely defined along rather compartmentalised sections of experiences (e.g., 'academic', 'social', and 'cultural'). Whilst approaching student identities as fragmented and sectional may serve conceptual clarity and methodological pragmatism, it may also run the risk of mapping out rather static and isolated identity spheres, thus failing to provide a more holistic and complex picture of students' self-formation. Drawing on qualitative research with a sizeable number of international students, Marginson (2014) notes that (international students') self-identity is ambiguous and can be constituted as a 'field of difference' in which certain identity elements (or labels) compete with one another and are prioritised over others in certain contexts and times when students

seek self-definition and affirmation to respond to change (e.g., nationality, language, family, faith). Thus, a more apt way to conceptualise student identities is perhaps to see them as layered, nested, or performed, thereby recognising that:

> [p]eople need the securing and certainty promised by identity but labels are not a substitute for a holistic description of the person and their relational characteristics. Identity is only one tool that people use when forming themselves.
>
> *(Marginson, 2014, p. 10)*

In this reading, also seemingly tokenistic labels such as nationality remain powerful and self-asserting expressions of identity in the process of international students' self-formation through difference, perhaps even more so in an era of global resurgence of 'banal' (ethno-)nationalisms, or otherwise, in contexts where nationhood and sense of national belonging are under threat by ever-present crises and conflicts (Douglass, 2021).

Intersecting international students' identities

Drawing on the above, developing complex narratives also entails applying intersectional approaches in theorising and analysing international students' subjectivities and identity formations, as outlined in the remaining chapters in this section. Attributed to US legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), and grounded in Black feminist and Critical Race Theories, intersectionality emerged as a critique of legal, sociopolitical, and educational grand narratives that treat multiple identities as isolated rather than inter-dependent, thereby maintaining structural inequalities and inhibiting transformative and radical social justice (Harris & Patton, 2019).

Whilst intersectionality is a well-established (and equally contested) concept in higher education research (Harris & Patton, 2019), it has not been until recently that it gained traction in research with international students. Historically, this may be linked to the segregation of equality/equity, diversity, and inclusion agendas (addressing gender-, race-, dis/ability-, or class-related inequalities and protected characteristics) on the one hand, and 'internationalisation' (policies, practice, systems) on the other (Caruana & Ploner, 2010). Likewise, and surprisingly late, more 'radical' or activist approaches have entered the subfield of research with international students via the increased application of queer and post-feminist, anti-racist, or post/de-colonial theories over the past decade or so (e.g., Majee & Ress, 2020; Hagen, 2022).

Recent studies have interrogated international students' intersectional experiences in relation to ethnicity and race (Chapters 9, 10, and 18; Ward et al.,

2021), disability (Chapter 10), sexual orientation (Chapter 11), gender (Chapter 12), language (Chapter 17), class (Chapter 13; Xu, 2020), religion (O'Connor, 2020) or parenthood (Brooks, 2015). Clearly, intersectional research with international students provides a kaleidoscopic range of opportunities to further interrogate the complexities that permeate students' subjective and relational identity work and, thus, further deconstruct prevailing monolithic identity classifications. The following chapters in Section 3 add to this debate by providing fascinating insights into the ways intersectionality opens up authentic, sensitive, and re/humanising approaches to research with international students (Chapter 4). They offer more nuanced theoretical and practical reflections on how international students' experiences can be reflected in intersection with their 'complex' identities.

Reflection questions

- What intersectional identity factors might be relevant for my research topic?
- In what ways have I purposefully centred 'complex' narratives in my research design?
- How can my research be planned to detect, integrate, and re-imagine 'hidden' epistemic, ethical and intersectional connections beyond 'Western/Euro-centric' disciplinary canons?
- What are the complexities that underpin my own identity, positionality, and voice as a researcher?

Suggestions for researchers

Research with international students and their identity formations is bound to be complex, fuzzy, and likely to remain at the heart of the wider subfield of research with international students (Chapter 1). Future research ought to remain critical about mono-directional or static conceptions of identity and work around the ways in which different identity labels are layered, mobilised, nested, and (per-)formed in different contexts and situations. At the same time, research must not neglect seemingly banal or stereotypical identity markers (e.g., nationality), processes (e.g., transition), or narratives when working with international students. While assumptions about (social, academic, cultural) 'adjustment' or 'acculturation' may appear simplistic or dated, researchers may well find themselves working with international students who use these exact terminologies to describe their own experiences and identity work. In addition, and while recognising that students' identity formations can be troublesome, stressful, or characterised by loneliness (Wawera & McCamley, 2020), future research might also consider highlighting more 'positive' emotional subjectivities and everyday sensibilities that define international students' ways of knowing and becoming, in both formal and informal international higher

education contexts. For example, while the identity-affirming role of social networks and friendship within the international student experience is well explored (Chapter 19; Beech, 2015), we still know fairly little about the everyday significance of family and kinship, love, sexual orientation, faith, lifestyle, food, art, leisure, travel, migration, work, physical and mental well-being, or sense of place, as realms of affirmatory, empowering, or liberating identity formations. From a methodological perspective, the explorations of everyday complexities, sensibilities, and intimacies of identity among international students remain ethically sensitive but may require to further develop innovative, participatory, and positional/reflexive research interventions that go beyond the important, yet frequently over-emphasised 'student voice'. To this end, and with a view to capture some of the complexities that permeate students' experiences, the application of critical ethnographies, thick description, biographical narrative, action research, embodied, visual, digital, as well as mobile methods, etc., are not yet fully exhausted.

Example in practice

Book chapter: Collins and Shubin (2017)
Chapter focus: the complex links between temporality and subjectivity in international student migration experiences
Chapter strengths: In this book chapter, geographers Collins and Shubin shed light on the complex temporalities that permeate international students' subjectivities, arguing that student migrants move within a range of simultaneous temporalities which encompass their pasts, presents and futures. Besides appreciating the often overlooked dimension of time and temporality in research with international students, I particularly rate the authors' critique of (Western/Euro-centric) utilitarian and linear conceptions of mobility and development associated with international students' 'journeys', shifting the focus towards more complex, ambiguous, and uncertain processes of becoming.

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9

CALLING RACE INTO RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Confronting omissions

Shannon Hutcheson

Introduction

In 2014, Canada rebranded its internationalization strategy, urging international students to study in their safe, welcoming, and multicultural society (Government of Canada, 2019; Marcus, 2014). Despite its branding as a post-racial society, the reality is that not all international students receive a warm welcome at their destinations of study, particularly if they are racialized (Ghaffar, 2020). There are increasing dialogues around international students and racism, but this particular aspect of international students' experiences remains under-studied, in favour of broader rhetoric such as "diversity", "acculturation", "culture", and "adaptation" (Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Buckner et al., 2021; Liu, 2017). International students come to their study destinations from different countries, regions, and formative life experiences, but in using the blanket terminology of diversity and culture, the finer dimensions of intersectionality (Chapter 8) are missed.

Ahmed's (2007) perspective on intersectionality characterizes the body as a "meeting point" of identities, shaping how individuals perceive and are perceived. How these identities "meet" directly impact access to resources and marginalization. Race is a critical factor among the different elements that intersect, interact, and impact how international students experience their host country (George Mwangi et al., 2018). Often obscured by higher education's shaky notions of diversity, race is just one essential component to understanding and researching growing international student numbers globally. Through the work of scholars engaged in critical work in the subfield of international education, it is clear that racialized status can significantly impact how international students navigate life abroad (e.g., Beck, 2020; Liu, 2017; George

Mwangi et al., 2018; George Mwangi, 2020). A "colour-blind" approach does nothing for the research subfield and functions to deny the encounters international students have with racism (Liu, 2017). Furthermore, willfully or subconsciously ignoring race is a question of equity and justice, principles that should be important for all researchers in international higher education.

This chapter provides a foundation for how we, as researchers, can conceptualize international students and race, beckoning for a reevaluation of how racial rhetoric has been driven, but also excluded in international higher education. Furthermore, it calls for a more complex understanding of the experiences of racialized students. It should be noted that I, the author of this chapter, am situated in Canada, which inevitably frames my perspective on the intricately connected subfield of international education.

Intersectionality is a unifying theme across many chapters in Section 3, demonstrating forgotten spaces where international higher education has yet to adequately carve out the different interlocking identities of international students. Despite best intentions, oftentimes dialogues on international students centre these students as a singular, monolithic entity, with universal and homogeneous experiences (Lomer et al., 2021). This chapter highlights race as just *one* of the many factors that can mediate experience for international students and combats homogeneity discourses. Notions of how race is discussed in international higher education give way to the rhetoric of diversity and the fetishization of diversity in reference to international students (Chapter 1). These foundational arguments provide a basis for the central themes of this chapter: the systemic racism encountered by racialized international students, the racialization and Othering of international students, the representations of racialized international students in international higher education discourses, and important omissions that currently exist in research with international students.

Race and racialization

Race is a social construct meaning conceptions of race are created by the society one exists in and interacts with (Foster & Thomas, 2022; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009). Foster and Thomas (2022) "recognize race, ethnicity, and racism as social, political, and historical processes" (p. 2). These real or imagined physical characteristics by which race is defined often lead to groups or individuals being targeted for differential treatment, which is the act of racialization (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009). The Ontario Human Rights Commission further defines racialization as "the process of social construction of race " (p. 11). The process component is significant in that there is an act of "becoming" Other. This is captured in Asante et al.'s (2016) article on how African immigrants become Black upon arrival to the United States. This phenomenon is further echoed in Zewolde (2020), who

chronicles some of the overt racism encountered by Black African international students studying in the United Kingdom.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) speak to the everyday "ordinary" nature of racism that defines Critical Race Theory (CRT). This definition is not to negate the severity of racism but rather to highlight how commonplace the occurrence of racism is in the spaces we inhabit. Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers understandings of how race functions to impact international students' experiences. In using a CRT framework, we better understand how race and internationalization collide. Yao et al. (2019) encourage the use of CRT to further interrogate the impact of racism on international students.

For the purpose of this chapter, I define racialized international students as those "who are marginalized by constructions of race within the host countries where they attend university" (Hutcheson, 2020, p. 192). Research often fails to consider how racialized status can impact students' experiences in their countries of study. A local example in Quebec, Canada, saw racialized international students subjected to unannounced language testing to meet for immigration criteria ('Racialized international students', 2017). While Quebec hosts a number of international students from many nationalities, international students from India, China, and the Middle East were disproportionately impacted. Some scholars have been intentional in their work to explicitly name race as an important mediating factor, demonstrating a track record of systemic racism against international students globally, as well as self-reports from international students that they have encountered racism as international students in Canada (Ghaffar, 2020; Houshmand et al., 2014; Wei & Bunjun, 2020). Additionally, careful critical analyses have shown the marginalization international students encounter, from the objectification as cash cows in a neoliberal marketplace that values the financial value of international students, to the vulnerability of non-citizenship status (Marginson, 2012; Yao et al., 2019). Race adds an extra dimension to this marginalization. We know that there is not one universal international student experience, and a number of factors intersect to change what a student's life looks like outside their home country. However, current research often fails to capture these nuances. Changamire et al. (2022) pointedly implore those in academia to be deliberate about race, stating that "academia must be accountable for the differential impact of race on the experiences of students" (p. 519). Beck (2020, 5:55) echoes this sentiment, critiquing "how race becomes a non issue in internationalization" (see also Chapter 18).

Critical considerations

One barrier to understanding how race and international student status interact is that we simply do not have data to bolster the research. Buckner (2021) signals the siloing of data on international students, distinguishing the

difference between how international student data and home student data are handled (Chapter 24). At some institutions, students can be counted in the diversity statistics of home students (as defined by that institution's conceptualizations of race) or they can be international, but students who are international *and* racialized cannot be identified within the data as both. To illustrate, an international student from Ghana who may be racialized as "Black" within the national context of where they are studying will not be counted as "Black" in the demographic data as a home student might be. This siloing contributes to the erasure of racialized international students on campus and an implicit understanding that race does not matter in respect to international students.

Talking about race? Avoidance and discomfort

Confronting discourses on race are often avoided as discomforting in international higher education research and higher education at large. Hernandez (2021) signals this "racial unspeakability" and "race muteness", adding the caveat that just because we do not talk about race does not preclude that racism is not happening. This discomfort translates to research and the subfield of international education. Individuals and institutions avoid these dialogues for a number of reasons, including fear of blundering or misstep or, perhaps more nefariously, the inaccurate belief that international students are a homogeneous group, and, therefore, discussions of race are irrelevant (Auger-Dominguez, 2019; Lomer et al., 2021; Ravishankar, 2021).

Far more palatable and approachable is the discourse of "diversity". In fact, international higher education *loves* performative diversity. Promotional brochures for institutions in Canada and the United States often strategically feature images of racialized students. These images are often paired with flowery language around the diversity of the student body and hand-picked vignettes describing the inclusivity of the institution (Buckner, 2021). This celebration of diversity is largely performative.

The diversity dance

In addition to this performative diversity, diversity as a construct has issues.

Diversity is often vague and used as a catch-all to describe students who are visibly "Other". The use of "diversity" to describe students continues to create opacity in both research and practice. Surtees (2019) also pinpoints the cloudiness of labels in their critique of the broadly used term "international". Their research suggests that, often, "international" is used as a proxy for race and that in using the term "international" broadly, it may mask very specific instances of racism. Surtees notes that "seemingly neutral labels, such as 'international,' particularly when combined with racial categories, may be used to produce a host of negative or instrumental inferences and may mask race-based

and language-based discrimination" (p. 52). The masking and obfuscation of race by intentionally or unintentionally employing codes and obtuse language work to undermine these unique experiences mediated by race.

The marginalization of racialized international students: White normativity and deficits

International students contribute to the diversity of campus but conversely are not really thought of in terms of race, although race *can* define their experiences when they arrive in their countries of study (Buckner, 2021). Noncitizenship status creates inequitable experiences for international students, such as limited access to funding, healthcare, and other social protections (Hutcheson, forthcoming). However, being racialized adds another layer of complexity to the Otherness (Chapter 5) of being an international student. An African international student's testimony from Changamire et al. (2022) shows these intersecting hierarchies of Otherness as they reflect on how their multiple identities impact how they are perceived and treated in the United States. The student reports that "it's not just that I'm foreign. It's because I'm African and foreign. Because they see a Black person and they think I'm lesser. And on top of that, they see an African and I'm even lesser" (Changamire et al., 2022, p. 513).

Confronting White normativity in research: alternatives to acculturation?

This "lessness" is also evident in much of the research centred on acculturation rhetoric that saturates research with international students (Chapter 2). A thematic analysis by Bista and Gaulee (2017) found that acculturation was the most prevalent theme among dissertations published in 2016. Acculturation and acculturative stress are still major contemporary focuses in research, highlighting the psychological adaptations international students encounter when adjusting from their home country to their country of study, but these constructs as they are used in the subfield are fraught with issues (e.g., Vasilopolous, 2016). Models of acculturation can imply White normativity, where distress occurs when a student whose culture is distanced from Whiteness "fails" to adjust (Madriaga & McCaig, 2022; Vasilopolous, 2016; Yao et al., 2019). In focusing disproportionately on how students fail to adjust to Whiteness, the critical inverse relationship is omitted: the failure of the welcoming society to adjust to or welcome the students (e.g., Perreira et al., 2017). Instead, we can examine the welcoming context or host environment and ask, "How is racism operating here?" (Jones, 2018, p. 233).

In Changamire et al.'s (2022) earlier student testimony, that student has effectively *become* Black upon arrival to their host country, which has translated

to more encounters with racism and discrimination. Shifting the focus from the *internal* processes of assimilation, adaptation, and acculturation would be advantageous to better capture the *external* impact of systemic racism, the process of racialization, and discrimination on international students' experiences. Understanding how students experience life in societies that are hostile to Otherness is critical going forward.

Madriaga and McCaig (2022) also signal that Black racialized international students are seen to have "cultural" deficits. We know that racialized international students for whom English is not their first language are often subjected to critique from their home student peers. Wei and Bunjun (2020) spotlight this in "We Don't Need Another One in Our Group", citing that home students sometimes see international students of colour as a burden. But these deficit narratives do not just occur in the classroom, they also happen in research, particularly when research seeks to confirm cultural and deficit narratives rather than combat them. To counter racist, deficit-centred rhetoric (Chapter 7), it is key to focus less on acculturation and deficit-centred research and focus more on the external structural and policy issues that impact students (e.g., Changamire et al., 2022). Furthermore, researchers who do address race must avoid including race as a vehicle to confirm perceived cultural deficits which are often entrenched in stereotypes.

Conclusion: addressing the omissions

Perhaps most pressing is confronting the omissions and denials of racism in the subfield of international higher education. For example, many student recruitment strategies promote study destinations as open and welcoming in their branding which omits racism. While it is beneficial to look at what a nation is doing well to support international students, the inherent ways in which systemic racism manifests for students outside of their home countries cannot be ignored in research.

In Beck's (2020) "What's Race Doing in A Nice Field Like Internationalization", they describe "common sense racism" or the act of normalizing the negative experiences of racialized international students. This banalization of racism is witnessed when the University of California Berkeley's Health Services released a statement saying xenophobia was a "normal reaction" to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, prompting backlash from the wider student community during a period of anti-Asian sentiment (Chiu, 2020). Beck further notes that the Canadian Bureau of International Education once inquired about experiences with racism in their annual survey with international students. Inclusions of race were on the 1999 and 2004 surveys, then subsequently dropped. The erasure of race and banalization of racism in our research and internationalization strategies is simply not the way forward. I, along with Beck, urge our subfield to take up more research about race and

internationalization and to not conflate race with diversity in our work (see also Chapter 18 by Beck). Finally, erasure of the rhetoric of race and racialization in our research does not mean racism is not happening (Hernandez, 2021). Many international students occupy the space of being marginalized by race and marginalized by their non-citizens status and understanding these interactions is key as international education expands.

Reflection questions

- Have I considered race and racialization in my research?
- Ask, "how is racism operating here?" (Jones, 2018) and how is race relevant for this research? How may racialized students be impacted disproportionately, or how are racialized international students further marginalized in the phenomenon that I seek to understand?
- *How* do I talk about international students? If diversity is the central theme to my research with international students, do I actually mean "race"?
- If I engage with dimensions of race in my research, what are my motivations for engaging? Is it to problematically confirm stereotypes, or does it challenge stereotypes and deficit narratives? Have I evaluated my lens for deficit-centred or essentialist rhetoric? Is the language I use reductivist/and or supporting a monolithic view of these students?
- How do I unconsciously centre Whiteness as the default in my research?

Suggestions for researchers

Employ Critical Race Theory and intersectional frameworks to your research and investigate how race may function to marginalize international students (see Buckner et al., 2021; Liu, 2017; Yao et al., 2019).

Identify some of the conceptual issues embedded in assimilation and acculturation-based research (see Yao et al., 2019) and consider how alternative models may complement research. Alternatives include looking specifically at how the process of racialization impacts international students (see Asante et al., 2016; Wang, 2010; Zewolde, 2020), or looking at the structural and systemic issues that impact international students (see Marginson, 2012).

Add specificity to how you collect and analyze your data. To move away from the homogeneous view of international students, opportunities to add specificity is advantageous. Avoid data soloing and encourage the inclusion of international students in diversity metrics (see Chapter 24; Buckner et al., 2021; Lomer et al., 2021). These descriptive data are not a "checklist" of diversity metrics but rather provide the opportunity to move behind a colour-blind approach and gain deeper analysis in keeping with intersectional frameworks (Liu, 2017).

Carefully examine your biases and avoid sweeping generalizations, stereotyping, and research that attempt to support deficit-centred narratives (see Surtees, 2019) and remember that "people are not problems" but rather systems (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Chapter 17). Consider the ways in which international students are heterogeneous and the mosaic of intersections that help define their identities and experiences (Hernandez, 2021, p. 11).

Example in practice

Article: Changamire et al. (2022)

Article focus: This article analyzes policy discourse and testimonies from "Black" racialized international students from Sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrating how inequities are reproduced and racism proliferates in international higher education.

Article strengths: The authors provide a thoughtful analysis of how policy interacts to reinforce and replicate racism and White supremacy. By centring student voices and testimonies, we gain insight into how race can impact how students navigate the universities where they study and how the university interacts with them. It adequately captures wider societal issues and how the university, policies, and internationalization replicate structures of inequity by centring on Whiteness.

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10

INTERSECTIONAL ISSUES IN RESEARCH WITH DISABLED INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Armineh Soorenian

Introduction

Building on the arguments outlined in Chapters 8 and 9, this chapter begins by discussing the barriers related to defining and understanding 'disability' both in 'home' contexts, in the British higher education setting in my instance, and also internationally. The chapter moves on to explore the impact of these considerations when conducting research with disabled international students. At this point, the readers will be invited to reflect on some questions related to the 'disability' language that may be used in research. Finally, the chapter will offer some practical insights into making research involving and relating to disabled international students more inclusive.

The ableist assumptions in existing research often erase disabled international students' experiences. In a Critical Disability Studies context, ableism reflects an ideological phenomenon, steeped in the over-valuation of ability or ableness and the ways that the norms of non-disabled bodies are afforded legitimacy in cultural values, social policy and laws (Van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019). As such, ableist assumptions in research value the neurotypical by privileging, promoting and providing for the ideal non-disabled-bodied participant who has minimal additional needs. Accessibility and inclusivity of the research process impact research on all topics with international students, and thus, thinking about intersectionality is significant when conducting research with international students. Current research is insufficient in investigating intersectional experiences of disabled international students and, therefore, the language in which we refer to these students is limited.

Critical considerations

The term 'disability' is defined throughout this chapter in social model terms, which characterizes 'impairment' as a biological experience, whereas the concept of 'disability' is defined as societal discrimination and prejudice related to larger injustice issues (Holden & Beresford, 2002). British disability scholars argue that the phrase 'students/people with disabilities' is rooted in the individual medical interpretation of disability and that it denies the political or disability identity, which has emerged from the Disabled People's Movement similar to 'Black' and 'Gay' political identities (Barnes, 1992). When used in this context, the term 'disability' refers to a student's medical condition rather than the disabling educational system and/or society at large, confusing the crucial distinction between disability and impairment. For this reason, I will refrain from using 'students with disabilities' in this chapter and, instead, I will deploy the 'disability' language and terminology related to the social model perspective when discussing the challenges that the international higher education system may pose for 'disabled international students'.

The 'disability' language that higher education institutions use to explain various impairments can reflect what the university thinks, which determines how disabled students are treated in the system (Rose, 2006). An institution, for example, which considers 'disability' as a problem to be located with an individual may take a different stance to an institution which sees 'disability' rooted with the practices and attitudes that can create disabling barriers. For instance, the former model may respond to individual student's needs by providing individualised adjustments whereas the latter interpretation is based on the social model of disability. In this view, 'disability' has resulted from the interaction between a disabled student's impairments and the physical and social barriers to her/his participation in education. Instead of focusing on deficiencies, as in the medical model, disability is considered a social construct (de Beco, 2014). A typical response to students' access needs from a social model perspective would be to make practice more inclusive, for example, making lecture notes available online so that students with or without additional needs would be able to access them, rather than making large print notes available only for one or two students with visual impairments.

It is the university and society at large which is disabling when it fails to accommodate disabled students on an equal footing to their non-disabled peers. The social model of disability advocates for the removal of disabling barriers, rather than blaming individual disabled students for not being able to access the higher education sector (Riddell et al., 2005).

Having physical, sensory or communication impairments are medical labels that might be attributed to students, with little or no explanation as to how impairment can impact their experiences or the effects of institutional barriers that must be removed to provide an equal educational experience

(Mutswanga & Chataika, 2016; Rose, 2006). Identifying a label for a student takes the focus away from higher education institutions' responsibilities to remove barriers and perpetuates the individual medical model of 'disability'.

That said, on an international level, the socially accepted interpretations of who is and who is not 'disabled' are relative to a given culture and time. When examining definitions of 'disability' in different cultures, therefore, culture and ethnicity often shape social attitudes to 'disability'. For this reason, education, employment and family life opportunities for disabled people differ markedly not only across cultures but also within institutions in the same culture, pointing to various attitudes to disability and different social, political, economic and legislative contexts. Cultural norms may mean that international students prefer not to choose to define themselves as 'disabled', which may directly be the result of previous disability discrimination experiences or a corresponding fear of the effects of disclosure.

Across the globe, health conditions and disability can be interpreted differently. In China, for example, educational services recognise only three categories of disability: cognitive, visual and hearing impairments (Deng & Guo, 2007). Conversely, in Hungary and France mostly pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties are the recipients of support for children with 'special needs' (van Zanten, 2009). Whilst the American education system refers to individual students' 'disabilities' and conforms to the individual medical model, the German categories consider the educational support needs of disabled students, highlighting the differences in definitions of 'disability' across the world (Powell, 2009).

Depending on their cultural backgrounds, international students may use a range of terminology for describing different impairments and may not be familiar with the words commonly used in their host context to explain various impairments. One participant in Soorenian's research (2013, p. 101), for example, discussed his observation of differences between the descriptive interpretation of impairments in the United Kingdom and that of his country in Africa: "In my country, four main categories are known – 'physical', 'hearing', 'sight' and 'mental' impairments. When we talk about 'disability', people understand those, so other hidden 'disabilities' are not known."

An obvious translation of the term 'learning difficulties', for example, may be absent in some cultures, meaning that international students may not readily be able to identify with terms such as specific learning disability, predominantly used to refer to dyslexia (also referred to dysnomia or dyscalculia) in the British higher education context (Rose, 2006). Some concepts utilised to define specific impairments, when translated literally, may be confusing or even derogatory for disabled international students and their families. For example, some international students may be offended by terms such as 'learning disability' or 'learning difficulty', avoiding identifying with these labels, thinking these terms would imply that they are not able to learn. In short, the

sociocultural and linguistic variations and the inadequacy and complexity of disability categories can often exaggerate the confusion and misunderstandings of what 'disability' means in a given culture.

Research with disabled international students presents a variety of challenges. The linguistic and cultural variables that characterise 'disability' introduce layers of complexity to the investigative process, and there is little guidance available for researchers on the practicalities of designing and conducting projects in this subfield. Perhaps for this reason, qualitative research into disabled international students' needs, experience and expectations is relatively limited. Due to its niche position, research has not prioritised this area, often overshadowed by other contemporary issues. For example, in the past few years, there has been a focus on how COVID-19 has affected disabled people and, more recently, there is an interest in the cost of living crisis in the United Kingdom but little in the intersection of disability and race. Research with disabled international students could be built into this new area of research but is often overlooked.

The central challenge of research involving disabled international students relates to the diversity of their experiences, identities and backgrounds. The complex web of variables needs to be recognised at every stage of research design and implementation, through clarification of objectives, choice of methodology, recruitment of participants, preparation of data collection methods and data analysis. For practical and ethical reasons, researchers need to allow for and respond sensitively to the different personal and cultural concerns of disabled international students, specifically in the following areas:

- The effects of cultural differences in interpreting and understanding the term 'disability', stemming from considerable variation in social structures and interpersonal relationships (McLean et al., 2003).
- Differences in comprehending what accessibility and reasonable adjustment in a research process might be in the host country are influenced by different resource allocations and various anti-discrimination legislation and policies.
- Differences in communication styles on disability issues between international students and host countries, leading to uncertainties about different social interactions, influenced by a range of expectations, perceptions and conventions of social relationships with disabled people (Soorenian, 2020).
- Differences in educational approaches and conventions to study and research (Li, 2015).

Recruiting disabled participants for research projects can present the first barrier, since some international students may be reluctant to 'stand out' from a group and be identified as 'disabled' due to their cultural norms. A lack of

information on what 'disability' is and what adjustments can be provided to make the research process inclusive can have a considerable impact on disabled international students' willingness to participate in research. For example, expanding the ways students can take part in a research process, via online platforms, email communication, face-to-face sessions or survey questions can increase disabled international students' participation in research that impacts their student journey. While these methods may be outside standard methodologies that some researchers may adopt, using them can increase accessibility and participation.

Terminology is an important part of the language that contributes to the construction of 'disability' (Barton, 2001). When conducting research, although the confusion about the inadequacy and complexity of 'disability' categories based on the individual medical model of 'disability' may not be exclusively an international student issue, reflecting previous studies (Deng & Guo, 2007; van Zanten, 2009), cultural and linguistic differences may add to the misunderstandings of what 'disability' means in their host university. Different concepts of impairment may influence research participants' perceptions and ways of thinking about 'disability'. Cultures across the world may have a variety of terminologies to describe impairment and may not readily relate to the words commonly adopted by researchers to encourage disclosure and in-depth discussion about participants' experiences of 'disability'.

The communication barriers experienced by international students include difficulties in understanding, speaking and writing skills, different accents and global variations in English, differences in cognitive performance, group participation and discussion methods, and misunderstandings over body language (Borland & Pearce, 2002). Linguistic and communication competence is widely different among international students, and inconsistencies in explaining 'disability' can further hinder data collection and analysis by leading to incorrect interpretations of responses. Variations in international students' educational backgrounds are of specific significance (Li, 2015). Many international students are unfamiliar with independent learning and Western research concepts and processes. Sometimes disabled students may feel suspicious of the non-disabled researcher's motives and, as a result, be unwilling to share their experiences of 'disability' in a research setting. For example, often there is an expectation of spontaneous oral contributions in a research field study situation, even where the interview topics and questions are not shared in advance.

This situation can be compounded for international students, who not only experience language barriers but may also have cognitive processing difficulties, such as following a head injury. These inaccessible practices can mean that we are missing out on the voices and experiences of an important group of students, further marginalising their accounts, resulting in a less complex understanding of international students' concerns.

Reflection questions

- Have I considered the intersectional experiences of disabled international students in my research?
- What definition of 'disability' will I use in the research to empower disabled international students?
- How can I modify the 'disability' language in the research without excluding any of the participants' experiences?
- How can I use a range of recruitment means and accessible research practices to increase disabled international students' participation in my research?
- How does ableism impact my research design? What might I be assuming about my participants?
- To what extent does my research perpetuate ableist assumptions of students' experiences when collecting and documenting data?

Suggestions for researchers

Dedicate considerably more time for recruitment, data collection and analysis to allow for explaining what 'disability' refers to in a given research context. Determining what reasonable adjustments are needed and what can be provided during the research process is an important stage that cannot be rushed. Repeating and rephrasing 'disability' language and explaining unfamiliar concepts may, therefore, be crucial.

From the outset, sensitively build participants' trust by clearly explaining 'disability' language, emphasising and maintaining confidentiality, describing the objective and intended outcomes of the project to ensure participants understand their rights, roles, commitments and how their contribution will be used. Ethical practice requires that participants fully understand the purpose of the project, as well as their commitments and rights (Hughes, 2004). This can be particularly the case for disabled international students, who may be unfamiliar with not only the 'disability' concepts in research but also the purpose and process of the particular research project in their host country. This initial step can assist the development of rapport between the researcher and participants and work towards a meaningful and productive cooperation.

Use unambiguous and appropriate levels of 'disability' language in all written and verbal communication, for example, in project documentation such as information sheets and consent forms. Often there is a fine balance between giving the students the information they need without being condescending. In these cases, researchers need to be led by participants' needs for clarification and explanation of unfamiliar concepts and procedures by providing them time and space to ask questions. Researchers must be aware of the varied causes and effects of miscommunication including the use of incompatible levels of 'disability' language in a cross-cultural context since they have

the potential to compromise the validity and reliability of findings. Misunderstanding of questions by participants or misinterpretation of participants' verbal responses by researchers can also influence the outcomes. Researchers must be aware of the possible challenges for participants to meaningfully articulate their responses on their lived experiences in the language of the research. Adopting interculturally appropriate communication strategies, or indeed multilingual research approaches, to overcome potential language barriers, would be a good start.

Consider less structured methods in order to allow for 'disability' language limitations when participating in project methodology. Methods such as observation, focus groups and semistructured interviews have the potential to overcome some 'disability' language barriers and provide information from different perspectives, for example, participants' thoughts and feelings, as well as their actions. Providing the research questions in advance of focus groups or interviews can allow participants to formulate the responses to the questions in their own time and clarify any concerns they have with the researchers prior to the research activity. This can be particularly helpful for neurodivergent students or those with speech impairments. These methods offer a platform for researchers to repeat and rephrase questions, where clarification of ambiguous phrases or incomplete responses are needed and gain additional information from the participants' body language in instances of miscommunication. Failure to do this can result in incomplete research output, one which only reflects the voices of certain members of the research sample.

Respect disabled international students' individuality as participants with intersectional experiences. Critically, handling disabled international participants' possible concerns relating to social anxiety about cultural influences of 'disability' on interpersonal relationships must be ensured by the avoidance of situations likely to cause personal stress. Participants must be encouraged to respond freely and constructively without fear of causing offence or displaying disrespect.

Conclusion

Researching disabled international students' needs, experiences and expectations can provide a rare opportunity to make the university sector inclusive, not only for the group of students that are the central concern of this chapter but also for a range of diverse students with an array of minoritised backgrounds that would benefit from inclusive practices in education. Valuable lessons will be learned when students with different backgrounds interact.

The key to quality research project outcomes lies in applying an appropriate and sound interpretation of 'disability', one that empowers disabled international students and works towards removing disabling barriers in the

university environment. Researchers' ability in supporting disabled international students to understand the definition of 'disability' and the related language without undermining their participants' experiences is of utmost importance in this process.

Example in practice

Article: Soorenian (2020)

Article focus: disabled international students' experiences of social interactions in their host universities influenced by the perceptions of their 'disabled' and 'International' identities.

Article strengths: The chapter considers 'disability' to stem from the categorisation of disabled people in relation to dominant social and cultural 'ablest' norms, as well as environmental barriers. It also avoids deficit narratives in relation to international students. The author draws on her own experience of being a disabled international student in British HE for over a decade and the barriers she experienced in this context, thus adding to the insights discussed in this piece of novel research.

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11

BREAKING BINARIES, ENGENDERING MULTIPLICITY

Decolonizing and queering research with international students

Hoa N. Nguyen, Ashmi Desai, Ashish Agrawal and Kneo Mokgopa

Introduction

LGBTQ+ international students are largely invisible in research with international students. These students are not voiceless but "deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard" (Roy, 2004, p. 1). This lack of representation upholds a hegemonic assumption that renders LGBTQ+ identities irrelevant or insignificant, while simultaneously presenting a monolithic portrayal of international students.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide critical, practical, and decolonizing considerations for research with queer international students. We explore issues of translation, politics, and coloniality, addressing the language and politics of queerness and engaging the multiplicities of identity, self, and other. We use LGBTQ+ to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other identities along the spectrum of gender and sexual orientation. In contrast, we refer to queer or queerness as a transgression of the dominant culture and a fluidity and resistance to the status quo of gender and sexuality.

The invisibility of LGBTQ+ international students perpetuates heteronormativity (privileging heterosexuality as the ideal norm) and cisnormativity (privileging cisgender identity – those whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth – as the ideal norm). By not emphasizing queerness as a cultural, international phenomenon, researchers risk centering White and/ or Eurocentric queer experiences and erasing the complex histories of Black, Asian, and Indigenous queer experiences.

Queering international student research is a frame for all researchers to consider and apply, even if their research is not explicitly on queerness. In the research process, queerness calls to complexify the stories of all international students. Acknowledging queerness is electing to see international students as whole persons, rather than fragmented objects of study.

As Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan (2002) stated, "Queerness is now global" (p. 1). As portrayals of queer sexualities and cultures proliferate, researchers should avoid exploitation or capitalistic consumption (Morton, 2001; Oswin, 2006). For instance, global social powers and media capitalize on one-dimensional displays of queerness and exoticize "the so-called Third World and queers within it" (Lind, 2010, p. 3) through a "global gaze/gays" (Altman, 1997, p. 417).

This chapter highlights queering as transgressing national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Intentional efforts to broaden Eurocentric views of gender and sexuality contribute to expansive, intersectional, and multiple perspectives. Researchers should challenge colonial supremacist narratives that stigmatize, erase, and dehumanize queer international students.

Authors' positionalities

Hoa and her family immigrated as political refugees after Vietnam War. She was born in Vietnam but lived most of her life in the United States, growing up in diasporic culture, never feeling Vietnamese nor American. As a Vietnamese, queer, cisgender woman, she wanted to understand how culture, gender, and sexual identity intersected for those who traversed multiple homes and rebuilt their lives in foreign lands. This interest fueled her research on the coming in and coming out experiences of queer international students and their sense of belonging and home.

Ashmi inhabits contradictory and in-between spaces of identity related to her international and sexual status. She reached the United States as an international graduate student in a program where there was a false equivalence between all students or international students often considered diversity teachers in the classroom. A general lack of awareness continues to persist in North American universities about culture shock; student inhibition toward self-disclosure, email cultures of intimidation, and how many "equitable" pedagogies and research methodologies are rooted in colorblind; and ethnocentric understandings of cultural differences. Her work is now oriented towards creating student-led invitational community dialogue and peer conflict mediation spaces. These spaces seek to lay the foundation for the social construction of queer international students' identities as critical complex relational processes enmeshed in systemic power structures.

Ashish identifies as a queer person. His interest in studying the experiences of queer international students developed as a result of his being an international student in the United States. As a queer international student, Ashish realized the on-campus support that is usually provided to queer international students on university campuses often overlooks the cultural sensitivities and nuances students experience. To address this issue, he worked with Hoa to create initiatives to provide support to queer international students, keeping in

mind their unique needs. Moreover, as an educator, Ashish is also interested in decolonizing knowledge – both its creation and dissemination through teaching. For Ashish, this chapter brings together these two streams of interest.

Kneo is a queer, non-binary person living and working in Johannesburg, South Africa. Growing up in early post-Apartheid South Africa, they faced many instances of gendered and racial trauma, especially being a part of some of the first racially desegregated classes in primary school. In 2015, while they were studying for their undergraduate degree, the Rhodes and Fees Must Fall movements, which Kneo was a part of, erupted in South African universities. During this time when students began to challenge the White supremacist, colonial, and capitalist project embedded in South African universities, Kneo developed a critical passion for what they call 'Othering & Belonging' – a praxis for understanding and challenging the ways people are made into 'the wretched of the Earth' (Fanon, 1963).

Critical considerations

Decolonization and what it means for studying queer experiences

One of the most significant hierarchies introduced by colonization was the notion that Western forms of knowledge and knowledge production were the only forms of legitimate knowledge. This hierarchy was achieved by repressing indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge production and imposing the colonizer's worldview and beliefs on the colonized (Quijano, 2007; Smith, 2021). Thus, the process of colonization led to a near-elimination of the epistemologies of the colonized (Chapters 6, 7, and 21).

Similarly, the colonial project imposed gender- and sexuality-related hierarchies, subverting the already existing social order in colonies, several of which gave more acceptance to alternate genders and sexualities (see also Chapter 12). For example, pre-colonial India had relatively more acceptance to androgyny, which refers to biological sex, gender identities, and gender expressions that embody male/female, man/woman, and/or masculine/ feminine entities (Nandy, 1983), along with a larger acceptance of same-sex love (Vanita & Kidwai, 2000). Indigenous societies in the Americas also recognized alternate sexualities (Picq, 2019). The colonial project introduced the binaries of masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality in these societies, creating hierarchies where masculinity was favored over femininity and heterosexuality was privileged over homosexuality (Grosfoguel, 2011).

Decolonization, especially of knowledge and its production, is to subvert the dominance of a single epistemology. Scholars (Le Grange, 2014; Maldonado-Torres, 2007) argue this can be achieved when diverse epistemic traditions co-exist with one another without one being privileged. Decolonizing

LGBTQ+ research with international students, therefore, would seek to understand the diverse sexual practices and gender norms across the world in the past and present day. Such research avoids the lens of popular rights-based movements in North America and Western Europe (Channell-Justice, 2020). Decolonizing research will broaden our understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences with new epistemologies (Kulpa & Silva, 2016; Picq, 2019).

Decolonization scholars do not advocate for a denunciation of Western knowledge in search of an 'unadulterated' form of knowledge that existed before the colonial influence. In fact, they call for an amalgamation of Western with traditional knowledge (Nigam, 2020). In research with international students, it is important to contextualize expressions of gender and sexuality within the influence of Western coloniality, without reducing the complexities of such experiences. For instance, highlighting the criminalization of queerness in certain countries without examining the residual colonial roots of such laws ignores the historical and modern Western-informed politics surrounding gender and sexuality (Han & O'Mahoney, 2018). Instead, researchers can better understand how coloniality operates in a queer international student's experiences and understandings of oneself, in ways that neither villainize nor idealize cultures.

Politics and issues around queerness and translation

From the 1980s to 1990s, queer became a cultural and political phenomenon in the United States. The concept of queerness arrived amidst the US government's silence and neglect of the AIDS crisis, increased homophobic violence, the rise of activist groups such as ACT-UP, Lesbian Avengers, and Queer Nation, and culture and sex wars that catalyzed the feminist sex radicalism (Davidson, 2020). It is within this context that queerness emerged as a fluidity, transgression, and intersectionality, ideas that were in stark contrast to the culture of assimilation, gender conformity, and Whiteness of mainstream gay and lesbian movements.

Similarly, research with international students is an effort to challenge our definitions and notions of who international students are, counter assimilationism and cultural conformity, particularly for queer international students. Queerness is both a critique and designation of identity, and queer theory is riddled with tensions between an attachment to identity categories and the desire to undo them. While used as an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ identities, queer also highlights their contingency and harmfulness (Gruszczynska, 2009). Queer theory's major ideas are attributed to deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and the work of Michel Foucault (Angelides, 2006). This entails rigorous questioning of identity's self-evidence and coherence, characterizing identity categories as the oppressive effects of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1990, 1995).

In key early queer theory text, Sedgwick critiques categorization and describes queer as a "continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, troublant" (1990, p. xii). Queer involves a "displacement of reference and destabilization of identity in general" (Epps, 2001, p. 425). As Muñoz (2009) writes, "Queerness is not here yet . . . . We have never been queer . . . . Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (p. 1).

Parallel to queerness's embrace of the fluid, ongoing state of in-between-ness, international students also transgress the in-between spaces of borders, identities, and cultures (Chapter 21). Critical to research with international students is to recognize ever-shifting understandings of queerness, given the culturally and nationally bounded contexts. This runs counter to Western narratives of sexuality and gender, which tends to focus on individual identity self-exploration as core to understanding one's queerness.

Tracing the root, uncovering dominant narratives and new queer praxis

Manhood, womanhood, hetero, queer – where do these binary ideas come from? Alok Vaid-Menon (2021) suggests that gender-variant and transgender people are tracing the root of binary ideas and in that process, examining the dominance of Eurocentered, colonial knowledge on Black, indigenous, and people of color. Britain's "exported homophobia" and anti-queer ideology (Sowemimo, 2019) started as colonies in the 1800s; this colonial legacy runs deep even today. Same-sex relationships are still criminalized in 72 countries, relying on legal statutes from centuries ago (Mendos et al., 2020). The criminalization of visible non-conformity and targeting is accompanied by the deep-rooted persistence of a binary structure or "thinking in opposition," as a way of categorizing and limiting the potential of human experience to be free, ambivalent, or existing in between. Thus, the question of "coming out" or disclosing one's identity produces varying risks for international students.

Vaid-Menon's tracing of the root recognizes how oppression is seeded through colonization and dehumanizes all of us (Chapters 4 and 6). It is a paradigm shift process of collective healing through questioning, empathizing, cultivating compassion, and having beliefs about collective interdependence, co-existence, and freedom.

A key exercise for researching the queer and international is to open oneself to and embrace complexity and recognize the dominant narratives in our lives. A plethora of dominant intersectional narratives impact our freedoms daily, including gender roles (sexism), hetero/cispatriarchy, age, immigration, body types, meritocracy, ability, heteronormativity, family, and marriage system, among others. These dominant narratives, "inform cultural and societal values about gender and sexual identities that render some expressions" (Owens,

2010, p. 43). These narratives assume powerful realities about what's acceptable and unacceptable in social life, often restricting or criminalizing nuance, ambivalence, or difference. Without constant questioning of the power of these dominant narratives to shape identities and social realities, enabling the authoring of counter-narratives is difficult.

Being queer and international involves a more complicated understanding of cultures, marginalization, and issues related to belonging. Queer international students may exist at a crossroads, face a double barrier navigating identity, and experience varying degrees of acceptance, isolation, and levels of discrimination across home communities, university settings, and cultural contexts (Nguyen et al., 2017). Within this realm, scholarly explorations must consider non-Western and/or collectivist cultural contexts; how heterosexism and racism/casteism intertwine in discrimination; and the role of the relationships with families of choice.

The realities of today also affect research explorations. For instance, in South Asia, Upadhyay (2020) calls for the formation of an anti-homohindunationalist queer praxis where one takes into account the impact of hegemonic nationalist polarizing forces across different matrices of oppression. The intersection of oppression through the homohindunationalist, an amalgamation of anti-LGBTQ+, anti-minority, and pro-nationalist, seeks to marginalize on the basis of sexuality and religion in a narrative of national pride. Queer prides in India have become sites of resistance through solidarities between queer, trans, Dalit, Kashmiri, and Muslim communities, amplifying the need for dismantling structures of Islamophobia, brahminical supremacy, and colonialism. In the United States, we observe the rise of anti-trans legislation in the form of bathroom bills, drag bans, and bans on gender-affirming care for trans youth (The Transformation Project, 2023), in which opposers of trans rights often align with opposers of feminism, abortion rights, and comprehensive healthcare. At the heart of trans and queer political movements is an intersectional recognition of economic, gender, and sexual justice. Researchers working with queer international students need to examine the realities of queer political positionings in the international students' home and host countries.

Reflection questions

- How can I consider the intersectional experiences of queer international students in my research?
- How might my assumptions and biases regarding queer international experiences affect my research approach?
- How does my research perpetuate heteronormative/cisnormative assumptions of international students?
- How does my research perpetuate White/Eurocentric assumptions of queerness?

• How can I engage queer international students' voices in my research?
Whose voices are privileged? Whose voices are invisible, erased, or silenced?

Suggestions for researchers

Resist preconceived theories of queer international students. Decolonizing
queer research with international students resists the urge to apply theories and
methodologies developed in other contexts. Rather, researchers should explore
what it means for the research subjects to be situated in their existing con-
texts (Channell-Justice, 2020; Nigam, 2020). The same idea holds for apply-
ing identity markers that acknowledge cultural sensitivities without imposing
identity terms that originated elsewhere. The identity marker of "queer" was
developed in a certain sociopolitical context and thus, requires reflective and
participatory discussion of its origin and development within context.

Decolonize the research process with queer international students.
Moore (2018) highlights three considerations researchers should have while
studying the experiences of queer individuals. The first consideration is to gain
entry and bring community members together. There may be limited spaces
or opportunities for marginalized communities to gather. Hence, researchers
should create opportunities for communities to connect. Moore also notes
researchers should challenge preconceived research questions by developing
research questions as the researcher spends time with the research partici-
pants and learns about their lives. The second consideration is negotiating the
insider/outsider dilemma. Moore emphasizes a researcher is never fully an
insider or outsider; this positionality is negotiated on a daily basis based on
the interactions the researcher has with the community. Finally, she suggests
researchers not end their work abruptly. The termination of research should
be done in gradual steps and start before completing data collection (Moore,
2018). Researchers should consider potential mental health risks, conse-
quences on participants and themselves, and unintentional "outing."

Situate queerness within contexts. Researchers should make concerted
attempts to understand queerness within various contexts. Researchers need
to situate what queer means for each specific cultural, historical, and political
context. This requires researchers to approach with cultural humility, engage
with members of the community, and further their training and education
on global queer perspectives. Researchers should explore how Eurocentric
and Western narratives may have influenced their views of gender and sexual-
ity. For instance, Western values of individualism and essentialism may isolate
queerness as an isolated, biological-determined characteristic, neglecting the
relational, communal, and cultural aspects of gender and sexuality. In addition,
queerness is a troubling or dismantling of previously assumed categories of
identity/self (Sedgwick, 2008). Future avenues for queer theory involve tak-
ing an intersectional lens of queerness, such as queering of race and indigenity
(McCann & Monaghan, 2019).

Examine who is included and excluded by utilizing queer praxis. Queer spaces are rarely power neutral. Like any social space, queer spaces also include some while excluding others. Queer praxis disrupts norms and renders the invisible visible. For example, in the South Asian context, there is the case of the Dalit queers (Pawar, 2020). Dalits have been rejected from both anti-caste movements and queer movements. Hence, researchers in these contexts need to consider the implications that this intertwining of caste, class, and sexuality has within queer spaces.

Compare for relevance and commonalities within international beliefs on queerness. In considering international beliefs, research can juxtapose contexts, similarities, divergences, and how they relate to one another. For instance, are there any comparisons between the "two-spirit" mythologies among the North American indigenous people, "tritiya prakriti" or third gender in the South Asian context, and other Azetic, Viking, Japanese Shinto, ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Persian, and other mythologies (Pattanaik, 2014)? Exploring these juxtapositions in relation to queer international students opens rich possibilities for future research.

Example in Practice

Article: Bakshi (2020)

Article focus: Bakshi studies dissenting meanings and different connections beyond the binaries of home, belonging and First/Third worlds that emerge from reading artistic narratives of trans diasporic artists Raju Rage (UK) and Ocean Vuong (US). The auto-ethnographic approaches of these artists become a site for alternative and transformative possibilities and a way of healing from the wounds of colonial legacies.

Article strengths: The author explores the intersection of queer, translocal, and decolonial art as complex, non-binary, and non-Eurocentric where sensemaking is awakened for a subjective understanding. The article challenges Eurocentric notions of knowledge and provides a rich analysis of queer and decolonial crossings that support radical forms of existence in decolonial queer diasporas. In-depth narratives are shared with strong theoretical backing.

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12

BRINGING GENDER INTO RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Siqi Zhang and Jenna Mittelmeier

Introduction

In continuing our understanding of international students' intersectionalities (Chapter 8), this chapter considers bringing gender into research with international students. In doing so, we recognise that research through a gender lens is perhaps more prominent than other identities outlined in Section 3. However, there remains space to reflect on gender as a social and cultural construct, alongside the tendency to assume gender is only a consideration for those who identify as women. Research on this topic also often paints women international students as vulnerable or marginalised subjects, positioned from deficit assumptions around the 'challenges' of being a woman in intercultural spaces. This, of course, makes important contributions to the literature, such as Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch's (2015) critical analysis of international students and gender-based violence. However, existing research often also misses needed conversations about gender and agency, exploration, or coping.

We argue, first, that there is a need to understand gender in research with international students as a varied socially and culturally constructed concept. Second, we illuminate how new lenses are needed for understanding how gender intersects with international or intercultural experiences in complex ways. We also, third, argue for a need to see research related to gender as not merely affecting those who identify as women, but as a construct which impacts all students who cross borders. Finally, we end with considerations for how research processes, beyond the topic of study, are gendered or could be improved through the lens of gender.

Critical considerations

Conceptualising gender

Scholars have long questioned the problematic nature of gendered roles and how they influence normative behaviours and practices, particularly in relation to power and (sub)ordination (e.g., Millett's, 1970 evaluation of 'sexual politics'). Within this, it is recognised that contextual factors influence the ways gender and gendered roles are constructed, defined, and given meaning in varied 'social hierarchies' (Delphy, 1984). In this chapter, we consider how differing constructs of 'gender', which refer to socially and individually constructed identities, vary in the act of border crossing, in addition to conceptualisations of 'sex', which focuses on biological and anatomical determinants. Gender, as we evaluate it here, refers to the cultural and social imaginary that gives meaning to constructed groups such as 'men' and 'women', through which individuals develop their own gender identity/ies (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). In research with international students, these gendered social imaginaries may shift and change when studying in new contexts of power.

Social constructionist accounts have highlighted the significance of social and cultural factors in conceptualising gender across different spaces (see the analysis of, e.g., Thorne et al., 2019). Wittig (1992), for example, questioned the idea that gender is a universal category, arguing instead that womanhood (but also likely expandable to other gender identities) is a concept that is constructed (and imposed) through particular social, cultural, and historical contexts ('*one is not born a woman*'). This aligns with Millett's reflections on the importance of 'the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression' (1970, p. 31). Cultural meanings are, then, attached to labels such as 'men', 'women', or 'non-binary', among other identities. For international students, their cultural constructs of gender and gendered roles may vary, and they may encounter different social/cultural constructions of their gendered identities in their new host context.

Gender, thus, can be regarded as plural and provisional, rather than fixed and static, as outlined particularly by Butler (1990, 2011) who conceptualised gender as performance. Butler (1990, p. 25) argues that 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender', suggesting that identity is instead constituted by 'the very expressions that are said to be its results'. Through this lens, everyday practices and social interactions continuously shape a social individual's gender identity. It is through 'doing gender' that a social individual produces 'the effect that there was some gendered person who preceded the performance' (Richardson, 2015, p. 19). Therefore, the construction of gender identities can be seen as a continuous process of performance. For

international students, this may bring up cultural incongruities in normative expectations for or reactions to their performance of gender.

Gender as a global social and cultural construct

More care is needed for researchers working in intercultural spaces to recognise the plurality of ways that gender and gendered roles have been conceptualised across cultures (see also Chapter 11). For instance, some scholars have outlined that contemporary understandings of gendered roles are colonial and Eurocentric constructs that have been enacted upon cultures which were not historically patriarchal (e.g., Oyĕwùmí, 2011). Binary gender constructs of 'men' and 'women' also hold alternative understandings in other cultures, where examples are aplenty for 'third-gender' identities around the world (Thorne et al., 2019), such as Two-Spirit (Robinson, 2020) or Hijra (Goel, 2016) identities. For instance, Ismoyo (2020) highlights how five genders are commonly recognised in Bugis culture in the South Sulawesi region of modern-day Indonesia. In research with international students, this may bring up complexities for how gender is understood and reflected on by participants, based on their cultural positionings.

Strong critiques have also been made about the tendency for hegemonic discourses about gender and feminism to erase other or alternative global constructs (Mohanty, 2003). For instance, scholars such as Lugones (2016) have highlighted that colonisation and coloniality have imposed gendered constructs in cultures which have historically held more pluralising understandings (see also Chapter 11). This further relates to diverse global understandings of feminism, which is interpreted and valued differently in various settings, not least because of its historical tendency to centre White women in many contexts. Even regionally, cultural and demographic differences impact approaches towards feminism and feminist beliefs (Maathai, 2006). For instance, scholars have outlined the differing feminist values of Arab women in North Africa and Black women in sub-Saharan Africa (Atanga, 2013) and the tendency for White South African women to align more with 'Western' feminist values than those of their Black African peers (Stuhlhofer, 2021). There are, therefore, tensions within research between pluralistic interpretations of gender and feminism in varied social and cultural settings and problematic assumptions about the universal applicability of Eurocentric notions. Thus, when undertaking research about gender through a feminist lens in research with international students, it begs questions of whose feminism and why?

Gendered constructions also influence the ways that international students are gendered *through* research, particularly when scholars are working across cultures. Chen (2007), for instance, critiques the construction of Asian women in the 'Western' gaze, revealing hierarchies of power within and across cultures. For example, the cultural heritage of Confucianism in

China has historically played a significant role in shaping gender roles and norms (Croll, 1995). The infantilising 'small persons' discourses (Rosenlee, 2006) used to describe women in Confucian contexts reinforced women's subordinate position as wives, daughters, and mothers (Croll, 1995). Yet, although Confucian rhetoric has strongly impacted historical understandings of Chinese womanhood, contemporary feminism in China is dynamic and not determined by this history (Wu & Dong, 2019). However, Chen (2007) observes that researchers, particularly those in Anglophone contexts, tend to assume Asian women are carriers of certain Confucian virtues, stereotyping them as 'obedient and quiet' (Arisaka, 2000, p. 215). With this in mind, we reflect next on problems in existing gender research with international students.

Limitations in existing research with international students

The intersections of gender, migrant student status, and other identity facets

Other chapters in this section have highlighted the valuable lens that intersectionality (coined by Crenshaw, 1991) provides for understanding how students' migrant status interacts with other identity facets such as race, disability, sexuality, and class. Within this, students' gendered experiences have been in more prominent focus in critical research compared to other identity facets (see, e.g., Zhang & Xu, 2020; Liu, 2017). However, research tends to view gender in isolation without reflecting on how it also intersects with, for example, race, class, or religion. This means there is an ongoing need for researchers to go beyond one-dimensional approaches to ensure that the complexity of lived experiences is not excluded in research.

Research which does highlight gendered experiences across multiple identity facets demonstrates the importance of this lens. For instance, Selod's (2018) conceptualisation of 'gendered racialisation' provides a framework for understanding how religion, race, ethnicity, and gender intersect to reinforce inequalities. This was applied by, for instance, Karaman and Christian (2020) to explore how Muslim women students' bodies are racially coded. This was further explored by J. Zhang and Allen (2019) in their analysis of Chinese men studying in the United States, highlighting the 'double burden' of racialisation with constructions of masculinity. Class, similarly, intersects with gendered identities, outlined through a strong disappointment expressed by Chinese women international students when their middle-class social status was overridden by their perceived status as 'racialised migrants' (Zhang & Xu, 2020). Altogether, this highlights how identities intersect with gender to shape international students' pluralistic lived experiences, offering avenues for future research.

Seeing beyond the 'vulnerability' of women

Research about gender and international students tends to centre on women's experiences. In doing so, there is a tendency to homogenise women's lives through a simplified story of 'struggle' (Mohanty, 2003). Critiques of such work highlight how this 'inevitably work[s] to flatten the women's identities, place them as victims, silence them, and remove their personal and collective agency' (Azim & Happel-Parkins, 2019, p. 15). Of course, gendered inequalities are real and should be studied, such as the important work highlighting the gendered violence women have experienced abroad (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2015). However, the subfield has a dearth of literature which also highlights how women may enact agency, cope, manage, or grow through the experience of studying in another country. By failing to illuminate women international students' agency, alongside their struggles, one danger is that scholars may reproduce stereotypes of them as solely a vulnerable group.

Some existing research shows pathways forward for new perspectives on women's experiences. For example, Martin (2016) demonstrates how Asian women international students regarded educational mobility as an opportunity for learning new social values to critically challenge gendered norms upon returning home. Another example is Sondhi and King's (2017) analysis of Indian women studying in Canada and their perceptions of 'freedom' from gender expectations while abroad. Other research points to greater complexity in narratives of international students' social networks, which typically portray them as 'unintegrated'. For instance, racially alienated Chinese women international students have been shown to negotiate friendships with fellow Chinese peers as a reference group for reflecting on their transnational growth, a creative way to demonstrate their agency (S. Zhang & Xu, 2020). In this way, women international students who may be commonly framed as 'vulnerable' show powerful ways of questioning and disrupting the normative patriarchal frames of both home and host countries. Together, this shows how research can contradict deficit narratives constructed through gendered stereotypes by highlighting women's agency in their international study experiences.

Considering research about gendered experiences beyond women

Because research about gender tends to focus on those who identify as women, there is an ongoing need for research to consider the gendered experiences of other groups. One example is the gendered experiences of international students who identify as men, which is currently under-researched. Nonetheless, existing research does highlight the ways that men negotiate ideas of masculinity and manhood in new cultural contexts, particularly through the lens of racialisation (as previously outlined by J. Zhang & Allen, 2019). Oliffe et al.'s (2010) research, for instance, shows how the intersections of masculinity and racialisation are experienced by participants across Asian, Latin American, and

Middle Eastern countries. The work of Deuchar (2023) also highlights how some Indian international students in Australia have developed 'caring masculinities' in providing for fellow international students. However, there remains an ongoing need to expand such understandings of how men (re)negotiate and experience changing gendered expectations across cultural contexts.

There is also a stark paucity of research which centres on the voices and experiences of international students who identify beyond the gender binary. Although there are growing avenues for researching the experience of transgender, non-binary, and third-gender students generally in higher education (e.g., Nicolazzo, 2016), hardly any published research specifically focuses on international students. Nonetheless, research about, for example, transgender and gender-expansive American students participating in short-term study abroad programmes (Michl et al., 2019) points to distinct joys and challenges. Wider migration research also provides some hints at how transgendered mobility 'challenges how countries historically construct their borders and, by default, their nation-states' (Yue, 2012, p. 280). However, there remains a limited understanding of the intersections between transgender, non-binary, or third-gender identities and migrant student status. While this undoubtedly is a small population, given intersecting inequalities of access to international higher education, it is an important absence that inhibits knowledge. This, coupled with the aforementioned complexities of cultural definitions of gender spectrums, represents a significant gap worthy of consideration for future research.

Bringing 'gender' into research processes

Thus far in the chapter, we have primarily focused on gender as an object of study, but it is also worth considering the ways that research processes are gendered (or could be strengthened through greater attention towards gender). Gendered stereotypes or assumptions may be present throughout the research design, from conceptualisation through to writing, even in research that is not expressly 'about gender'. For instance, assumptions about gender occur in how social constructs are categorised and delineated in research (such as through quantitative variables; see Chapter 23). Gender bias may also structure the literature researchers read and cite, positioning gendered assumptions about whose knowledge matters. For example, although this has been limitedly evaluated in research with international students, analysis in other fields shows that women are cited less often than men, particularly by men (Dion et al., 2018). Equity of access to the benefits of research may also be unequal, particularly if patriarchal assumptions have delineated who imagined beneficiaries are, as highlighted by Criado-Perez (2019) in her in-depth analysis of 'a world made for men'. Therefore, considerations are needed for reflecting on why gender in relation to international students tends to centre solely on narratives of participant experiences, whereby gender, in line with Butler's

(1990, 2011) conceptualisation of it as *performance*, may be performed throughout the research design and writing process for research on all subtopics.

Reflection question

- As a starting point, have I considered how gender intersects with other facets of international students' identities?
- How am I defining gender in my research? In doing so, have I considered how gender and gendered norms are socially constructed differently across cultures?
- How might my participants define gender or gendered identities, and how might that vary from my own conceptualisations?
- How might my participants be encountering different or new gendered assumptions, norms, or performances while studying internationally?
- In what ways could my research move beyond focusing solely on gendered vulnerabilities? Where might my participants be enacting agency in their gendered experiences?
- How might the *processes* of my research be gendered, beyond the specific topic of study?

Suggestions for researchers

Explicitly define gender in your research and engage with how it may be constructed by participants. Constructions of gender are often an assumed shared concept, but we have highlighted in this chapter variation across cultures. Therefore, any research which centres gender should begin by defining it and reflecting on the underpinning assumptions entailed by that definition. This may include, for instance, spending time reflecting on researcher positionality (Chapter 20) and how, as researchers, our individual identities and gendered experiences may frame assumptions we have about participants. When working across cultures, this likely also means engaging with theories about gender that originate in the spaces where our participants are from.

Negotiate and reflect with participants on how they construct their gendered identities. Participants themselves are in the best position to outline their own conceptualisations of gender and how they identify themselves. Researchers may, for example, assume how participants may identify based on their performance of gender (Butler, 1990) and what that means from their own cultural lens or standpoint. This also influences practices such as creating pseudonyms for participants, where pseudonyms chosen without participant discussion may not align with the gendered reflections that participants have of themselves.

Consider the intersectionality of gender with other identity facets. We have outlined in this chapter that gendered experiences do not exist in a vacuum but instead are influenced through other identities, including race (Zhang & Allen, 2019) and religion (Karaman & Christian, 2020), among others. This means there is a need for thinking through an intersectional lens and considering nuance and complexity in the ways that identities interact with one another.

Reflect on the purposeful inclusion of gender, rather than gender for gender's sake. We reflect that gender is often 'tacked on' to research as a key indicator of engaging with inequalities and difference. For instance, research with international students may include a breakdown of participants' gender or label a participant's gender alongside their data or quote without further engagement. However, this is a shallow engagement with gender as a social and cultural construct and does not reflect on how experiences are gendered. Therefore, researchers may wish to question why they have included information about gender in their research and how, in doing so, they are engaging with what gender means to the findings developed.

Example in practice

Article: S. Zhang and Xu (2020)
Article focus: This article reflects on the lived experiences of Chinese women at universities in the United Kingdom.
Article strengths: Building upon the theories of gender and distinction, this article investigates how newly acquired gendered disposition of the mind, cultural taste, and global identity during their mobility contributed to Chinese female international students' construction of distinction. The findings suggest that the way they perceive gender intersects with race and class, which helps to understand the women international students' experience as a complicated journey rather than a simple and homogeneous journey.

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13

FROM PRIVILEGE TO DIFFERENTIATION

International students' class reworkings

Ana Luisa Muñoz-García and Teya Yu

Introduction

While conducting research in our doctoral program, "advanced human capital, "global citizens," "flexible citizens," "globalisation in higher education," "brain gain, drain and circulation," were among the ubiquitous ideas circulating in our discussions. The sentiment that "the capital, social and cultural, you get studying (or living) abroad is immeasurable" was a notion we started to challenge as we began our research in international student/academic mobility. Although mainstream literature focused on using internationalisation as an instrument to prepare students to produce useful knowledge and generate scholars for a more global and highly interconnected world, we were complicating this focus on internationalisation, territoriality, knowledge, and higher education through the lens of class differences, decoloniality, feminism, and the critical analysis of power and neoliberal dynamics involved. Our discussions centred around how the reworking of social class in the experiences of international students moving across borders had been dismissed by the literature (Roberts, 2021).

Internationalisation has become a theme that concerns the privileged in the field of higher education. As stated by Kramer (2009), international students usually came from elite families and moved towards Western countries, specifically Europe and the United States, to pursue the domain of technical, political, and institutional frameworks for robust nation-states. As two women from working-class backgrounds who had experienced moving across borders for academic purposes, our experiences did not resemble the ones we read about in the books or in the data we collected with Chinese international students and/or Chilean academics. This pushed us to consider the intersection

of internationalisation with social class and problematised our positionality in our research.

In our work, we examined how social class is tensioned in the process of internationalisation. In the case of Ana Luisa's research with Chileans, the class privilege is removed while studying abroad, and in the case of Teya's research with Chinese students, internationalisation is used as a differentiation marker. Based on these two empirical studies on international students from China and Chile in the United States, we argue that reworking social class in the process of internationalisation allows us to understand the contemporary ways differentiation and privilege are both constructed and tensioned, which requires greater nuances in the ways social class is understood by people who research with international students and the ways social class is a key marker in the process of moving across borders. In short, we found that international students from different social class backgrounds followed different paths in moving across borders and had different aspirations. International students should not be studied as a fully homogeneous group belonging to just one social class but as diverse individuals in their experiences and motivations. Specifically, our chapter focuses on what we learned in writing and thinking on social class and internationalisation, and how our reflections can be useful for other researchers.

Critical considerations: working class into research with international student

Despite being largely omitted, international students' social class is a key issue in moving across borders that defines the experiences of international students abroad and the ways they are constructed in that process. Our understanding of social class is as a "practice of living" (Weis, 2008) which allows us to question the naturalised way people live and experience class. As Weis (2008) points out, "class is a fundamental organiser of social experience, both 'objective' and 'subjective', an organiser that has been largely eclipsed in scholarly literature over the past twenty-five years" (p. 3). For Weis, the experience and subjectivities of people cannot be read "off class" (Burns et al., 2004). The choices we make and the values that guide those choices are all shaped by class structures (hooks, 2000). Critical considerations in working on research with international students mean reflecting on three key areas: social class privilege and differentiation in relation to the socioeconomic context of the sending countries; the policies of internationalisation in both the sending and receiving countries that promote and regulate the experiences of international students; and the educational policies of the sending and receiving countries. Furthermore, it sometimes involves moving away from the literature on internationalisation to dig deeper into theoretical conversations that move in the margins of scholarly work.

Privilege in the conversation: Chilean students

In countries with high levels of educational inequalities, such as Chile and China, social class is a key issue in internationalisation. Chile ranks fourth on the list of countries with the highest levels of income inequality in Latin America (World Bank, 2018). For example, the richest 10% of the Chilean population earns on average 25 times more than the poorest 10%. In contrast, the average across OECD countries is about nine times. Chile ranks first in inequality within the OECD (2018). Following that inequality, educational opportunities in Chile have highly segregated education systems, in which the distribution of students across school types is determined by socioeconomic status. Students in private schools come from the two wealthiest income deciles; most students in subsidised schools are distributed across the middle-income deciles, and more than two-thirds of students in public schools come from the bottom half of the income distribution (Mizala & Torche, 2012). The type of high school attended is a critical predictor of the performance on the national admissions tests to universities which determines access to higher education and entrance to selective institutions (Canales, 2016). This directly impacts who has access to move abroad for further education opportunities and the type of experiences they get and articulate in the internationalisation process.

As such, social class privilege in Chile is a key issue for Chilean students to move and return (Muñoz-García & Chiappa, 2017; Muñoz-García, 2019). The study led by Ana Luisa on internationalisation was developed during a period when there was a strong initiative in Chile to create grants to pursue doctoral degrees abroad in order to foster Chile's competitiveness in the knowledge economy by improving its scientific, technological, and innovative capacity (CONICYT, 2008, 2014). The government created the Becas-Chile Fellowship Program to advance the country's stock of human capital because the number of doctorate holders was far below international standards (7.08 per million inhabitants) (Muñoz-García & Chiappa, 2017). Studies on this specific program have been conclusive in detailing the ways class (and privilege) has been a key factor in obtaining a doctoral scholarship to study abroad. Perez-Mejias et al. (2018) called this "privileging the privileged".

Historically, scholarships to study abroad have been directed to people proficient in a second language, usually English. To be eligible to apply for this scholarship, these students had to have already gained admission to a doctoral program. Embedded in this admission already implied second language proficiency and accumulation of the social capital to understand how to navigate the admission process. As a result, students from upper-class backgrounds scored higher in international and national exams on English as a second language (Barahona, 2016). This study found that most Chilean overseas students were from the upper class, highlighting how social class is denaturalised and deterritorialised abroad. Starkly put, these international students had never thought

about class issues and privilege in their home country; however, after travelling abroad, they felt they had lost their privilege of being recognised and treated as upper class. A key consideration here has been the denaturalisation of class (in this case, class privilege), which is counterbalanced with strategies of silence and class guilt to avoid a genuine conversation about privilege and the perpetuation of classism (Muñoz-García, 2021).

Consequently, deterritorialising social class suggests that the ways it is understood in one national context vary from other contexts (Muñoz-García, 2019). In this sense, working issues of privilege must move away from the mainstream literature of internationalisation. One alternative is using the literature of Whiteness, which gives empirical attention to the ways privilege works and allows scholars to understand the ways class silence and guilt are utilised to counterbalance further thinking on privilege and, with it, the justification of class differences and its perpetuation (Levine-Rasky, 2002).

Stratified differentiation from abroad: Chinese students

Income inequality in China ranks among the highest in the world, especially compared to countries with comparable or higher living standards (Xie et al., 2022). However, the higher education system in China is highly regulated through the college entrance exam. Poor students can gain access to top universities while wealthier and middle-class students may fail to gain access to a university that would be more likely to allow them to reproduce their position in the middle class. (Ciupak & Stich, 2012; Kipis, 2011). Furthermore, students from rural provinces, regardless of social class, do not have access to the same quality of education as their urban counterparts. Students from middle-class backgrounds can opt to attend private boarding schools if their performance on local exams excludes them from attending a top local high school. During each transition, middle-class students have more choices than poor rural students. At the tertiary level, studying abroad is often less about reaching the global elite but more about a possible route for social mobility or maintaining social class when other avenues are blocked due to the highly competitive national education exam system. From this analysis, an open question for research with international students is how countries with deep social and economic inequalities define not just who has access to internationalisation but also the experiences they have in the entire process of going abroad and (potentially) returning.

Internationalisation in education has been glamorised in China. It is a way for the cosmopolitan elite to circumnavigate the globe to obtain credentials that further secure their position (and the positions of their children) in the global elite (Waters, 2008; Fong, 2011). Specifically, it is a method of class differentiation. Most Chinese who go abroad are more middle class than elite Teya's study, coherent with previous studies, aimed to look more closely at

middle-class undergraduate Chinese students, their experiences in China, and their pathways to study in the United States. The data collected allowed an understanding of the ways Chinese students were acting in response to broader changes in both economic policy and social policies. From the 1980s, wealth in China increased due to Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening Up Policy and educational resources were concentrated due to the One Child Policy (Wu, 2008). People found ways to rise from poverty independent of their educational background. Indeed, students in the study saw the material conditions of their childhoods improve. They moved to bigger apartments, and their families bought their first cars. Beginning in the late 1990s, China's higher education system began a massification project to meet the growing demand for educational opportunities (Zhao, 2009; Xu, 2011). In the competitive exam-based system, only the top students in the top class at the top urban high schools can get into the top universities in China. Accordingly, students in this study could predict they would not access the top universities and decided that going abroad to differentiate themselves from their peers was a better alternative than attending a lower-ranked domestic university.

According to Teya's study, Chinese students' pathways to the United States were not planned or calculated in advance but rather a reaction to less desirable alternatives. Many had difficulty navigating the admissions process in the United States and needed help to navigate the application process with limited English; students often used agents to assist them in their applications. Students from the lower-ranked American university had offers to attend far more prestigious schools than they thought they would have been able to gain admission to had they not gone abroad. Students in the higher-ranked universities commented more on how the knowledge they were gaining was positioning them to pursue a graduate education that would give them highly competitive skills. They also noted that their experience in the United States showed them a different way of life than they would have experienced in China. They gained independence, self-sufficiency, problem-solving skills, and ways to think differently from their peers in China.

In sum, Teya's study showed that choices for students in China were governed by existing structures and policies; however, it was possible for students with both financial and social resources to have alternatives. Those alternatives, however, should not be understood as an easier or more direct route to the middle class. Like other research with international students, it is important to consider that students' backgrounds are not homogeneous (Waters & Leung, 2017). Students attending a joint institute between two prestigious universities are expected to get capital out of having attended both universities and are expected to go on to become world-class leaders. Students doing the joint degree program at a low-ranked institution saw going abroad as a way to be different from other students and as a way to have more opportunities.

The authors of this chapter have followed very different paths after their doctoral studies, which have been relevant to look back at and consider internationalisation issues. Ana Luisa has settled in her home country, working on issues of knowledge and internationalisation (Muñoz-Garcia, 2017, 2019), gender, feminism, and decolonialism (Muñoz-García et al., 2022). After the feminist movement in 2018 and the social and political uprising in 2019, questions about how research connects with social demands have been relevant in her latest works. Still, epistemological conversations from feminist standpoints and decolonial studies have become key for rethinking issues on internationalisation. Teya has settled in Michigan in the United States and works for the Global Institute of Lansing – a non-profit organisation created to help adult refugees obtain a high school diploma. In addition to high school tutoring for online classes, she teaches academic ESL to help bridge the gap between the employment-based English offered in the community and academic English needed for college success. Her work gives constant reminders to be grateful for being alive, that it is possible to be generous when you have few resources, and that acts of welcoming kindness abound. While working on this chapter, as the author re-reflected on the Chinese students in her study, she began to see the struggle as well as the privilege in the choices they made and that we are all facing much unpredictability, instability, and uncertainty about the future.

Reflection questions

Moving across borders offers a range of opportunities but generates complex, contradictory, and contested dilemmas. These contested dilemmas include not only knowledge, narratives, subjectivities and territories but also conversations about who is talking and writing on these issues.

- How is educational inequality created and maintained through governmental policies in international students' home countries?
- How are internationalisation policies related to educational policies in the context they are created?
- What policies make it possible for international students to go abroad? Who actually has access to go abroad?
- After removing a narrative about moving abroad for greater and deeper cultural understanding, what neoliberal motivations underlie the reasons for transnational mobility?
- After moving away from thinking about going abroad as simply a matter of choice, how is this choice embedded in the broader system of higher education, and what lies beneath the surface of a "decision" to go abroad?
- To what extent and in what ways do students' social class and other categories of differentiation impact their access to studying abroad, their

experiences in becoming mobile, their experiences while they are mobile, and in their return?

Suggestions for researchers

Expand the conversation beyond the international experience of who is moving for academic reasons. As we usually say, zoom out, and you can see the broader (usually structural) pictures of the focus of our research. Both authors explored class and internationalisation with a specific research exercise on working on the educational experience of international students from Chile and China. We started with an educational experience and ended up on social class, privilege, differentiation, and international conversations.

Recognize that what knowledge moves around us will define how we talk about internationalisation issues. These knowledges (in plural) are strongly tied to territories. As the authors were in movement across countries, our conversations and questions were changing based on those experiences. Beyond the scope of this paper, our conversations on Whiteness, the process of racialisation, and issues on coloniality in internationalisation have been part of the discussion (see also Chapters 9 and 18).

Acknowledge that it is never just about internationalisation – understood as a scholarly framework for thinking about research with international students. It is always internationalisation with broader but specific issues depending on the context and who you are as a scholar doing knowledge. Just keep an eye on "the zoom". A critical eye is a constant suggestion we have for someone focusing on this work.

Example in practice

Article: Martinez (2022)

Article focus: This article reflects on the experiences of Colombian international students in Chile

Article strengths: Inspired by feminist geographers, this article analyses the production of international students in Chile, how affective geopolitics influence Colombian doctoral students' trajectories, and how they live and resignify their bodies and nationality. The results indicate that, by presenting themselves as Colombians, students are associated with stigmatised Colombian bodies, which include the notions that they are sexually reified, Black, poor, and vulgar. At the same time, they try to dissolve those stereotypes using their privileged positions as high-skilled graduate students to detach from the great Colombian immigrant flow.

Acknowledgement

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SECTION 4

What concepts might be reconsidered?

14

CONCEPTUALISING TO TRANSCEND

Glocal imaginaries and international students

Kalyani Unkule

Introduction

The previous section of this volume focused on ways that narratives about international students can be made more nuanced and complex through considering intersectionalities. This section closely examines the conceptual underpinnings of the subfield to reveal assumptions – tacit or explicit – which are steeped in the deficit narratives previously discussed (Section 2). The chapters in this section show how the ways in which key concepts like "global", "language proficiency", "mobility" and "intercultural learning" have been operationalised in research with international students have not only restricted avenues of investigation in the subfield but also buttressed dominant ways of walking through and knowing about the world.

As the opening chapter of Section 4, which answers "What concepts might be reconsidered?", I take the opportunity here to step back and ponder our research practices, particularly with the aim of developing and revising concepts. Scholars from and/or based in the Global South, such as myself, enter the scene of research when the conceptual bottom lines either are set in stone or are specifically roped in to solidify textbook definitions by writing up our experiences as deviant data points. Therefore, in the first part of the chapter, I discuss how centering the dynamic interweavings between the global and the local might shift the purpose and possibilities of conceptualisation. Later on in the chapter, I explore how such reframing may be operationalised while engaging in research with international students.

One of the hierarchies reinforced by the current system of international higher education is that of institutional allegiance first to the "global", then to the "national" and lastly, if at all, to the "local". This chapter argues that

such a ranking of priorities stems from misconstruing the global and local as a binary and has contributed to the entrenchment of the deficit approach in thinking about international students (Chapter 7). The conflation of the Western disciplinary canon, and metropolitan ways of being with the ideal type of the global, places before international students a false choice between their origins, which are understood as local, and their aspirations, which are deemed global, as long as they reinforce such conflation. To break this entrenched pattern, local must not be conceptualised, as the very act has usually left it essentialised, particularised and relativised. Global must first be deconceptualised to account for readings which trouble its homogenising thrust and presumed inevitability. Thereafter, a promising step towards reducing the harm that stems from theorising as if standpoint does not matter is to discover the ways in which local and global are mutually constituted.

Pointing towards a post-hegemonic conceptualisation of the glocal which is rooted in genuine respect for other ways of knowing, I begin with a glossary of terms or the ABCD of an alternative vision. To disrupt inertia and infuse intentionality, I first address "D" which stands for de-centering and dialogue. Moves towards the local may entail erosion of the centrality and validity of hegemonic frames and practices, provided they are accompanied not just by dialogues on diversity, but rigorous dialogic diversity. The acknowledgement in much research with international students of diversity as a prominent feature of educational mobility has done little to clear the path of knowledge creation towards engagement with other lived experiences on their own terms (see also Chapter 18). "C" for continuum recasts the global and local as evolving, interactive entities, reflective of each other, best captured by the dynamic of char-achar (the Indic principle of variable constant, implying the outer world as mirroring the inner). We may even picture the global-local polarities as a yin-yang tension wherein, "one polarity already includes the other one" and desired transformations otherwise inconceivable in a zero-sum calculus, "are within the realm of possibility" (Coll, 2022, p. 60). "C" also denotes the Commons or Common Treasure that cultural diversity represents, rather than a problem of containment, as much research with international students has thus far assumed (see also Chapters 17 and 19). "B" reminds us of the Borderlands which offer singular insight into how mainstream knowledge creation is complicit in manufacturing rootlessness and which rephrase the cosmopolitan in terms of the dialectic between becoming and belonging. "A" for Adaptive Muddling draws out the genius in the local and, through its very groundedness, sharply qualifies the sophistry of claims of top-down, monopolistic innovation. Adaptive Muddling permits us to dream of a praxis which replenishes the knowledge commons, breaking through the constraints of "ideal-type" and "best practice" with their operative modality of tech-transfer. "A" for Ananta (that which has no limits) brings us back to the point of one-ness so that we may build transcendence into our concepts and our application of

them. Thus, a cosmology which recognises global and local as co-constitutive opens a new pathway for inhabiting relational ontologies and infusing internationalisation practices with an ethic of responsibility.

An epistemic framework derived from these influences allows us to conceptualise not against incoherence and meaningless-ness but alongside them. Deconceptualising global is a necessary step for the very exercise of conceptualisation to confront its limits and face the music of unspoken assumptions and unintended consequences (see Section 2 for examples of such assumptions). As I have noted elsewhere, "What is envisaged is a thriving pluriversal knowledge commons which will displace hegemonic claims of universality as the gold standard" (Unkule, 2021, p. 261). In her feminist critique of modernity's influence over Korean culture, Cho Han Hae-Joang (2000) conveys this aspiration in words that need no paraphrasing:

> As an academic, I/we must stop thinking within established categories. I/we should view existing scholarly concepts with scepticism, overthrow the language I/we have been using, and change the boundaries of modern academia itself. The time has come for us to choose reality over the image and induction over deduction.
>
> *(p. 67)*

By bucking the methodological nationalism (where the nation-state is the primary unit for analysis, conceptualisation and policy-making) embedded in disciplines, global studies attest that "globals can be partial" yet, "always fashioned and explored within regimes of value and hierarchies of power across multiple scales" (Kahn, 2014, p. 7). The epistemic bandwidth thus afforded by naming the encompassing and shape-shifting features of the global adds to the range of levels of analysis perceptible within the international higher education landscape. But for those seeking to tap into lessons from an ongoing conversation between said levels, such recognising and naming can only be a point of departure – lest it merely replaces methodological nationalism and its accessories, statism and coloniality, as the dominant frame, conspiring to silence all others.

Critical considerations

The identification of global with "Western modernity writ large" has a healthy dose of ontological amnesia built into it. In practice, such conflation has bolstered systemic coloniality which normalises the enrichment of one part of the world while imposing costs on another – in sheer disregard of natural laws of interconnectedness – costs in the form of cognitive injustice, brain drain, and dumping of waste. Yet the more subtle re-orientation it orchestrates to a worldview wherein time is the new space equally demands attention. Explaining why place became unfashionable in social science, McKenzie and Tuck

(2015, pp. 7–8) observe that "globalization as represented by big-box chain stores that dot the landscape of otherwise very different places, makes it seem that place matters far less than it used to matter". Mobile populations such as international students are, on one hand, perceived as instrumental in eroding the significance of place. On the other hand, their directions of travel have in effect cemented the metropolitan centrality of certain countries and education systems, demonstrating how greater interconnectedness magnifies the importance of place rather than diminishing it.

To divest knowledge creation from the venture of colonial futurity, Paperson (2014) introduces storied land as a transhistorical analytical framework and a method that is both temporal and spatial. Storied land attempts to get our current associations with a particular place unstuck from the dominant narrative of the present, to rise above considerations of proprietorship and cartography and to relocate place meanings in a temporally dynamic frame. For our purposes, the paradigm of storied place permits us to localise all, break the hierarchical global/local dichotomy and capture each "local" as an equally valid manifestation of the global, rather than as an aberration in need of alignment with the norm.

As elaborated by McKenzie and Tuck (2015), Critical Place Inquiry could help us address the deficit view of international students in various ways: First, because it "entails, at a more localized level, understanding places as both influencing social practices as well as being performed and (re)shaped through practices and movements of individuals and collectives" (p. 19), it shifts our perspective on international students from knowable objects to agentic subjects in research. Second, thanks to a recognition that "disparate realities determine not only how place is experienced but also how it is understood and practiced in turn" (p. 19), we are able to contend with mobility as a phenomenon marked by diverse conditions and motivations, even among seemingly monolithic populations (see Chapter 15). Third, we are confronted with the ethics of mobility which, in a paradigm of neoliberal globalisation, has been assumed as inevitable and not subject to any eco-planetary constraint yet is constantly at odds with the presumed sanctity of the geographical and cultural boundaries that buttress the legitimacy of nation-states. A corresponding imagination in higher education research whereby international students' mobility is constructed as movement between national educational systems, rather than movement within an increasingly homogeneous global educational sector mirrors these logics of transnational capital.

Once place is put back into focus, we may fully specify how the global impinges upon the local. However, this would necessitate moving away from conventional ethnographic beliefs in sites being distinct, self-contained, sui generis. Bollig et al. (2015, p. 17) acknowledge the impetus provided by educational ethnography towards critiquing and revising the "implicit localism of the field concept" long assumed in methodology. Such a revision may inspire, for instance, inquiries about how all students world-travel in conversation with

each other's experiences irrespective of where the classroom is situated. To open up our sites to possible outside influence is to countenance the unique-ness of the local, not in opposition to, but in interplay with, the global. Piec-ing together and connecting these iterations of the global across time and space – as a sort of multi-scalar, multi-sited ethnography (see Kenway, 2016) – would then feed back into our understanding of how processes of globalisa-tion are themselves altered via their encounters with contextual multiplicity. Thus, evading the global-local binary also subverts the circularity of the "West versus the Rest" conundrum confronting postcolonialism. Chen (2010) views this dance with a singular narrative of modernity masquerading as global, as in fact yielding multiple modernities, further noting:

> The local formation of modernity carries important elements of the West but it is not fully enveloped by it. Once recognizing the West as fragments internal to the local, we no longer consider it as an opposing entity but rather as one cultural resource among many others. Such a position avoids either a resentful or a triumphalist relation with the West because it is not bound by an obsessive antagonism.
>
> *(p. 223)*

Making the local a focal point of our study need not mean fragmentation into particulars ad infinitum. To recognise the dialectic between the local and the global is to step back from theorisation severed from practice. When con-fronted with "the 'choice' of being either oppressed or oppressor, exploited or exploiter, dominating or dominated, predator or victim" (Paranjape, 1991), it means instinctively, tentatively, opting to occupy the space in between. As for the enterprise of conceptualisation, such non-dualism precludes a com-mitment to generalisation/universalisation and spatiotemporal ossification, in other words, the concerns of validity and generalisability hard-wired through the training of researchers. Mindful engagement with levels of analysis presages rigorous alignment with the relational ethics of research by explicitly confront-ing the question: whose interests does the knowledge we are creating serve?

Reflection questions

- How are you defining the relationship between "global" or "local" in your research? What does that definition assume?
- How does doing research with international students enable you to embrace marginality as a standpoint for conceptualising and theorising?
- What does operating on the mutually constituted local-global continuum mean for the ability of concepts to travel?
- To what extent does the continuum relieve the burden of universalistic pretensions of knowledge creation via theorising?

Marginality is envisaged here not as a disadvantage or a steady state of oppression but as a manifestation of the nimble-footed beginner's mind attitude, or, for the more pragmatically geared, a disavowal of the saturated mainstream. Put differently, how do we make seeking out borderland spaces from where convention is destabilised and agency is democratised as an integral, albeit subversive, part of our research endeavour? In positing that "the position of a 'stranger' becomes a potential competitive advantage to generate new knowledge capital" Kim (2017, p. 986) hints at how liminality could spark creativity. The unique insight that stems from being "Other" in both home and host societies affirms the centrality of reflexivity – a reflexivity heightened by an emerging consciousness of translocal identity formation in the case of international students. Here, the local-global continuum helpfully reminds us that such fledgling identities should not be assumed as levelling inherent disparities or entirely novel constructs which allow absolute transcendence of situatedness but rather as an arena for challenging well-worn scripts from a vantage of not belonging.

International students' experiences frame the phenomenon of belonging and connectedness to place in ways that elude the off-the-shelf primordial or liberal-citizenship or cosmopolitan-nomad templates. Through their exploration of how international students' ways of relating to place dynamise the frames of "here" and "there", Hasnain and Hajek (2022) arrive at the notion of "translocal connectedness". Based on their review of the Erasmus study abroad framework which they describe as "primarily a group experience of being foreign", Viol and Klasen (2021, p. 25) argue that the experience of place itself can be significantly mediated by the strength of friendships formed there – upending routine assumptions about 'culture shock'. Such definitional non-conformity is not only methodologically transformative but also potentially confounds orthodox governmentalities and policy interventions.

Suggestions for researchers

Scholars with affiliations to a range of disciplines including sociology, anthropology, international studies, cultural geography and global studies have rich contributions to make to research with and about international students. Rectifying the deficit narratives discussed in previous chapters demands tactically orchestrating disciplinary disorder and systematically confronting the question: to whom are we as researchers accountable? Put differently, we would be called on to ponder over what kind of epistemic community we wish to build through our research practices. Sun Ge's (2001, p. 270) advice accounts for the global, the local, and everything in between when he urges that "what a trans-cultural 'intellectual community' provides is not the space of dialogue for intellectuals of two or more cultures but instead the space within which these intellectuals can constructively reconfigure themselves". In this spirit, we should prepare ourselves for the scrutiny of our own research motivations,

practices and outputs, which ceasing to project hegemonic narratives onto our research subjects will ultimately portend.

Finally, as scholar practitioners, we may find the courage to renounce the allure of the myth and set off in pursuit of the parable. According to Bartzel (2022), the myth "holds the power to reconcile forces that at first seemed irreconcilable, while parable does the opposite . . . parable creates irreconciliation where before there was reconciliation". In our quest for enduring myths, much critical research about and with international students has been preoccupied with minimising difference, managing diversity, mitigating hybridity and maintaining continuity with neo-colonial regimes of knowledge creation and resource (including demographic) extraction. Forthcoming chapters in this section elucidate these very themes. To conclude, it is when we challenge the inevitability and give voice to inherent inconsistencies, inadequacy and irreconcilability of this prevailing paradigm – its methodological complicity, its epistemological conceit, its ontological disconnect and its cosmo-axiological vacuity – that we will have instead harnessed the power of the parable to express the timeless through the situated.

To summarise the suggestions emanating from this discussion:

- Examine the role that disciplinary and research training play in the kinds of questions we choose for research
- When reviewing literature be attentive to implicit/explicit assumptions underlying themes of enquiry, definition of concepts and scope and level of analysis
- Operationalise "global" on a case-by-case basis with due consideration to how it influences and is influenced by other levels (local, sub-national, national, regional etc.)
- Unpack static present-day associations with place/site of study to better account for their histories and spotlight their positionality vis-a-vis other places

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Example in practice

Article: Rutazibwa (2020)
Article focus: Interrogating disciplinary orthodoxy in the field of international relations
Article strengths: This work brings together recently published work, disciplinary socialisation practices and enactments by individual researchers in a particular discipline (international relations, in this case) to reveal the multi-level shifts triggered when we begin to question our knowledge creation practices.

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15

CONCEPTUALISING 'MOBILITIES' IN RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Jihyun Lee and Johanna Waters

Introduction

The concept of 'mobilities' has, over the past two decades, played a foundational role within research with international students and the internationalisation of higher education, as outlined in the preceding chapters. Indeed, the movement of students across national borders has become widely known as international student mobilities (or ISM). The focus on mobilities stems, in part, from the influence of the so-called mobilities turn or new mobilities paradigm within the social sciences, attributed to the work of sociologists Sheller and Urry (2006). In short, this paradigm shift has highlighted the importance of mobilities (at different scales and for differing durations) for understanding society (as opposed, as had been previously assumed, to viewing mobility as a 'means to an end' or an 'aberration', with stasis being the 'desirable' and 'normal' state of things). In this literature, the notion of mobilities has been predominantly understood as a means to achieve capital accumulation and reproduce social advantage across national borders (Chapter 13). Central to this discussion are the experiences of individual students, with those studying for foreign academic qualifications at home largely assumed to be devoid of cultural and social capital whereas their internationally mobile counterparts are replete with it (Lee & Waters, 2022). By drawing inspiration from a range of disciplines that demonstrate a long-standing intellectual interest in embodied movement through human migration (migration studies, human geography and sociology), we aim to move beyond the narratives of individual distinction and social reproduction and suggest alternative ways of exploring 'mobilities'.

Critical considerations

Infrastructure and mobilities

Whilst previous research underlines the importance of different actors involved in educational migration, much less attention has been paid to the way in which these actors work as part of networks to shape international student flows. Scholars have indicated that international students' decisions are often influenced by networks of individuals who have studied abroad themselves or advocate doing so (Beech, 2015). These interpersonal networks are often embedded in, and specific to, different places or locales across national borders. For example, Waters (2006) has contended that the cross-border mobility of Hong Kong students in Canada is closely intertwined with a transnational network of students in Vancouver and graduates and employers in Hong Kong. Likewise, Collins (2008) has drawn attention to various types of transnational ethnic business activities that facilitate the movement of students between South Korea and Auckland. Although relatively sidelined in the extant literature, the 'supply side' of international education – that is, the interests of those who supply and market higher education opportunities within the global economy – also plays a significant role in shaping international student mobility (Findlay, 2011). The influence of various institutions has been explored in relation to education agents (Thieme, 2017), universities (Sidhu, 2006) and government institutions and policies (Geddie, 2015).

The growth of scholarship on migration infrastructures can provide important new knowledge about how international student mobility is produced. Migration infrastructures are defined as 'the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility' (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p. 124). For instance, Collins's (2012) study of South Korean international students in Auckland provides an account of how education agents connect the economic interests of education providers and the government with the educational demands and desires of students and their families. The complex interplay of international students and their parents, education agents and host institutions in mediating international student mobility has also been analysed by Yang (2018). He unpacks how the mobility of Indian English-medium medical degree students to a provincial university in China is produced by a 'compromise' made by students and their parents (in terms of decision-making) and the case institution (with respect to admission screening and educational quality) as well as 'complicity' between these different actors in this unlikely mobility project, despite its multiple inherent tensions and discrepancies. Similarly, Raghuram and Sondhi (2022) demonstrate the entanglement of migration, education and finance infrastructures in the flow of international students into the United Kingdom during the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that 'finance, education, mobilities and health have to routinely align for international student migration to become

successful' (p. 182). The perspectives of infrastructures can, therefore, offer a layered understanding of international student mobility and the constitutive nature of infrastructures to the cross-border movement of students.

Multi-scalar, multi-site mobilities

The proliferation of scales and sites[1] – across and within which student mobilities are manifested – has been notable within recent scholarship. Mobilities often create scales (e.g., national, local) while helping to deconstruct them (Massey, 2005): students are seen to engage with 'the state', for example, both at the border and far more locally. Moskal (2017) adopts a 'multi-scalar approach' to international student mobilities, arguing that students' 'individual projects' intersect closely with 'state policies' (see also Yang, 2016). If we acknowledge the presence of different scales within ISM research, however, it is also worth reflecting on how scales (such as the global, international, regional, city, campus and home) are invoked and operationalised (Cheng et al., in press). Many of these scales, of course, are also 'sites' within which students experience and make sense of their mobilities (Spangler, 2022). We touch briefly on the construction of these different scales within recent research on ISM.

The global (or 'world') dimension of ISM is often invoked with little critical awareness of what this can and should mean (Chapter 14). It implies, of course, the incorporation of multiple regions, countries and jurisdictions. However, *what it means* for a student/graduate to be globally mobile remains opaque: few studies have addressed this. Findlay et al. (2012) appeal to the notion of 'World Class' when discussing the contemporary mobilities of international students (from the United Kingdom). Their discussion of the world relies, in part, on similar discourses suggesting the existence of so-called global skills and the existence of a 'global labour market'. It is attached to the assumption that students/graduates are largely untethered by national affiliation but have the skills and qualifications to move and work 'anywhere' (Liu-Farrer & Shire, 2021). Global, in this sense, is used as a proxy for placelessness. Findlay et al. (2012) also acknowledge that the ability of some higher education institutions to attain 'global distinction' is in part related to the expansion of 'world rankings' or league tables, which have been so influential in spreading the message that higher education is global in nature (Tan & Goh, 2014). Yet, as noted by Olds and Robertson (2012) in their critique of world university rankings, very few universities are in fact included in these rankings and 'the world', as we imagine it, is not represented.

Related to this, Brooks and Waters (2022) consider the circumscribed or 'partial' spaces invoked by the use of 'the international' within the literature on international student mobilities, arguing that 'the international' in this context represents many things, including spatial hierarchies and social exclusions (see also Lee, 2022). An understanding of the *regional* dimension of ISM has also been increasingly drawn out within recent scholarship, particularly in relation

to East and Southeast Asia – an emergent region when it comes to international student mobilities. Sidhu et al. (2020) chart regional-level attempts to attract and retain international students/graduates and to bolster countries within Asia as increasingly attractive *destinations* for international students. Cities also have emerged as important spaces/scales and sites within which ISM is manifest. For many years, cities were conceived as a backdrop to student mobilities or as student 'destinations'. More recently, scholars have come to appreciate the active role that cities can play in ISM, in both stimulating and directing mobilities (Beech, 2014) and in the way that students' mobilities transform city-scapes (Smith & Holt, 2007). And finally, the home has been, until very recently, notably neglected within discussions of ISM. This has been appraised by Spangler (2022), who has explored how various spaces (national, familiar, everyday, domestic) are entangled in students' production of geographies and identities of 'home'. 'Home' shifts here from fixed and stable, seen as a rigid entity, to something which is more an 'ongoing process' of homemaking (p. 3). Home and students' mobilities exist not as separate entities but as co-constituted and 'intertwined' (ibid.).

In terms of the practice of doing research with international students, these observations have a number of implications. One, researchers need to be cognisant of the fact that although largely fictitious, students themselves may hold onto these ideas about global labour markets, global skills, world-class universities and so on. They may use university rankings when choosing where to study. So, these discourses have real power. Second, researchers should also be aware that the reality of students' experiences as learners may not live up to these aforementioned expectations, resulting in a mismatch between students' expectations, experiences and outcomes.

Temporalities and mobilities

Policy and existing research have tended to neglect the temporal dimensions of ISM, that is, the way time is lived, experienced and (re)constructed by internationally mobile students. As evidenced in international student policies in major study destination countries, there is a presumption that international students are free agents who are able to respond to easing work or residence permits in line with their career and lifestyle preferences (Geddie, 2013, 2015). The standardised reading of time is also evident in existing empirical work that largely focuses on those in a particular stage of life (i.e., young adulthood) and with sufficient economic resources (Chapter 13; Findlay et al., 2012). The framing of international students as young and privileged in both policy accounts and academic literature gives rise to a view that individual students can actively organise their present mobilities to achieve particular futures. Not only are theoretical or empirical questions about time largely absent from these discussions, but time and mobility are often seen as contained in space with little attention given to unexpected encounters or connections with new places and people that international education entails (Collins & Shubin,

2017). Moreover, the diversification of international student bodies within and beyond traditional receiving countries and, hence, heterogeneous international student experiences suggest a need to pay closer attention to the temporal complexity of international student mobilities.

We consider a number of ways in which research on student migration can productively engage time or temporalities. First, life course perspectives offer a more nuanced account of international student mobility. In her research on study-to-work transitions of Chinese international students in UK universities, time is conceptualised by Xu (2020) as both a form of coveted cultural capital and an underlying mechanism that constitutes students' habitus. She argues that her research participants employ different temporal strategies (i.e., 'deferred gratification' and 'temporal destructuring'), which vary by familial class backgrounds and students' places of origin. The linear and compartmentalised accounts of time in international student mobility are also challenged by Lee (2021), who demonstrates the role of higher education institutions in shaping the way in which international students imagine and experience post-study aspirations and transitions. However, she contends that the institutional effects are mediated – if not limited – by individuals' social characteristics. Moreover, temporal perspectives render visible the precarity of international students across different national contexts, which is often affected by macro-level or institutional temporal discourses such as changing migration policy and (temporary) visa status (Chacko, 2020). Furthermore, by situating their future mobility aspirations alongside the past and present dimensions of time, Lee (2022) has illustrated that the perceived value of a UK university degree is linked to the country's colonial legacy. We suggest that foregrounding 'temporality' allows us to think differently – and productively – about the connections between international students and their mobilities.

Politics and ethics of mobilities

Student mobilities are both political and ethical in nature and, of course, politics and ethics are closely intertwined within debates on the international aspects of higher education (Chapter 21). Furthermore, we argue there is an imperative for scholars working on student mobilities to be aware of and to draw out these aspects – for too long ISM has been depoliticised and focused on economics. The political dimension of student mobilities has been most obviously expressed in relation to visa and immigration laws, rules and policies. There are competing international policies when it comes to the recruitment and retention of international students (Lomer, 2017; Ziguras & Law, 2006). International students can also be involved in politics in relation to 'diaspora' – states can covet their outgoing international students, encouraging them to return, whereas students can decide to engage with (or indeed shun) their 'home countries' (Brooks & Waters, 2021). Interestingly, international students are often not considered political actors because they are frequently

disenfranchised within their places of study, and yet they do (in different ways) partake in various forms of politics, which brings us to the question of ethics.

For many years, international students were not considered important – by policymakers, institutions or academics. In many ways, international students continue to have their voices silenced: they are often subjected to racism, discrimination, disrespect or neglect (Chapter 9). Madge et al. (2009) were some of the first scholars to address, head-on, the ways in which international students are perceived largely as sources of income within UK universities and yet teaching practices continue to, at best, ignore them and, at worst, marginalise them and their experiences. Tannock (2018) has also been forceful in his critique of the (absence of) ethics in discussions of ISM from an institutional perspective. Similarly, Lomer (2018) has exposed what she calls the subjectification of international students within UK higher education. The (un)ethical treatment of international students in relation to their (im)mobilities can also be seen in work on transnational higher education (Waters & Leung, 2017) and more recently, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where some international students were neglected to the point of destitution (Waters, 2020). Finally, in an article on the ethics and politics of international student mobilities, Yang (2019) proposes a 'framework for rethinking' these issues in the context of two broad conceptual ideas: neoliberalism and post-colonialism. The neoliberal university, described as a profit-maximising entity, will inevitably put the extraction of student fees above any notion of educational equality and fairness (Tannock, 2018). Likewise, postcolonial relations underpinning the presence of many international students within the contemporary university classroom *should* (but invariably do not) lead to a form of 'engaged pedagogy', wherein these unequal power relations (i.e., politics) are exposed through teaching and learning practices (Madge et al., 2009). Students' mobilities, therefore, are increasingly provoking bigger questions to be posed and answered, about the ethics of international higher education and the extent to which this is a political issue (Waters, 2018). These are not just practical questions, of course, but also intellectual ones about how we conceptualise ISM: the relational nature of international student mobilities, for example, and the spaces of (inequalities within) international higher education.

Reflection questions

- How is the notion of 'mobilities' being defined and conceptualised in my research?
- How important are infrastructures to an understanding of student mobilities?
- To what extent is research with international students' mobilities involved in the construction of different scales and the extrapolation of different sites?

- How are researchers approaching the concept of temporalities and how does it intersect with student mobilities?
- How can researchers conceptualise international student mobility to explore the key ethical and political issues underpinning international education?

Practical suggestions for researchers

- Consider how international student mobility is embedded in a complex assemblage of actors and networks. It is important to think about which actors and networks your research will focus on as well as how you are going to examine this.
- Consider how students negotiate *international* mobility (and the crossing of borders) whilst also at the same time dealing with *localised* rules and policies. This requires a research design that goes beyond exploring the experiences of international students to include different sources of data such as national and/or institutional policies.
- Consider how linear and compartmentalised accounts of time can be challenged through the mobilities of international students. Whilst acknowledging the temporal complexity of international student mobility can be a positive thing (in terms of providing a more nuanced picture), be aware of its policy implications which incline towards the generalised explanations of international students' experiences.
- Consider it an ethical responsibility to highlight where international students face discrimination, negative stereotyping and so on, whilst at the same time acknowledging the politics this evokes. A detailed analysis of the relationships between key actors involved in international education can make visible some of the ethical and political issues arising from international student mobility.

Example in practice

Article: Lee and Waters (2022)

Article focus: This article reflects on how mobility is differentially experienced by those studying for a British higher education degree in two different locations (one in the United Kingdom and the other in Hong Kong).

Article strengths: This article draws on the concepts of mobilities and materialities in education to highlight how the experience of two ostensibly very distinct student groups may not only differ but also converge. This perspective helps to illuminate the importance of materialities in students' educational encounters in their experiences and associated outcomes, challenging the emphasis placed by extant literature on mobilities in understanding the meaning and value of international education.

Note

1 Our use of 'scales' and 'sites' here draws heavily on conceptualisations used by human geographers. Scale refers to the socially constructed way in which the world is divided up into different territories of different sizes. A classic example of this might be the 'global','international', 'regional' (sub-national) and 'local' (referring to ones' immediate surroundings) scales. The term 'sites' refers to places within which certain activities could be said to take place, such as a bedroom, school building, classroom or canteen.

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16

RE-CONCEPTUALISING MULTIPLE AND MULTI-DIMENSIONAL TRANSITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

Divya Jindal-Snape

Introduction

This chapter focuses on research related to international students' transitions as existing research is beset with serious limitations. For instance, transitions research regarding international students conceptualises their transitions as primarily linear and uni-dimensional. The linearity and stage-based conceptualisations of transitions prevalent in the literature, such as an assumption that *all* international students sequentially go through four phases of honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment, have been challenged (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016). This linearity is likely to be due to researchers seeing international students as a homogeneous group (Section 2; Hellstén, 2007; Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016) and not undertaking longitudinal studies with very little unpacking of unique transitions of individuals and the interaction of these transitions with those of significant others, for example, family members, peers and communities that they inhabit in home and host nations (Jindal-Snape, 2016). Without a holistic understanding of the complexity, dynamic, multiple and multi-dimensional nature of transitions, we are operating in silos and unable to see the complete picture. Any research that is based on such narrow conceptualisations runs the risk of the data not being robust enough to inform future research, policy or practice.

Most transitions research, including those involving international students, uses a negative discourse (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021; Chapter 7). It considers international students' transitions using a deficit model that conceptualises international students as vulnerable and passive with no agency or self-determination (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016). This is highly problematic, especially as this is based on previous research about international migrants

who were not students (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Zhou et al., 2008) and viewed their adaptation in a uni-directional manner without considering that transitions are better understood as mutual adaptation involving international students, their host/home communities and universities. These aspects will be considered in the following sections with a discussion of how research should be developed differently.

Critical considerations

Conceptualisation of transitions

As noted with transitions literature elsewhere (Jindal-Snape, 2023; Jindal-Snape et al., 2021) and in higher education research (O'Donnell et al., 2016), few studies define and/or theorise what the authors mean by 'transitions'. It is even rarer to find any transitions literature that considers what transitions mean to the research participants. This is problematic as there is evidence in the literature of a lack of shared understanding of what transitions mean (Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019; see also Ecclestone et al., 2010 for various conceptualisations). If the key terms of a study are not clearly defined or operationalised, it casts doubt on its robustness as it is possible that there is a mismatch in the conceptualisation of the researcher/author, participants and readers. Further, it has important implications for research designs, study findings and their interpretation, and implications for future research, policy and practice. Therefore, it is important that transitions researchers review different conceptualisations of transitions; decide and clearly express how it is operationalised in their study; and collect data about different participants' conceptualisations.

I define transitions (in plural, see later) as an ongoing process of psychological, social, cultural, spatial and educational adaptations due to changes in contexts (e.g., home, work), interpersonal relationships (e.g., with staff, family) and/or (multiple) identities (e.g., university student, parent, professional; see also Tobbell et al., 2010 and Section 3). These transitions can be simultaneously exciting and worrying for an individual and others in their lives and can require ongoing support (Jindal-Snape, 2016, 2018, 2023). It is important to point out here that I conceptualise transitions not as 'change' but as 'adaptation' to that change. Further, when people suggest that international students did not experience transitions as they did not move to the host country due to the pandemic, it is important to note that the normative or expected change not happening in itself would necessitate adaptation to that change in their expectations and reality, along with some other transitions that might be triggered from potential changes in perceived identities, for example, becoming a distance learner. To be able to understand these transitions fully, I will consider my Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions (MMT) theory next.

Conceptualising multiple and multi-dimensional transitions

Research suggests that every individual experiences multiple transitions simultaneously. In the case of international students, these can be triggered due to changes related to experiences of being in a new country, new national and organisational culture, different educational system, leaving (or bringing) family and friends, forming new relationships, differences in pedagogical/andragogical approaches, etc. (Jindal-Snape & Ingram, 2013; Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Zhou et al., 2008). Therefore, they will experience ongoing multiple educational and life transitions at the same time. Some of these are likely to be positive, whereas others might be negative, or both, at the same time; most importantly the transitions experiences will change over time. Previous research tends to focus on one type of educational transition (e.g., adapting to different language or academic skills; O'Donnell et al., 2016) rather than considering the multiple educational *and* life transitions an international student might experience. Further, as the questions asked by researchers focus on a particular transition, international students might not have the opportunity to reflect on, or talk about, other transitions that might be more significant to them, especially at that time. This provides a fragmented picture of what are complex multiple transitions; it is not possible to see how multiple transitions might be interacting and how they might support (or not) the individual when some transitions are going well and others are problematic. For example, an international student could be experiencing a negative educational transition alongside positive social and relationship transitions. Jindal-Snape and Ingram (2013) suggest that, if stronger, these positive transitions experiences can act as a buffer for the negative experiences, and vice versa.

Similarly, international students are not the only ones experiencing transitions. Their transitions will trigger transitions of significant others, such as their family, friends, staff, and/or community members. Consider the case of a British student moving to Japan with their spouse and children. The international student will experience multiple transitions, but their transitions will have a domino effect on their family's transitions too. The spouse might have been a professional in their home country, but became a dependent in Japan, and will have to navigate everyday life in a language and culture they might not be familiar with or prepared for, leading to multiple transitions. Similarly, the children might have transitions due to a change in school system, pedagogical approach, language and cultural expectations of a child. It is also important to consider the transitions significant others, such as family, friends and, in the case of professionals, coworkers in the home country, might experience (see Figure 16.1). The academics, peers and the university and local communities in the host nation will also experience transitions related to the international student's transitions. For instance, academics might experience professional transitions as they change their andragogical approaches,
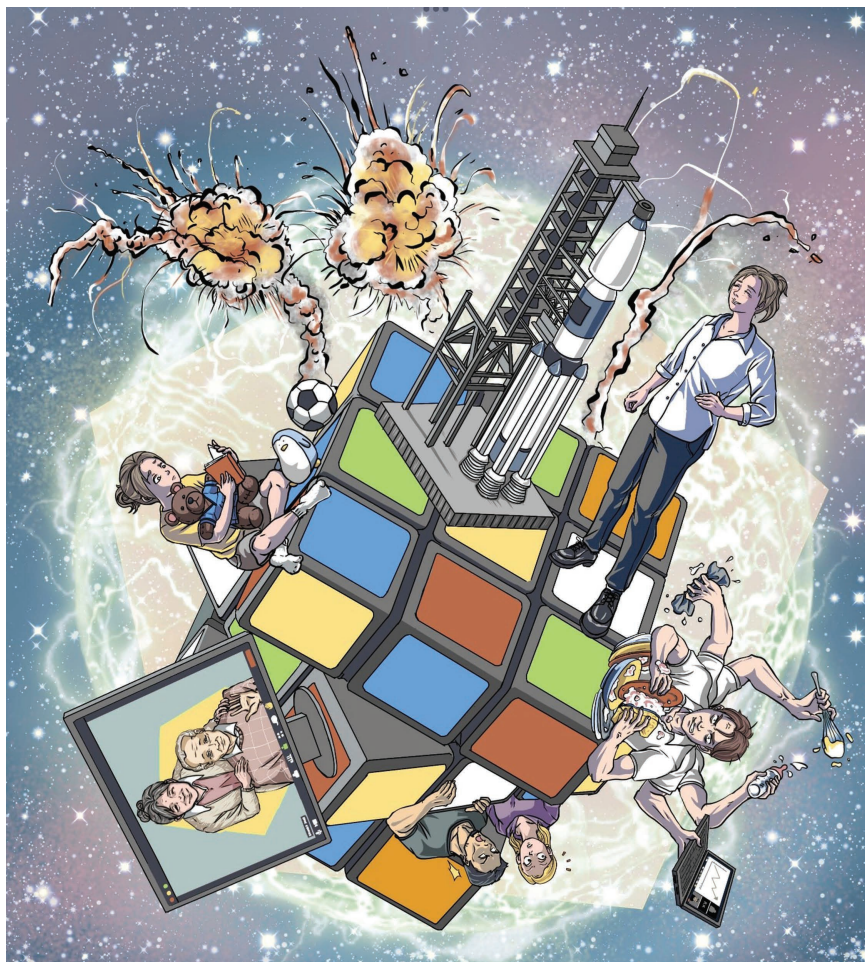
FIGURE 16.1 Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions Theory.

Source: Copyright Divya Jindal-Snape; Art Clio Ding; Rubik's Cube® used by permission of Rubik's Brand Ltd. www.rubiks.com

curriculum and assessment (Zhou et al., 2008). Further, these transitions, and any other unrelated transitions, of significant others will trigger transitions for the international student.

Therefore, Jindal-Snape's (2016) Multiple and Multi-dimensional Transitions (MMT) theory proposes that each individual experiences concurrent multiple transitions and that their transitions can trigger transitions for significant others, highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of transitions. Conversely, significant others will be experiencing their own transitions and these transitions will trigger and/or have an impact on that individual's transitions. These transitions are dynamic and are not taking place in a vacuum but in

an environment that is constantly changing. The environment, for instance, might change due to visa regulations, pandemic, local- and national-level policies and the positive or negative narratives in the media about international students and other migrants. The dynamic environment will not only trigger transitions, it might also determine whether the transitions are positive or negative as well as whether the environment will facilitate or hinder their transitions. International students will have multiple types of transitions in every context they are situated in every day, and this will change over time.

To understand MMT better, it can be visualised using Rubik's cube as a metaphor (see Figure 16.1). If each individual and significant others in their ecosystem are seen as one colour in a Rubik's cube, we can visualise six individuals and their significant others as well as their mutual interactions. As with a Rubik's cube, when one slight change on one side/colour leads to changes for other sides/colours, one person's transitions would lead to transitions for all those in the connected ecosystems. Figure 16.1 shows the ecosystem of an international student (female on the right), with resultant transitions of their significant others, such as the spouse taking on multiple roles and identities (e.g., that of a professional, main parent, homemaker) and their parents' transitions being triggered due to the distance and limited time to converse online with them due to the student's multiple transitions.

It is important to also be mindful that the international student will not be at the centre of each ecosystem we consider them to occupy; their advisor of studies is likely to be at the centre of another ecosystem (and connected to multiple ecosystems on the fringes) which will imply that the ripple effect will be felt across multiple connected ecosystems.

Therefore, instead of international students' transitions being uni-dimensional, they are multi-dimensional and need to be considered as such in any research that is undertaken. Further, it is important that researchers are mindful of the ever-changing home and host contexts and environments, rather than considering them to be fixed for every international student who is from a particular country or going to a particular country.

Discourse

Most of the transitions research literature, irrespective of the type of transitions and who is experiencing it, portrays it as a negative experience which is disruptive and stressful (Jindal-Snape et al., 2021; Chapter 7). This is also the case with the research literature about international students' transitions despite an acknowledgement that international students are able to study their chosen discipline in the university of their choice, and develop their social and academic skills. Further, in most cases, the international student status is a marker of having been successful in getting prestigious and competitive scholarships (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). Therefore, a negative discourse is problematic, and it might feed into negative stereotypes of their transitions. This

aligns with Richardson and Sun's (2016) argument that the prevalent stereotypes of international students (whether related to academic, ethnic or national culture) can cause barriers to mutual adaptation (see also Chapter 4). Also, it most likely does not take into account the multiple transitions and different experiences of every international student. Therefore, it is important that the discourse is balanced, and researchers investigate both positive and negative transitions experiences (e.g., see Jindal-Snape & Cantali, 2019).

Longitudinal and multi-perspective studies

As mentioned earlier, the conceptualisation and operationalisation of key terms will have an impact on the research design. When we conceptualise transitions as ongoing processes of adaptation, it becomes apparent that the research requires a longitudinal design. Most transitions researchers collect data just before and after the move to the new educational institution or country, capturing the immediate perceptions and experiences without considering their adaptation over time. Some studies report that they undertook a longitudinal design; however, as their conceptualisation of transitions is around a one-off event, data are collected before and after the move (e.g., mention of data collection twice 21 weeks apart at, what authors have termed as, 'pre-transition' and 'post-transition'; Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008), without considering the ongoing adaptations over the years. For instance, a review of healthcare literature between 1994 and 2004 also showed that of the 23 studies exploring transitions, only one had used a longitudinal design (Kralik et al., 2006). Even longitudinal research like Jindal-Snape and Cantali's (2019) is limited as data were collected at four fixed time points determined by the school year structure. Ideally, data collection should be ongoing with the participants deciding when to provide data such as through longitudinal diaries, whether written or audio recorded (see Glazzard et al., 2020; Gordon et al., 2017, 2020). The longitudinal diaries allowed participants to reflect on changes in their own conceptualisations of transitions over time; instead of describing them as change and one-off-event, they started to speak about their transitions as complex, dynamic, multiple and multi-dimensional (Jindal-Snape, 2023).

Further, if conceptualising transitions according to the MMT theory, it becomes crucial that we ask international students not only about their transitions but also those of significant others, as well as any interactions between their transitions. Similarly, it is important that data are collected from an international student and their significant others to understand their unique and holistic transitions. Therefore, multiple participants' perspectives need to be captured to understand one person's transitions experiences, possibly better undertaken through a case-study design to capture holistic transitions. It is also crucial that we do not assume who their significant others are; they should be asked to nominate them, for instance at the first interview. This design was found to be effective in other contexts where young adults were asked to nominate

their significant others, which provided a holistic and complete picture of transitions that would otherwise have been lost (Jindal-Snape et al., 2019).

Reflection questions

- What is my conceptualisation of transitions? Have I explicitly operationalised it before deciding on my research questions and research design?
- What does the language I'm using about transitions assume about students' experiences?
- What transitions theory/ies am I using and why? Does it/they underpin my research design, analysis and interpretation? What are the limitations of this/these theory/ies?
- During the review of international students' transitions literature, what discourse am I drawn to, and why?
- Whom do I need to collect data from to understand international students' holistic transitions? Who will decide whom to collect data from – the participants or me?
- How can I design a longitudinal study that is able to capture multiple transitions over time? What data collection methods should I use to collect data that can capture these transitions in a non-linear manner?
- Do my selected methodology and data collection methods allow for unique and diverse views to emerge? How will I ensure that I don't privilege some views over others?

Practical suggestions for researchers

Align your research design with the conceptualisation of the key concept/s. As I consider transitions to be an ongoing process, it is important that I use a longitudinal research design that captures international students' expectations before moving and reality after they have moved, as well as their excitement and concerns related to their move to a different country, educational system, language (both academic and everyday life), cultural differences, etc. Therefore, data have to be collected not only as they move into higher education but also across higher education followed by their return to their country. Similarly, consider what your key concepts are, and which research design is the most relevant based on that.

    Align your research design with the theorisation of the key concept/s. It is important to be mindful of the theory/ies underpinning your study. For instance, my theorisation of transitions is that transitions are multiple, multi-dimensional and interact with those of significant others (MMT Theory). Therefore, my research design includes data collection from students about their complex and holistic transitions experiences, in multiple contexts, alongside the multiple transitions experiences of their significant others. Data collection involves specific questions about mutual transitions experiences and any

impact on, or of, significant others' transitions. Consider being explicit about your theorisation before designing your study.

Consider critical discourse analysis to provide the context for your study. Understanding the context in which international students enter or live in the host nation might provide valuable insights into what conscious and unconscious messages the dynamic environment might be giving them about the host nation's, university's and society's willingness to engage in any meaningful mutual adaptation. However, literature based on discourse analysis of national/university policies, curriculum and/or media about international students is limited and might be a useful first step before undertaking further research.

Example in practice

Book chapter: Jindal-Snape (2023)
Chapter focus: This chapter focuses on the conceptualisation and theorisation of transitions across a range of educational and life transitions.
Chapter strengths: It unpacks an underdeveloped area of transitions research, namely conceptualisation and theorisation of transitions, and provides examples of multiple studies through which these have been developed and examined. It highlights the need for constant critique of existing theories in the researcher's own context, their applicability and need for development, including that of new theory/ies based on their study.

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17

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND LANGUAGE

From individual 'deficiency' to instrument of oppression

Vijay A. Ramjattan

Introduction

Research pertaining to international students and language in higher education has a seemingly altruistic purpose. That is, it is typically dedicated to identifying some 'deficient' aspect of these students' language use and suggesting ways to eliminate this linguistic 'deficiency' in order for them to thrive in their academic studies (Chapter 7; Jenkins, 2014). However, the primary issue with such framing is that it presents language as some type of personal failing of international students, thereby creating a deficit understanding of their language practices. Rather than present language as an individual fault to overcome, the purpose of this chapter is to explore how language is actually used as an instrument to oppress international students in higher education institutions. Operating on the premise that the linguistic 'deficiencies' of these students are institutionally created, the chapter specifically encourages researchers to name and challenge the institutional forces that marginalize international students on the basis of language. Although the focus is on language, the arguments of this chapter can be applied to the making of other types of 'deficiencies,' such as culture or disability.

Given the capaciousness of language as a topic of inquiry, I limit the current discussion to international students studying in English-medium universities located in the Global North, particularly settler colonial nations like Canada, the United States, and Australia. This is done for two reasons. First, there is ample literature exploring the global dominance of English and its role in sustaining racial and colonial hierarchies among different users of the language (e.g., Motha, 2014; Phillipson, 1992). Furthermore, as someone who teaches English for Academic Purposes at a Canadian university, where I am required

to uphold particular standards of English-language use, I am quite aware of how my institutional role marginalizes the linguistic repertoires of international students.

This awareness has led me to critically question some taken-for-granted assumptions about international students and their use of English. For instance, is being an international student an automatic signal of some sort of deficiency in English? Are there truly objective assessments showing the 'flaws' of international students' English? Does the English of these students need to be 'remedied' for all types of academic communication? Such questions are certainly applicable to other linguistic and geographical contexts, and I, therefore, encourage readers to connect these questions to their own research areas.

Critical considerations

For now, the focus on English serves as a starting point for researchers to consider that the language of international students is not inherently inferior, but rather, made to be inferior through institutional processes. As detailed in the following sections, researchers must critically examine the linguistic assumptions that are tied to the label of 'international student,' the external perceptions of international students' use of language, and the specific contexts in which the language practices of these students are perceived.

Interrogating the linguistic assumptions behind 'international student'

Examining the deficit framing of the English of international students can begin with interrogating the label of 'international student' itself (see also Chapter 1). While much research uses 'international student' as a straightforward legal category which describes those who travel to another country to pursue (under)graduate education, Cantwell and Lee (2010) argue that 'international' can also define fluctuating levels of alienation. One way to appreciate this point is to examine how university language policies uphold hierarchies among different types of international students (Sterzuk, 2015). Take, for example, how the University of Toronto, my academic institution, determines who is exempt from proving their English-language proficiency to study at the university. According to its website, those who completed four or more years of English-language education in countries where English is the dominant language do not need to prove their proficiency in the language (University of Toronto, 2022). The problem with this policy is that it generally excludes nations where English is used alongside an array of languages in public life (with the exception of select African countries). For instance, India and the Philippines are not included even though many students from these countries would consider themselves highly proficient in English. One likely reason for this exclusion is that students from these countries, once British and

US colonial subjects, respectively, are often racialized as 'non-native' English users. That is, their English is subject to colonial stereotypes positing that it is deficient in relation to that of their former colonizers, who are deemed to use it in a 'pure,' 'native' manner (e.g., Motha, 2014; Perez-Amurao & Sunanta, 2020; Ramjattan, 2021). By reproducing the colonial idea that the English-language proficiency of those from India or the Philippines is suspect, this type of language policy makes some students 'more international' to the university than others. Whereas an Australian student may feel more welcomed by the University of Toronto as their variety of English does not need to be inspected, an Indian student who must undergo formal testing to prove that their English is valid may have opposing feelings.

Understanding how university language policy can make 'international' a shifting category is important for researchers who may use 'international student' as a blanket euphemism for multilingual students who are believed to 'struggle' with using the English language (Bodis, 2021; Jenkins, 2014). Using 'international student' in this uncritical manner ignores that English is not always a hindrance for all international students (and simultaneously ignores the diverse linguistic backgrounds of home students). For example, Bhalla (2019) notes that, even though their English may be unfairly scrutinized as described earlier, Indian students can have an easier time linguistically adjusting in US universities than other international students because of the colonial history of English in India, which made them used to communicating in English for educational purposes. Therefore, even if a language policy suggests that the English of Indian students is lacking, this is not to say that it is actually deficient when needed in everyday communication.

This discussion on the erasure and dismissal of the English produced by certain international students should underscore that the term 'international student' cannot be taken for granted, especially with regard to language. As evidenced by the University of Toronto's language policy, for example, when the label 'international' is attached to a student, this results in institutional sorting to determine which students are 'more or less foreign' to the type of English required by the university, which often relies on colonial logics. For research seeking to understand the relationship between linguistic 'deficiency' and being an international student, then, it is pertinent to point out that particular students *are made to be* linguistically deficient even before they enter a university. In other words, there should be a shift away from identifying 'inherent problems' with international students' English to identifying the ways in which universities create these problems through such things as language policies and pedagogical practices. This requires reframing the practical purpose of future studies: rather than helping international students linguistically adjust to their academic surroundings, researchers need to identify how these surroundings must adjust to the linguistic repertoires of these students (Dobinson & Mercieca, 2020).

Disrupting external perceptions of international students' language practices

When argued that the English-language 'deficiencies' of international students are not of their own doing, a frequent counterargument concerns how this ignores the fact that many students do need assistance in developing their competence in the language. While this point cannot be entirely disregarded, it cannot be considered a consistently objective assessment either. Just as university language policies have the potential to dismiss the English-language proficiency of particular groups of international students, representatives of universities, such as faculty and staff, also contribute to this dismissal through their everyday perceptions of these students' English. Given how this dismissal is often a product of racism and coloniality, as discussed earlier, it is important to explore how raciolinguistic ideologies can inform these everyday perceptions. As sets of ideologies formed by histories of European colonialism throughout the globe, raciolinguistic ideologies posit that the language practices of racially minoritized people are perpetually deficient, even when they match those of their privileged White counterparts (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

Raciolinguistic ideologies permeate universities in such setter colonial nations as Canada and the United States because these institutions typically uphold White-settler-coded varieties of English as the standards for organizational communication (El-Lahib et al., 2011; Sterzuk, 2015; Yao et al., 2019). For students who do not look or sound like these varieties of English, they may be constantly perceived as not living up to the linguistic standards of their universities (Kubota et al., 2021). This can even be the case when there is nothing inherently different about their English-language use. In a study partly examining how English is constructed as White property during everyday interactions in a Canadian university, for instance, Sterzuk (2015) details a story where the thesis committee of a Chinese student immediately started to correct the English of the thesis even though the student's White, 'native-English-speaking' supervisor had already proofread it. Here, it might be argued that the committee members were subscribing to a raciolinguistic ideology positing that the student's English was inherently unintelligible since the supervisor noted how they were reading the thesis as if it had an unfamiliar 'Chinese accent' (Sterzuk, 2015, p. 62). Even when legitimated as 'standard English' by a privileged White professor, the student's writing needed to be deeply scrutinized because it was produced by a Chinese *person*.

Returning to research, then, drawing on conceptual vocabulary like raciolinguistic ideologies can help to move away from research which assumes that international students only need to aspire to a hegemonic linguistic norm in order to avoid critiques about their language practices (e.g., Benzie, 2010). Indeed, while studies may explore the linguistic discrimination experienced by these students, their alluded solution to this discrimination is linguistic

assimilation, which ignores how international students cannot necessarily escape raciolinguistic ideologies by changing their language practices and, once again, reinforces the idea that their English is inherently 'inferior' and in need of remediation (e.g., Sherry et al., 2010). Moreover, because the concept of raciolinguistic ideologies stresses how language cannot be separated from the bodies which produce it, the use of this concept can counter research that frames the linguistic and racial discrimination of international students as separate phenomena (cf. Ramjattan, 2020, 2021). By acknowledging the intertwining of language and race, future research can better detail how the alleged linguistic 'deficiencies' of international students are ideologically produced by external perceptions of their racialized bodies.

Recognizing the waxes and wanes of linguistic oppression

Thus far, the current discussion about how language operates as an instrument of oppression for international students might suggest that this oppression occurs in an even and consistent manner. Indeed, while studies about international students and linguistic oppression provide very useful evidence on the pervasiveness of this oppression, they do not necessarily explore how certain contextual factors may exacerbate it (e.g., Bodis, 2021; Sterzuk, 2015; Yao et al., 2019). One important contextual factor that is often lacking in data analysis concerns the academic discipline in which international students are situated. For example, in a study exploring the speech accent discrimination experienced by international teaching assistants (ITAs) in Canadian engineering departments, I found that engineering culture often shaped the discrimination experienced by these ITAs (Ramjattan, 2020). Because the organizational culture of engineering upholds the figure of the White cisgender man as the prototypical engineer, ITAs who neither "sounded White" nor "sounded masculine (enough)" faced further criticism of their accents than those who could manage to meet these auditory expectations (Ramjattan, 2020). This small example warrants further scholarly consideration of how disciplinary beliefs, practices, and so on intensify the discrimination of international students' language practices by creating additional linguistic norms to which to conform.

However, one danger of focusing on the manifold contextual factors contributing to international students' linguistic oppression is that it can portray them as perpetually passive victims unable to communicate in the manner they wish. This issue can be reflected in research that solely focuses on the linguistic oppression these students face, all without exploring how they escape and/ or resist this oppression (e.g., Lee & Rice, 2007). For this reason, it may be worthwhile to occasionally temper such research with explorations of how language is not always constructed as a problem in certain contexts. This is a similar argument made by Zhang and Mi (2010), who also describe how academic disciplines shape language requirements. Drawing on survey and interview

data from Chinese students in various Australian universities, the researchers found that for disciplines deemed less linguistically demanding, such as agriculture and mathematics, advanced English-language proficiency, especially in terms of listening comprehension and speaking, was of little concern to these students. In these types of disciplines where their English-language skills would be less scrutinized, the students would seemingly escape hegemonic expectations about what their English should sound like, etc.

At first glance, my suggestion to almost downplay the linguistic oppression that international students experience in universities runs counter to what I have argued in this chapter. Yet, by noting which types of language practices these students believe to be unnecessary for their academic studies, future research can move away from notions of what international students cannot do linguistically to what they *do not need to do* linguistically (Zhang & Mi, 2010). Moreover, in the context of the global dominance of English in higher education, such a conceptual shift can help to move past representations of international students perpetually 'struggling' to match hegemonic English norms to explorations of how they successfully draw on their entire linguistic repertoires in academic communication (see, e.g., Galante, 2020). Future research must therefore emphasize that international students can and should use language in a variety of ways during their studies.

Reflection questions

- What deficit understandings do I hold about international students' language use? How can I transform these assumptions in my research?
- What linguistic assumptions am I making about international students when I use the term 'international student?'
- In addition to raciolinguistic ideologies, what theoretical tools could I use to highlight how the linguistic 'deficiencies' of international students are institutionally created?
- Beyond academic discipline, what are some potential contextual factors that can aggravate or mitigate the linguistic oppression experienced by international students?
- How could the arguments in this chapter be applied to languages other than English?

Suggestions for researchers

Interrogate linguistic assumptions of 'international student' in your research. Formally defining how you use 'international student' provides the opportunity to note what linguistic assumptions you make in relation to the term. Also, noting these assumptions may lead to questioning how they are naturalized by universities.

Actively explore who and what creates international students' linguistic 'deficiencies'. To move away from the idea that international students are entirely responsible for their allegedly deficient language use, consider research designs which examine the entire context in which international students must communicate. This may mean interviewing the interlocutors of international students, who might hold discriminatory views about these students, or undertaking a critical document analysis of university language policies to understand how they create institutional cultures that uphold hegemonic manners of communication.

Create more nuanced research questions about language use. When designing research questions on the expected language practices of international students in their academic environments, try to develop questions that explore how these expectations may not be constant. For example, how does one academic discipline uphold stricter language standards than another?

Example in practice

Article: Sterzuk (2015)

Article focus: This article explores how linguistic, racial, and colonial hierarchies are reproduced through policies and practices in a Canadian university, especially with regard to the distinction between home and international students.

Article strengths: In addition to interviewing international students, the article draws on interviews with faculty/staff and document analysis of departmental language policies to highlight how particular international students are unfairly evaluated in relation to White-coded English, which is enforced as the communicative norm by the university. It, therefore, emphasizes that the linguistic 'deficiencies' of international students are institutionally created.

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18

SEEING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Challenging the culture trap

Kumari Beck

Introduction

One of the commonly asserted goals of the internationalization of higher education is the development of intercultural learning, intercultural competencies, and global citizenship among all students (Knight, 2021). Postsecondary institutions, in Canada for example, identify student mobility, both incoming and outgoing, as a key strategy to accomplish this goal. International students are recruited on the promise of gaining international and intercultural competencies and a superior "Western" education and are sought after for the multiple benefits to the institution: they are economic assets, enhance institutional reputation, and bring culture (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). The recruitment of international students is thus legitimized as a contributor to the diversification of the university and to intercultural learning (Buckner et al., 2020).

It is this notion of culture, in relation to internationalization and research with international students, that is the focus of my exploration in this chapter. Our everyday understanding of culture refers to "the characteristics of everyday life of a group of people located in a given time and place" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 15), and most commonly thought of as the visible aspects – food, dress, language and literature, the arts, customs, practices, and so on.

As the well-known "iceberg of culture" model (e.g., Peace Corps, n.d.) shows, there is much that is invisible. Scholarship on culture, intercultural education and intercultural communication establishes culture as multifaceted, dynamic, complex, and constantly developing and changing (James, 2010). In this chapter, I show how prevailing discourses of culture and interculturality in the international education sector, often reflected in research with international students, reflect simplistic, celebratory, hierarchical, and instrumental

constructions of culture that harm culturally different international students. Some of the consequences are that racialization is erased, and students are blamed for their own negative experiences. I suggest that researchers need to avoid falling into the trap of generalist notions of cultural diversity and consider the power relations inherent in cultural difference.

Some words of caution about some of the terms I use, notably, the West, and non-West, and the use of Global North-Global South. Much of the internationalization literature adopts a West-non-West binary to refer to the flow of students from countries that are economically disadvantaged (non-Western) to mostly English-speaking economically advantaged countries (the West). I also adopt the terms Global North-Global South. I recognize that these categories are problematic as they apply universalist labels to the fast-changing and complex realities of those living under them and that some countries don't fall neatly into these categories. I use them as general referents rather than essentializing terms. While there may be commonalities among the experiences of international students in these diverse places and contexts, there can be no universalizing of these experiences. In this chapter, my references to, and consideration of, researching international student experiences are in the context of Canada, where my research is located, and I hope there is value in being able to draw parallels with other contexts.

Critical considerations

The following considerations are insights gained from my research with international students, from my own experiences of a colonial education in my home country, Sri Lanka, and my work as a language teacher and adult educator with newcomers to Canada. These insights highlight, for me, the importance of lived experience in entering the research with criticality and curiosity – criticality so that we may interrogate the ways in which we may be blind to the very power structures and systems that we were educated and socialized in, and curiosity so that we may understand and interpret the phenomena we study in new ways. The considerations below are by no means an exhaustive list, nor are they meant to be a set of guidelines. They are shared, from one researcher to another, as prompts that may be useful in our collective and individual research journeys.

The commodification of culture

The market orientation of the internationalization of higher education is well recognized (de Wit & Altbach, 2021), and there is an impact of the resulting commodification of education on international students. For one, international students are "the consumers" and are framed as the objects of internationalization, rather than the subjects (Buckner & Stein, 2020). They

pay fees that are several times higher than domestic students (e.g., Hassanein, 2014) and the ethics of their role in maintaining the financial viability of Western universities go unquestioned. Stein and de Andreotti's (2016) analysis of international students being constructed as "cash" or economic assets, "competitors" to displacing domestic students in higher education institutions, or "charity", in need of Western knowledge to "improve", and often as a mix of all three, is instructive in naming the ways in which international students are objectified.

These neoliberal logics, I contend, have shaped even the way we think about culture. Definitions of internationalization, conceptualized as integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into higher education institutions (Knight, 2004; de Wit & Hunter, 2015) prime this instrumentalizing discourse. The "intercultural dimension" and culture itself become objectified as a "thing", a commodity to be desired, transmitted, consumed, and acquired as a skill set. Intercultural learning can be acquired through cultural competence workshops or curricula that are informed by uncritical notions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes about different Others, and these competencies can be measured. This way of thinking further leads to the assumption that the mere presence of international students on the campus amounts to intercultural learning. They are typically ascribed cultural identities and national identities that are unitary and static by which they are primarily identified (Beck, 2013, Chapter 1), leading to harmful stereotyping and discrimination even in non-Western contexts (Lee et al., 2017). These forms of cultural Othering (Chapter 5) did not arise simply with the intensified mobility of international students arriving from other places but, as scholars have argued, have arisen from colonial practices of conquest and dominance (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022) and must be accounted for in the frameworks we employ in research.

For researchers, one of the key considerations in investigating the cultural dimension of internationalization and international students is the crafting of research questions that aim to understand and interpret the complexity and fluidity of interculturality. The selection of theoretical frameworks that support a complex view of culture and student experience is another important consideration. In what ways are research designs reproducing cultural hegemony by adopting conceptualizations of culture that result in reductionist views of racialized groups, or uncritical celebratory views of students' cultural diversity? The theoretical lenses used can counteract the objectification of international students and the instrumentalist views of culture (Chapter 4).

Coloniality and culture

The colonial roots of modern internationalization (Chapter 6) and research with international students (Chapter 21) are becoming better understood. International education took the form of development aid to what was

referred to as the "Third World" after World War II (Trilokekar, 2010). These activities reified existing power imbalances of North-South relations in what de Wit (2002) described as academic imperialism, reproducing the discourses on the superiority of Western education in relation to the deficits of "the rest". These legacies of colonialism are compounded and even extended by economic globalization (Beck, 2012), which scholars have argued is a new form of imperialism (Beck & Pidgeon, 2020; Johnstone & Lee, 2017). More recent arguments have been made about how the university, founded in Whiteness (Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022, Chapter 9), advances the "modern colonial global imaginary" (de Andreotti et al., 2016). These cultural norms established by coloniality continue to dominate the ordering of social and academic relations privileging the cultural perspectives, knowledges, ideas, and practices of the hosting nations and institutions in a form of cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991). These ongoing conditions necessitate the probing into research with international students that can uncover historical and prevailing power relations and discourses.

Decolonial scholarship further explains how desire has been created among students and families in non-Western countries for English language and Western education, internalized in the popular imagination as intellectually and culturally superior. According to Homi Bhabha (1994), colonialism "produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (pp. 70–71), the "'otherness' . . . is at once an object of desire and derision" (p. 67). This results in what some have theorized as "doubling discourse" (McBratney, 1988 cited in Jiwani, 2010, p. 61) where the doubling manifests in the concurrent representation of the Other in both positive and negative representations. In the case of international students, it explains how they are both sought after and valued as a cultural asset (Buckner et al., 2020) and are simultaneously cast as culturally and intellectually deficient (Chapter 7) and in need of remediation. Constructs such as employing multi-layered analyses of international student experiences can uncover historical and ongoing power relations and discourses. I will next discuss how multiculturalism factors into this discussion of culture.

Multiculturalism and the erasure of race

I address multiculturalism in the Canadian context, but there are parallels to be drawn to much of the world where people of diverse ethnicities live together under a national banner. Bannerji's (2000) discussion of Canadian multiculturalism is illustrative of the ways in which this ideology further extends the deficit discourse imposed on those who are different from the dominant cultural group. She calls multiculturalism a "national imaginary [which] rests on posing 'Canadian culture' against 'multicultures'. An element of Whiteness quietly enters into cultural definitions, marking the difference between a core

cultural group and other groups who are represented as cultural fragments" (p. 10). Bhabha (Rutherford, 1990) situates multiculturalism and cultural diversity in a liberal tradition that values the co-existence and encouragement of many different cultures. Along with this "creation" of cultural diversity, however, Bhabha finds a "containment" of cultural difference as dominant cultures "accommodate'" others only within their own norms and frames. International students are invited and recruited for the cultural diversity they bring to institutions, and yet they are cultural fragments set up against the dominant culture. Their cultural differences are contained by the many social and academic norms and rules that keep them silenced (Beck, 2013), feeling unwelcomed (Tavares, 2021) and pressured to devalue their own languages and cultural identities (Tavares, 2022).

Another critique of multiculturalism is that difference is ascribed to culture rather than race (or class, or gender, for that matter) leading to the erasure of race and racialization (Chapter 9; Henry & Tator, 2006; James, 2010; Simpson et al., 2011). Multiculturalism is aimed at accommodating, celebrating, tolerating, and appreciating cultural diversity, but it leaves out the dominant group allowing for "the preservation of the cultural hegemony of the dominant cultural group . . . [and fails] to deal with the problems of systemic racism" (Henry & Tator, 2006, p. 49). The very notion of diversity itself, a core tenet of multiculturalism, appears as a value-free "cultural classification" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 35), and this neutrality allows it to be simply a descriptor of plurality and leads to the avoidance of cultural difference as a construct of power. For researchers, these analyses point to the importance of selecting theoretical frames that support the analysis of power relations that lie hidden in mainstream uncritical understandings of culture and multiculturalism.

These critiques are particularly important when considering how international students are positioned in the host community – as cultural fragments, as bearers of culture for the education of the host community, and simultaneously, whose cultural difference positions them as culturally and academically deficient. The "co-existence" of diverse cultural groups as evidence of the success of multiculturalism makes it difficult to report discrimination and racism, which is deemed to be an individual problem. Multiculturalism is marketed to international students as promising peaceful, harmonious social relations and safety as well as an opportunity to gain a high-quality education including intercultural and international literacies (Stein, 2018). Multiculturalism emphasizes the positive contributions made by cultural groups (Simpson et al., 2011) and so any conflict, racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination experienced by international students who are cast as different are excused as problems created by a small number of misguided individuals. Furthermore, interculturality is framed as educating for intercultural competencies that would prevent conflict and misunderstandings, and accordingly, learning about different cultures or attributing cultural stereotypes becomes

the common educational approach to intercultural learning. In this way of thinking, students have only themselves to blame (or are blamed) for the problems they face. In research, data collection methods such as interviews and questionnaires need to be thoughtfully designed to probe the complexity and the range of student experiences. Interpretation of data analyzed through complex lenses will thus lead to findings that reflect the contradictions, tensions, and messiness of the realities of international students.

Culture and racialization

As noted earlier, the emphasis on culture as a rationale both for recruiting international students (the bearers of culture) and for achieving goals of intercultural literacies and global mindedness (as the attraction for international students) leads to an instrumentalization and essentialization of culture, both in practice and in research. Furthermore, multiculturalism's celebration of cultural diversity and simplistic views of what constitutes intercultural learning relegates issues of cultural difference to a matter of developing cultural competencies. These approaches mask and even erase the deep-rooted racism and other forms of discrimination that mark social relations in pluralistic communities.

   In this context, research on race and racism in international higher education become important resources for researchers. In what is considered to be a seminal study, Lee and Rice (2007) found that many of the difficulties experienced by international students studying in a US university could be caused by neo-racism, rather than what was largely attributed to adjustment problems of the students. Neo-racism is described as a form of racism where prejudice arises from notions of cultural or national superiority. International students are particularly vulnerable to neo-racism, making this an important theoretical lens (e.g., Lee, 2020; Lee et al., 2017). These and other more recent studies, including several using Critical Race Theory, mark important progress made in illuminating the impacts of racism and showing the connections between culture and race (see Brown & Jones, 2013; Koo et al., 2021; Yao et al., 2021).

   Given the significant connections between culture and race, it may be useful for researchers to consider adding a race analysis to data on international student experiences. Students may experience racism but may not be able to identify them as such. One example is everyday racism (Henry & Tator, 2009), which is often internalized by those who experience them as being challenges of acculturation, and challenging to report. Another form of racism is democratic racism: "[C]ommitments to democratic principles such as equality, fairness, and justice *conflict* with, but also *coexist* with, negative feelings about racialized individuals and groups and discrimination against them" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 33, emphases in original). These tensions are particularly evident in the academy, where racism is more likely to be seen as the ignorant

behaviour of a few "bad" people. Recent literature in critical internationalization studies makes important theoretical and conceptual arguments about the deep rootedness of Whiteness, and how it sets a racial climate of cultural imperialism (see Shahjahan & Edwards, 2022; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). This is the environment that international students enter and the context in which intercultural engagement occurs. The task of research then is to uncover and illuminate the ways in which race is part of the cultural fabric of international and intercultural experiences.

In conclusion, the ideas presented in this chapter are meant to be a prompt to bring criticality into research with international students that focus on culture and intercultural learning. Researchers are invited to consider challenging assumptions about culture and the power relations inherent in intercultural relationships and encounters. The intercultural dimensions of internationalization are integrally linked to neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and racialization, and it is important that researchers consider these entanglements in how they play out in the lives of international students.

Reflection questions

- What conceptualizations of culture inform my research?
- Do my research instruments probe international students' lived experiences sufficiently to illuminate tensions and contradictions, such as doubling discourses?
- What do these experiences say about the institution, the structures, and the people in the host community?

Suggestions for researchers

Craft research questions that aim to understand the complexity of intercultural relations. International students are often constructed in terms of surface cultural differences, and attention is placed on their individual acculturation experiences. Research questions that seek to understand the complexity of intercultural *relations* will illuminate the power relations, dynamics, attitudes, and perceptions about international students and systemic issues such as racialization and discrimination.

Select theoretical frameworks that allow for a nuanced analysis of culture, histories, contexts and power in intercultural relations. Explore the invisible dimensions of culture and how they manifest in the way international students are framed and constructed. What assumptions about culture are prevalent in institutional discourses? How is culture commodified, for example, and what are the implications for international students as the bearers of culture? How can we uncover phenomena such as doubling discourses? What are the ways in which race and racialization get erased?

Data sources and data collection methods that probe participants' lived experiences across time will generate rich data. It is particularly important to center international students as subjects rather than cultural artefacts and as having agency. How can international students' stories shine a light on host institutions, structures, and systems that mediate intercultural relations? Are cultural knowledges of international students and their differences recognized?

Example in practice

Article: Tavares (2022)

Article focus: This qualitative study on the lived experiences of three multi-lingual international students at a Canadian university examines how neo-liberal ideologies and native speakerism influence students to devalue their own culture.

Article strengths: The authors bring out the complexity of cultural Other-ing in illustrating how the students participate in their own oppression by aspiring to achieve native-speaker English, viewed as socially and politically neutral.

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19

REVISITING THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS IN RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Kazuhiro Kudo

Introduction

For more than four decades, intercultural relationships – broadly defined in this chapter as interpersonal relationships formed through repeated interactions across (perceived) cultural differences – have received considerable attention in research with international students. However, this issue has remained under-theorised, and most research has reported similar findings. That is, international students in many countries find it difficult to develop close relationships (e.g., friendships) with home students (Kudo, 2016; Mendoza et al., 2022; Meng et al., 2021) and tend to immerse themselves in the enclaves of their same-culture friendships (Yu & Moskal, 2019a), or at best in networks of international students from other countries (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). As such, international students' social experiences are often portrayed pessimistically, associated with loneliness, threat and anxiety, partially stemming from the stereotyping and xenophobia of home students and staff (Marginson et al., 2010).

Alongside these negative narratives, close relationships with home students have been assumed to contribute to international students' needs and aspirations, such as academic and sociocultural adaptation (Schartner, 2015), decreased homesickness (Hendrickson et al., 2011), connections within the university community (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017) and study-to-work transitions (Lee, 2021). Some studies focusing on home students' experiences have linked positive interactions with international students with the improvement of their attitudes towards international students (Mak et al., 2014), intercultural competence and future educational and career decisions (Jon, 2013). Despite these positive associations, however, very few attempts have been

made to conceptualise and empirically investigate meaningful intercultural relationships experienced by a small but significant minority of (both international and home) students (cf. Kudo, 2023; Kudo et al., 2020). Additionally, previous studies seem to have legitimised and even reinforced the implicit ideology that, for international students, social relationships with home students are more valuable than those with co-national and other international students (Mendoza et al., 2022).

This chapter calls for a new conceptualisation of intercultural relationships by critically reflecting on how this phenomenon has been conceptualised and studied empirically. First, I argue that loose and static conceptualisations of intercultural relationships that permeate the literature should be replaced by dynamic and inclusive conceptualisations. Then, I discuss the need for more research with ecological, rather than individual-centred, conceptualisations that unravel the co-contributing role of individual and environmental dimensions in intercultural relationships. I hope that these shifts in perspective, which I am pursuing in my recent research, will yield more productive conceptual and empirical insights into the social experiences of international students. Finally, methodological issues are briefly addressed. Since much of the literature has focused on intercultural relationships between students, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to address other kinds of intercultural relationships, such as those between international students and teaching/administrative staff (see also Chapter 17). Nevertheless, it is my hope this chapter will help to reduce the findings that reproduce narratives about the interactional problems and difficulties of international students and to improve the social experiences of *all* – both international and home – students.

Critical considerations

From loose and static to dynamic and inclusive conceptualisations

The first proposal I would like to make is to adopt dynamic and inclusive, rather than loose and static, conceptualisations of intercultural relationships. As pointed out by Kudo et al. (2019), the literature has used vague conceptualisations of relational terms (e.g., relationships, friendships, interactions, contact). Some studies have used different terms interchangeably without paying attention to different nuances attached to these terms and cross-cultural differences in the definitions and expectations of certain types of relationships, such as friendships. There have also been static conceptualisations of the social relationships of international students. That is, most research has focused on superficial or functional intercultural relationships at a particular point in time (e.g., Meng et al., 2021; Yu & Moskal, 2019a), without explicitly addressing how the relationships develop, maintain and even dissolve over time (e.g., Kudo et al., 2019, 2020).

The loose and static conceptualisations of intercultural relationships also derive from the manner in which interculturality, or the existence of students with culturally diverse backgrounds, has been operationalised in empirical research. Most studies to date have assumed interculturality by enrolment status, namely, whether students are 'international' or 'home' (Chapter 1). This presupposed distinction is indeed useful for identifying the underlying causes of mis-/dis-communication between the two student groups, such as language differences in culture-specific interaction rules and expectations of relationships (God & Zhang, 2019) and inequality based on access to cultural knowledge and skills valued in the host institution (Colvin et al., 2015). However, the accumulation of research based on fixed interculturality may have only served to reproduce a 'deficit' perspective of international students (Chapter 7; Marginson, 2014) who struggle with adaptation/assimilation to, and are alienated from, the host institution and community. Moreover, with increased international student mobility and migration afforded by globalisation, it is no longer easy to adopt a 'passport approach' (Dunne, 2013) to examine intercultural relationships, as it equates interculturality with differences in nationality and thus ignores co-cultural (e.g., gender, religious) influences on student relationships (Section 3; Kudo, 2016).

Against this backdrop, I argue for the need to adopt more dynamic and inclusive perspectives of intercultural relationships, which aim at building a common ground that connects people with (perceived) cultural and individual differences. A useful approach, for instance, is Holliday's (1999) 'small culture paradigm', which attaches culture to small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behaviour (e.g., student organisations). Holliday and MacDonald (2020) further recommend that 'large culture paradigm' concepts such as nation and ethnicity be seen as 'one of many possible, emergent, ideologically constructed variables rather than as the starting point for research' (p. 621). A similar approach is to view international students as active agents with hybrid and multiple identities (e.g., nationality, religion, class, gender) that evolve in the country of their education (Section 3; Marginson, 2014). These alternative perspectives of interculturality align with the finding that, for example, by visiting a church, international students made friends with people in the host community based on mutual interest in Christianity beyond other cultural differences (i.e., nationality, ethnicity, language) (Yu & Moskal, 2019b).

Clark and Brennan's (1991) 'grounding', defined as the process of making contributions to the common ground of ongoing conversation, is another example of dynamic and inclusive approaches to intercultural relationships. Importantly, grounding strategies (e.g., asking to slow down, repeat, explain, rephrase or summarise what has just been said) can be trained. An experimental study by Aguilera and Li (2009) found that a 10- to 15-minute training on grounding had a positive effect on reducing

intercultural miscommunication between Anglo-Canadian and Mainland Chinese international students in Canada. This finding paves the way for producing concrete knowledge on interactional strategies that *all* students can learn to enhance intercultural connectivity and mutual understanding between culturally diverse students while negotiating sociolinguistic differences resulting from different native languages. Such intervention studies can contribute to overcoming the limitations of previous studies that have largely relied on retrospective data to address unequal power relations between international and home students in nuanced but somewhat deterministic ways (e.g., Colvin et al., 2015).

The study of intercultural relationships can be further enriched by drawing on culturally inclusive philosophical foundations such as cosmopolitanism and conviviality. Cosmopolitanism, or a broadly defined disposition of openness toward otherness, has informed recent research about student learning and institutional internationalisation (Arkoudis et al., 2019). While some researchers criticise cosmopolitanism as an essentially Eurocentric and pro-elite construct, others view it as a useful concept to address the intercultural dimensions of social relationships, such as showing interest, sensitivity, understanding, acceptance and respect in the face of cultural differences (Kudo et al., 2019). Another concept that deserves more scholarly attention is conviviality, first used by Illich (1973) but promoted by Gilroy (2004) as a state of living with difference without being anxious, violent and trapped by closed and fixed identities. Conviviality, as Bigby and Wiesel (2019) argue, represents safety and freedom to engage with cultural Others, which in turn can lead to the development of long-term relationships. Like these, the adoption of philosophies favouring cultural sensitivity and inclusion may be a welcome addition to studies on intercultural relationships.

Moreover, research that pays more attention to collective moral and ethical engagement that goes beyond self-interested intercultural relationships is warranted. As already mentioned, studies on intercultural relationships have thus far been framed in relation to the promotion of students' academic and sociocultural adaptation, intercultural learning and transition toward employability. In addition to these self-serving merits, Kudo (2023) points to the altruistic nature of intercultural relationships at university (e.g., creating a student organisation to mitigate interactional difficulties between international and home students) and beyond (e.g., launching a donation for international students from an earthquake-affected country). This perspective can broaden the conceptual and empirical understanding of how meaningful intercultural relationships bring about positive change, not only in students themselves but also in institutions, local communities or society at large. In the midst of current global health and international crises, research that addresses collective actions resulting from intercultural relationships is valuable and should be promoted.

From individual-centred to ecological conceptualisations

My second main proposal for future research is to shift the focus from individual-centred to ecological perspectives of intercultural relationships, according to which this phenomenon is seen as emerging in multi-layered ecological – both spatial and temporal – systems that are embedded within each other (e.g., classroom, curriculum, international student policy, global pandemic) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). To date, the majority of research has attributed success and failure in the formation of intercultural relationships to individual attributes (e.g., age), dispositions (e.g., personality) and capabilities (e.g., language) (Kudo et al., 2019). Some, though fewer studies, especially those focusing on the role of interventions, have examined the influences of interactional situations (e.g., buddy programs) on the quality of intercultural relationships (Jon, 2013). However, only a few studies have simultaneously examined both individual and environmental factors that are conducive to the establishment of intercultural relationships (e.g., Kudo et al., 2020; Zou & Yu, 2021). Consequently, the literature has (implicitly) assumed that the responsibility for developing intercultural relationships lies with individuals, especially international students, who (should) have the motivation to interact with home students (Kudo et al., 2017). In my view, such individual-centred conceptualisations, combined with deficit narratives about international students (Chapter 7), have only served to reproduce the discourses of difficulties and challenges in intercultural relationships.

To redress this situation, future research needs to focus on the co-contributing roles of individuals and environments in the flowering of intercultural relationships. In this regard, Kudo et al.'s (2019) three-stage ecological and person-in-context conceptual framework offers unique insights into how student agency (i.e., the will and action to initiate interactions) and environmental affordances (i.e., the possibilities of actions in multiple situations) interact to co-produce the development of intercultural relationships. Although this framework needs empirical validation outside the context of our research, it provides a holistic understanding of intercultural relationship development and suggests the need to identify the conditions necessary for the emergence of agency, and the components of interactional situations that promote, or are promoted by, agency (see also Chapter 3). The framework is also expected to promote empirical research into how, especially the turning points at which, students change the focus of interactions with relational partners (e.g., from functional/superficial to personal/intimate).

In particular, I would like to stress the need to pay explicit attention to the role of institutional environments in promoting the development of intercultural relationships, and further, in making them into transformative learning experiences for the students involved. Curriculum and programme structure, often intertwined by the number and enrolment status of international students (i.e.,

whether they are degree-seeking or exchange), can be detrimental to the formation of intercultural relationships (Mendoza et al., 2022; Yu & Moskal, 2019a). Institutional commitment to internationalisation, typically by providing safe, non-threatening space for interactions (e.g., student organisations, culturally mixed dormitories), has been found to foster meaningful intercultural relationships (Kudo et al., 2020). However, there has been insufficient research on what structural conditions or institutional arrangements, in dynamic interactions with students' dispositions and capabilities, enable or constrain the establishment of intercultural relationships (cf. Lee, 2021). From the viewpoint of improving interactions on campus, the disciplines of architecture and human geography that pay attention to concrete physical objects and spatial arrangements (Chapter 15; Mayblin et al., 2015) can be a valuable asset for further research.

Future research should also investigate the role played by the environment outside the campus (e.g., volunteering, internships, part-time jobs, religious practices) in the development and maintenance of intercultural relationships with (non-)students. How the composition of international students' personal networks (e.g., friends in the home country, family accompanied in the country of education) influences the quantity and quality of intercultural relationships is worth exploring, but has not yet received much attention. With the massive increase in the number of users of online communication tools, the role of information and communication technology cannot be ignored. For example, social media platforms can substitute for the development of global competence in international students by compensating for the lack of interactions with home students (Meng et al., 2021). The manner in which new technologies, including virtual reality, can promote student engagement in intercultural interactions and relationships is also an interesting research topic.

However, these off-campus as well as on-campus environments – both in-person and online – should ideally be studied in combination rather than in isolation. The literature has shown that international students interact with intercultural and intracultural peers and mentors across multiple situations (Kudo et al., 2020; Rasi et al., 2015). Importantly, as ecological perspectives suggest, these environments are nested in broader ones, such as sociocultural (e.g., collectivism – individualism), national (e.g., international student policy) and global (e.g., cross-border student mobility) environments (Kudo et al., 2017; Meng et al., 2021).

Methodological considerations

Finally, some remarks need to be made about research methodologies. In particular, I would like to emphasise the need for methodologies – whether quantitative, qualitative or mixed – that assist in the collection and analysis of empirical data that explicitly address the conceptual issues raised in this chapter. The literature is still overwhelmingly reliant on retrospective data collected

from interviews or questionnaires administered to international and/or home students. There is a need for the use of data collection and analysis techniques that complement self-reported data (e.g., observation) and provide nuanced insights into moment-to-moment interactions (e.g., conversational analysis). For the same reason, more studies should include non-student participants, such as lecturers, administrative staff and local residents (cf. Mendoza et al., 2022). Furthermore, to capture the evolving nature of intercultural relationships, more studies should be conducted in a longitudinal design. From the viewpoint of promoting meaningful intercultural relationships, more intervention research, grounded in solid theoretical and philosophical foundations, is also necessary.

I also invite researchers in all corners of the world to create new conceptual frameworks that are well informed by both the literature and empirical data, ideally by using multilingual sources. I encourage more researchers from the Global South to join scholarly discussions on intercultural student relationships, which, with a few recent exceptions (e.g., Nadeem et al., 2020; Song & Xia, 2021), have been dominated by researchers in the Global North, especially English-speaking countries (e.g., the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia). I also suggest the use of non-English, as well as English, concepts and theories, with a view to generating novel understandings of intercultural relationships. The Japanese concept of *ibasho* (i.e., a place where one feels a sense of security, acceptance, belonging and purpose), for example, can succinctly capture the agentic construction of the whole life-space of international students in relation to intercultural relationships (Murata & Furukawa, 2014), an aspect that has been underrepresented in the literature. All in all, the richness of scholarship on the intercultural relationships of international students will rest on the extent to and the manner in which researchers around the world can tap into the potential of cultural and disciplinary resources to create valuable knowledge together.

Reflection questions

- For whom and for what objective(s) am I conducting research about students' intercultural relationships?
- What relational term(s) (e.g., intercultural relationships, friendships, interactions, contact) should I use to achieve my research objective(s), and why? What assumptions do the terms I'm using make?
- How should I conceptualise interculturality to address the dynamic and inclusive nature of intercultural relationships?
- What levels of environment should I focus on to gain an ecological understanding of intercultural relationships?
- What concepts and research method(ologies) should I use to generate a dynamic, inclusive and ecological understanding of intercultural relationships?

Suggestions for researchers

Conceptualise/operationalise relational terms carefully – this will determine the scope of empirical research. If you use the term relationships, which in contrast to transient contact involves dynamic changes, collect and analyse empirical data – be it cross-sectional or longitudinal – that can cover a wide range of relational states (e.g., from strangers to best friends).

Consider carefully how interculturality should be operationalised. Be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the perspectives chosen for operationalisation (e.g., passport approach, small culture paradigm, cosmopolitanism) and collect and analyse the empirical data accordingly.

Consider what levels of environment (e.g., situational, institutional, national, global), and what individual factors (e.g., agency, language skills), that influence intercultural relationships should be looked at. To take full advantage of an ecological approach, collect multiple forms of data relevant to the research question – ideally a combination of empirical (e.g., interviews, questionnaires) and non-empirical (e.g., policy documents, media reports) data – and explore how they can complement each other.

Example in practice

Article: Kudo et al. (2019)
Article focus: This article proposes an ecological conceptual framework for intercultural relationship development.
Article strengths: The proposed conceptual framework provides a dynamic, inclusive and ecological perspective of intercultural relationships by focusing on the interplay between individual agency and environmental affordances.

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SECTION 5

How can research be designed better?

20

REFLECTING ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Hanne Kirstine Adriansen and Vera Spangler

Introduction

For developing and framing research with international students, the previous chapters focused on conceptual and theoretical considerations. This section turns to practical methodological considerations and methods that can address the key critiques so far and shift research on this topic towards more ethical and critical outlooks. Starting off the last section of this book, this chapter concerns positionality as a foundation for developing new research designs. A key argument of this book is that international students and their knowledges, languages, and cultures should be treated as epistemic equals in the research about their experiences (see Section 2, particularly). We argue that this requires that researchers understand and recognise the ways their positionalities influence the research process and its outcomes. Just like the groups they study, researchers come with histories and socialisation. The positionalities researchers bring with them affect the whole research process (Madden, 2010). The aim of this chapter is to provide perspectives and suggestions that can help researchers to reflect critically and responsibly on their positionality in research with international students. Additionally, this may help address some of the issues raised in the preceding chapters. We draw on our previous work on researcher positionality (Adriansen & Madsen, 2009) and use examples from research with international students studying at a Danish higher education institution (Spangler, 2022).

Critical considerations

Positionality refers to the social and political positions of those involved in the research – both the researcher and the participants. It is a tool to critically call into question how we know, inhabit, and move through worlds (Mullings,

1999). Positionalities are relational and emerge situationally; they are not total, nor are they static (Rose, 1997). Positionality extends beyond the boundaries of our selves; it is a relational formation of co-constituted nature (Massey, 2005), rather than only navigating our individual identities (Kinkaid et al., 2022). Research about positionality builds upon the notion that knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1988) and that "where we are located in the social structure as a whole and which institutions we are in . . . have an effect on how we understand the world" (Hartsock, 1987, p. 188). Challenging epistemological claims about universality, objectivity, and unbiased knowledge, we argue that critical reflections on positionality may lead to more comprehensive analyses because it becomes transparent where the researcher speaks from. It is about acknowledging that our age, gender representation, nationality, ethnicity, job, and position in society, as well as our personal experiences, influence our research, while keeping in mind the transient and relational nature of positionality (Reyes, 2020). When conducting research with (international) students, reflecting on researcher positionality entails reflecting on how these different aspects affect us during our whole research process from formulating research questions, to conducting the research itself, to analysing and publishing the research. It is about acknowledging how it will affect your research if you are, for example, a young, international master's student conducting research multilingually with other international students, as compared to an experienced professor working in your mother tongue.

Reyes (2020) uses the concepts of visible and invisible characteristics when writing about the strategic use of positionality in the field. We find the concepts useful as visible characteristics such as gender, age, accent, and other appearances such as 'race' are different from invisible characteristics, such as nationality, profession, academic degrees, hobbies, and family background. Folkes (2022) argues positionality is relational and, therefore, we use (consciously or not) our different characteristics when, for instance, negotiating access or building rapport. It is also important, however, to move beyond what Folkes (2022, p. 4) has labelled 'shopping list positionality', which is simply listing the researchers' characteristics and how they are similar or not to the informants. Instead, we need to engage in situational understandings of positionality that entail reflecting upon how positionality has played a role in the construction of knowledge from the design of the study (Chapter 21), to producing the empirical material (Chapters 22–25), to the analysis and writing (Chapter 26).

Being an insider in educational research

According to Sikes and Pott (2008), an insider is somebody who is attached to or involved in the organisation or its social groups prior to commencing the study. Therefore, being an insider is common in research with international students. However, we find this is a simplified understanding of the insider

position. Foremost, we see the insider positionality as a sub-position as you are always an insider by sharing a position with the research participants, whether this is a visible or an invisible characteristic (see Reyes, 2020). The debate of being an insider or outsider to the community studied has been and remains a key debate within qualitative research (e.g., Folkes, 2022). Discussions often concern dis/advantages of each position. 'Insiders' argue that they are likely to gain more intimate insights and competently understand the experiences of those inside the community, while 'outsiders' argue that they have an advantage of greater distance and are more likely to be perceived as neutral by not belonging to the community under study (Holmes, 2020).

There seems to be, however, a binary implied in such insider/outsider debates assuming that being an in/outsider is a fixed attribute, disregarding the dynamism of positionalities through space and in time. Few researchers completely remain outsiders and no one can attain a consistent insider position (Mullings, 1999). In research with international students, we will, as former students ourselves, always have some sort of insider knowledge. Yet, international students may see us as outsiders due to, for instance, our seniority or nationality. One will likely move between both positions and fall somewhere within the 'space between' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Hence, "an insider is someone who is considered an insider by the other members of a given community and/or who participates on par with the other members of that community" (Adriansen & Madsen, 2009, p. 147). This means that, while the researcher may use her positionalities strategically to gain an insider position, this may not happen if the members of that community do not consider her an insider. Or the insider position can rapidly change if the researcher talks or behaves in a manner that is not considered to be a 'true' way of behaving for an insider.

One should also responsibly attend to the power relations and hierarchies. When having an insider position, these hierarchies may seem blurred, but it is important to remember that the researcher maintains analytical power (Rose, 1997). The researcher has a privileged position by defining the research problem, deciding which questions should be asked, and analysing the data. Furthermore, it is important to reflect on the diversity present within the homogenised groupings of 'international students'. Insider status does not mean insider to *all* experiences. For example, a young White woman studying in a majority-White country may be an insider in terms of being an international student but cannot claim to truly understand the racialised or marginalised experiences of other groups of international students (e.g., Chapter 9).

Examples of negotiations of positionality during fieldwork

We will now draw on examples from our research with international students to illustrate how researchers might reflect on and negotiate positionality during

a study. The first author, Hanne, is a Danish associate professor and the principal investigator (PI) of the research project Geographies of Internationalisation. The second author, Vera, is German. During her undergraduate studies, she studied for one semester in Denmark. After Vera finished her studies in Germany, she returned to Copenhagen as a full-time international master's student. Driven by her personal experiences and motivation, Vera designed the research for her master's thesis, which was affiliated with Hanne's research project. Hanne was her supervisor throughout the process from research design to fieldwork and thesis writing. Afterwards, we co-authored a paper based on Vera's ethnographic fieldwork with international students (Spangler & Adriansen, 2021), which we draw on here.

During her semester abroad, Vera studied at the same institution where she conducted her research and was able to *gain access* through her contact with the international coordinator. The position of Hanne as PI of the project was also important, as she had a signed agreement of collaboration with that higher education institution. In the field, Vera had to learn that access is far more than a simple matter of physical presence; it is rather a constant process of negotiating positions from which the necessary data can be gathered (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). Here, for instance, the lecturers of the individual courses were important gatekeepers within the first weeks of fieldwork. With a few lecturers, gaining access to their classes was a simple, practical matter, communicated via email. Some others wanted to meet Vera before they agreed to invite her to their class. These different forms of negotiation access shaped her position within the individual classrooms. The lecturers who she met in advance made extra time to introduce her to their classes, creating more direct awareness of her presence. Interestingly, the specific ways in which the lecturers presented her to the students also had an impact on her position and interactions in the classroom. One lecturer said, "She will be our little fly on the wall", and another one said, "We are thankful to have her. She will participate with you in class". Vera adapted and followed these somewhat implicitly assigned positions. In one class, she would sit in the back corner of the room, quietly observing, while in the other class, she would participate in activities and discussions.

Participant observation is often described as an oxymoron, as there is tension between the two terms (O'Reilly, 2012). Yet, Vera experienced it more as dialectic. In the beginning, she found herself in a complete observer role. Coming from many places, the international students, though, were in the same position, having to form social bonds with one another. Vera was naturally pulled into this process (becoming a full participant). This proved decisive for building closer relationships with the students. She followed them everywhere around campus, joined them to get coffee during class breaks, ate lunch with them, or attended study group meetings after class hours. Based on her age, nationality, and position as a student herself, it was not difficult for Vera to blend in with the students. She used these insider positionalities for building rapport with the group. She introduced herself as an international

student and, for the purpose of being with the group, as a researcher. Many of them approached her to ask about small things, like how to get around in the city or to learn about her experiences of what it means to be a student in Denmark. The students quickly started to greet her in the morning, included her in group work, and invited her to social events off campus. This insider positionality was a continuous, dialectic experience which also led to careful ethical considerations and (re)negotiations.

Ethnographic fieldwork requires a careful balance between becoming close, but not too close (Madden, 2010). Throughout fieldwork, Vera observed several classroom situations where she saw students trembling, unable to speak, filled with anxiety, and leaving class in tears. By participating in the daily lives of the students, Vera became entangled in multiple facets of their lives. This integration presented her with feelings of morality and questions of commitment which went beyond the immediate research topic (see Moskowitz, 2015). Witnessing scenes that she considered on a moral human level not acceptable invoked a feeling of obligation within her. She encountered serious ethical responsibility and her different roles and forms of engagement posed a dilemma on how to position herself.

Sharing personal experiences with her participants both helped and affected the research process. Primarily, her personal lived experiences as an international student herself challenged her in keeping a distance and not becoming overly sympathetic. Many of the international students referred to Vera as their friend, often emphasising that she was one of the first people to be attentive and available to them during their time in Denmark. The relationship between informants and ethnographer may be perceived as one of the core aspects of conducting ethnographic fieldwork (Driessen, 1998). While the aim of the fieldwork experience is to get a sensibility and closeness of the people and everyday sociality, ethnographic work is also coloured by instrumentality (Madden, 2010). Consequently, it is essential to engage reflexivity to identify and articulate one's positionality. Getting close to the international students allowed Vera to 'be there', while at the same time, she had to keep a certain distance and disengage to absorb and process all the information. Here, one may perceive Hanne's position as an external-insider (Banks, 1998). As an insider, she brought expertise to the subject and field, but also helped Vera to detach herself from the group and suggested ways to strategically use her positionality differently, for example, drawing more on the researcher/ethnographer positionality and less on the (fellow) international student positionality to develop a more detached role in the group. This helped Vera realise that positionality is not static or fixed but rather an ongoing negotiation.

The aspect of *language* and positionality is also important (explored further in Chapter 25). While English was the means of communication among the international students, it was not the only language present. During fieldwork, it seemed that coming from the same country and speaking one language provided students with an understanding of one another's experiences.

Indeed, previous research has portrayed the preference between students to work with those sharing the same backgrounds (Singaram et al., 2011; Moore & Hampton, 2015). Vera's classroom observations mirrored these aspects of self-segregation by cultural background among the international students, wherein language often played a role of dis/connection, regulating positioning of inclusion and exclusion and a sense of belonging. Being German herself played in similar ways into Vera's positionality. She could, for instance, approach students from Switzerland, Austria, and Germany in their mother tongue and conduct interviews with them in German. Being a linguistic insider and sharing an ethnic identity (Liamputtong, 2010) was facilitative for Vera to seek positional spaces of trust and cooperation. Positional spaces are, however, transitory and cannot be reduced to such insider/outsider privilege (Mullings, 1999). Particularly, international students bring various backgrounds and languages with them and researchers will most likely find themselves in a position of cultural outsiders (Manohar et al., 2019) to most of them.

Vera had planned two *interview sessions* with some of the students. The first one on campus and the second one in the students' current homes – one of the most intimate of our everyday spaces. Entering the private space of research participants is usually off-limits because participants can be in fear of judgment or a certain sense of scepticism (Folkes, 2022). During the visits, Vera noticed how important it was for the students to make her feel comfortable in their homes, offering her slippers, tea, and one informant cooked dinner for her. This may reflect that it was important for them to present themselves in a certain way. To negotiate her insider position in the students' homes, Vera tried to emphasise some of the commonalities between them, sharing stories about her living situation and how challenging it was to live on a student budget. This situation, however, can lead to an atmosphere where it is difficult to maintain the position as a researcher asking critical questions or just saying "What do you mean by that?" (Adriansen & Madsen, 2009). This requires reflexivity during the analysis, where the researcher should ask herself about the potential shortcomings of the material and how her positionality has influenced the data generated.

Reflection questions

- Who am I in this subfield of research with international students? What is my position in terms of academic position, disciplinary background, gender, age, ethnicity, etc.? How does my personal migration history influence my approach to this topic?
- What do I bring with me, which biases and/or subjectivities? How can my positionalities be limiting to understanding international students? What may cause a lack of shared understanding (e.g., assumptions and

expectations)? How does my privilege shape what I am seeing/not perceiving due to my location in social structure?
- How am I positioned by my participants and others while in the field?
- How can I use my position strategically (e.g., to gain access or empathise with participants)?
- How has my own positionality changed, or not, through the research, and why?

Suggestions for researchers

Keep a journal to stay aware of your positions throughout the research process. Conducting research with international students means that you have participants from various sociocultural backgrounds. Some may consider you an insider in some ways, others not. Your positions may shift, and you will need to continuously clarify them.

If you can conduct research with another person, try to make reflective notes about what is going on before you talk and synchronise your views. If you interpret situations differently, this can be valuable data.

Create a practice (e.g., take notes, talk to others, listen to your interviews) where you critically reflect on who you are in the subfield/ community, what you bring with you, and how you approach and position your participants and vice versa. Positionality is at stake during all phases of the research process, from the planning phase to conducting the research to the analysis. Acknowledging and identifying your positionalities can enhance a reflective awareness and better understanding of your own biases.

Altogether, this involves reflecting on your position within the wider research subfield and your (potential) contributions about international students' lived experiences, and how you eventually portray them.

Example in practice

Article: Folkes (2022)
Article focus: It shows how to move beyond simple 'shopping list' descriptions of positionality to understand the actual dynamic of positionalities.
Article strengths: It uses the concepts 'in/visible characteristics' to understand basic elements of positionality and shows how researchers can use conversations with colleagues and interviewees to engage in reflexivity about positionality. Through examples from her own research, we see the transience of positionality and how it influences both the construction of the research problem and its outcome.

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21

A DECOLONIAL PRAXIS FOR RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Bukola Oyinloye and Bowen Zhang

Introduction

In addition to critiques of the agentic limitations of the concept of 'experience' (Deuchar, 2022), scholars have critiqued research on other topics such as international students' pedagogical practices (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023) and participation (Straker, 2016), among others, for reproducing stereotypical and colonial representations of international students (Chapter 6). In this chapter, we align with these critiques but also extend them by offering some ideas about how we might do research with international students differently. We write as two female, UK-based, international early career researchers from China (Bowen) and Canada-Nigeria (Bukola) with complex experiences and identities (Chapter 8). We argue that concepts from decolonial thinking, or decoloniality, can be useful in helping all researchers (not just those who position themselves as 'decolonial') resist dominant ways of researching which deepen the colonial gaze on 'Othered' international students (Chapter 5) to avoid reinforcing and normalising the hegemony of Western knowledge forms.

Decoloniality refers broadly to the "perspective[s], concept[s], analytic[s], practice[s], and prax[es]" (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, p. 3) conceptualised from experiences of the colonised to reveal and contest the darker side of modernity (Western, capitalist ideas of 'development') and the constitutive role that coloniality played in the emergence of modernity (Mignolo, 2018, p. 112; Dunford, 2017). According to Dunford (2017), coloniality is constitutive of modernity in three ways: 'modern' capitalism; 'modern' democratic (political) institutions; and Western knowledge systems, underpinned by enlightenment ideals. Of particular interest to us is the third way, specifically how the hegemony of enlightenment forms of knowledge production, predicated on a

"disembodied, placeless thought", disavows other knowledge forms or ways of knowing (Dunford, 2017, p. 387). Decolonial ethics, underpinned by decolonial theories, seek to offer alternate, non-Western responses to ethical questions about how to live together in a global world with legacies of colonialism and realities of coloniality (Hutchings, 2019; Moosa-Mitha, 2022). Decolonial ethics scholars draw from additional decolonial concepts, namely border thinking and pluriversality. In this chapter, we similarly draw from these concepts to situate our critical considerations in research with international students.

Border thinking entails thinking with the "subaltern knowledges and cultural practices world-wide that modernity itself shunned, suppressed, made invisible and disqualified" (Escobar, 2004, p. 210). Borders are where global coloniality, that is, experiences of domination, dispossession, and epistemic injustice, are felt (Dunford, 2017). They are geographical locations but also epistemic (Dunford, 2017), racial, sexual, religious, aesthetic, linguistic, and national (Mignolo, 2018) and, ultimately, experiential ones. Although borders may be thought of as formerly colonised places, the emphasis is on epistemology. The host country's higher education institution, particularly in the West, as a site of hegemonic knowledge production, may be understood as a type of 'borderland' (Icaza, 2017), a place where international students are Othered (Chapter 5), labelled as unengaged, viewed as uncritical, etc. (Chapter 7). Border thinking is, therefore, a way of thinking about normative questions from the experiences of the Other, a way of reflecting on and from their geo-political experiences. As such, it is an 'epistemic location' from which to critique capitalist modernity using the experiences of coloniality (Dunford, 2017). As international researchers with our own experiences of coloniality in host institutions, our positionalities (Chapter 20) deepen our ability to border think and proffer the critical considerations in this chapter.

Pluriversality relates to the values, practices, policies, worldviews, etc., underpinning the normative ideas about how we may live together in a global world (Chapter 14). For Dunford (2017), a value is pluriversal if and only if it satisfies two conditions. First, it must be procedural, that is, conceived through real intercultural dialogue (which may take creative forms) across places, cultures, worldviews, etc. Second, it must be substantive, that is, the procedurally conceived value has the right to be different and must be considered of equal standing as other values, provided it does not disrupt the survival of other values. Since research with international students typically examines cross-cultural places, concepts, perspectives, etc., pluriversality is useful when seeking to do such research in a way which avoids the imposition of hegemonic Western values.

In what follows, we draw from these concepts to provide some critical considerations around key aspects of research with international students. We focus on the research topic; ethics framework; methodology/methods; and analysis

and reporting. We discuss these separately for simplicity while recognising that these aspects are often interlinked in the research process. We apply border thinking to how we think about the overall process of research with international students from students' perspectives, and to the notion of reflexivity, or how we think about the influence of positionality, that is, our social and political positions (Chapter 20) on our research, including our identity, particularly as part of the ethics framework and the analysis and reporting phases. We apply border thinking not to essentialise participants' culture and strip it of its time and place (Dervin, 2011) but to underpin border researching, a way of approaching research with international students from the perspectives and experiences of students (see Chapter 1). We apply pluriversality primarily to the research topic and methods. By applying these concepts, we hope to offer opportunities for how research, no matter its theoretical or methodological orientation, may be reimagined. Researching decolonially requires understanding how coloniality is reproduced within our research. We consider these ways and, in response, consider how our doings and beings as researchers of, and with, those categorised as 'Others' (Chapter 5) may be used to contest coloniality (Chapter 6) in research with international students.

Critical considerations

The research topic

As this book demonstrates, scholars are increasingly critical of the predominantly deficit depictions of international students in the literature (Section 2). Often, these deficit framings stem from research which seeks to explore the challenges that international students – often defined as homogeneous groups within their national boundaries (Chapter 1) – face in 'assimilating' to their host country's pedagogical practices assumed as 'standard' (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023; Straker, 2016). Unsurprisingly, research designed to unearth problems and challenges do as intended and, in the process, reproduce uncritical deficit assumptions about international students' critical capabilities, classroom engagement, experiences, motivations, and aspirations, among others. Moving towards a decolonial gaze of capabilities (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023) and assets (Zhao & Carey, 2023) can help produce research which challenges these assumptions.

Applying the first pluriversal condition – process of formulating value – to research topics engenders this 'move' by foregrounding international student participants in the research process. Meeting the condition requires engaging in real intercultural dialogue with international students to collectively or collaboratively determine topics worthy of study and questions worthy of being asked (see also Chapter 22). Such dialogic approaches offer opportunities not only to extend the current, fairly narrow, often deficit-laden range

of research topics, that is, beyond well-worked topics such as international students' acculturation processes, stresses, and academic experiences (Chapter 3; Jing et al., 2020; Krsmanovic, 2021), but also to critically interrogate why such topics merit inquiry in the first place (Straker, 2016). Broadening and deepening the range of topics also suggest moving beyond academic, social, or other on-campus experiences to include other dimensions of international students' lives (Chapter 16; Abdullah et al., 2014) which may be explored in interdisciplinary and intersectional ways for a richer understanding of the complexity of international students' lives (Chapter 8) and identities (Chapter 1). Problematising the notion of 'experience', Deuchar (2022) suggests that the concept contributes to perceptions of international students' vulnerabilities while only partially illuminating their agency. He advocates for the more agentic notion of 'practices' which, for him, better illuminates students' contributions to and interactions with their educational, social, and other spaces without implying the need for students to integrate into these spaces.

The second condition, thus, underscores the need for researchers to recognise international students' epistemic validity and legitimacy (Hayes et al., 2022). The dialogic approach hitherto discussed requires acceptance that the topics students may be interested in pursuing or wish researchers should pursue, are of equal standing, even if they are different, and as long as they do not limit the expression and existence of other worlds. To the extent that it is possible, in addition to co-conceiving topics, involving students in the research process (Chapter 22), or including researchers from student participants' demographic (Chapter 20) further ensures a recognition and avowal of students' epistemic capabilities. Notably, the co-creative process inherent within pluriversality requires an acceptance that one's position as the all-knowing researcher may no longer hold. A decolonial praxis brings with it a realisation of the tenuous nature of individual, all-knowing claims to knowledge and expertise (Mignolo, 2018).

The ethics framework

Conventional ethics processes in many host countries, particularly in Western/ Anglophone institutions, are typically underpinned by Western normative/ ethics ideals assumed universal (Oyinloye, 2021). Pluriversalising our ethics frameworks, therefore, suggests, on the one hand, that researchers accept that Western and non-Western normative ethics concepts are of equal importance and merit, at the least, consideration within our ethics frameworks. On the other hand, it suggests the need for an intercultural dialogical process of determining which values should underpin our research conduct. This implies interrogating, for example, whether Western research ethics' preferences for individual participation and written consent are relevant for student

participants from more collectivist societies and with more collectivist orientations (Tauri, 2018).

Given institutional ethics processes in many host country institutions in the 'West' tend to make challenging real engagement with participants until approval is obtained, researchers may feel cautious about engaging international student participants in such dialogues a priori. In lieu of real dialogue, textual or literary dialogue (Song, 2023) may be explored, that is, engagement with the textual, oral, or performative sources of the philosophies, epistemologies, worldviews, etc., which most closely represent those of participants. In other words, researchers will need to engage with and examine alternative sources such as historical or fictional literature, film, etc., which best represent those of their participants or engage with people from similar cultures outside the participant demographic. However, the two pluriversal conditions offer limited guidance on how we may put the accepted and dialogically conceived values into practice as we conduct research. For Hutchings (2019), this requires embodied, reflexive practice that is situated within the contexts and objectives of research. This, for her, may require exercising border thinking, or bracketing one's existing ontological and ethical commitments to be able to reflexively respond to and negotiate situations from the perspectives of those being researched (see also Oyinloye, 2022). Adopting a decolonial praxis in thinking about the ethics framework of research with international students, therefore, requires not just disrupting the hegemony of the enlightenment ideals which underpin such frameworks but also disrupting their referential positioning during the conduct of research.

For simplicity, we have discussed the ethics framework as a specific phase of the research process. However, the concepts we draw on in this chapter are embedded within decolonial ethics and, as such, we highlight that ethical choices underpin the entire research process and not just the institutional ethics approval process.

Methods

Researchers are increasingly creatively reflecting on the methods they employ in research with international students to disrupt coloniality by legitimising students' epistemological frames (Hayes et al., 2022) and amplifying their voices. Deuchar (2022) suggests that research with international students has primarily been undertaken using surveys, questionnaires, and interviews and argues for a wider range of qualitative methods, including go-alongs; participatory methods; ethnographic methods such as participant observation; and narrative inquiry and autoethnographic methods. Hayes et al. (2022) suggest the use of artefacts, within a broader multimodal methodological approach. Lomer and Mittelmeier (2023) are proponents of more culturally diverse techniques, multi-institutional or multi-sited studies, as well the generation of data

from longitudinal or multi-iterational studies. Moreover, they suggest exploring data beyond what is easily available and accessible in researchers' own contexts. In addition to generating rich data, these diverse methods increase students' participation (Deuchar, 2022) and, therefore, their epistemic contribution to research about them (Chapter 22). The methods also potentially reshape the balance of power between the researcher and students. Nevertheless, for Hayes et al. (2022), the methods, and by extension, methodology, applied should have a decolonial epistemological, that is, philosophical, basis (Barnes, 2018; Hayes et al., 2022).

In addition to specific methods, language is an important consideration in disrupting coloniality (see also Chapter 25). Researching in participants' languages (Zhao & Carey, 2023) not only challenges current dominant languages of knowledge production but also enables participants to better communicate their worlds. Critical linguistic reflexivity, the explanation and exploration of linguistic positionality (Cormier, 2018) thus extends decolonial praxis towards the language of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Decolonial considerations can also be made during participant recruitment, particularly for more qualitative approaches. For example, in research with Chinese international students, Cui (2015) and Zhao (2017) employed a 'Chinese way' to recruit and build rapport with their participants. In other words, they engaged in an approach familiar to participants, that is, by conveniently sampling people whom they already knew or snowball sampling through referral from an intermediary and adjusting researchers' identities depending on their participants. Doing this challenges colonial, disembodied forms of producing knowledge (Dunford, 2017) and legitimises participants' ways of knowing (Hayes et al., 2022).

Analysis and reporting

Border thinking is helpful in thinking about how we analyse and thereafter write up research with international students (see also Chapter 26). Where the research is conducted in participants' languages, the question of which language to carry out the analysis is particularly relevant for qualitative research where coding analytical methods are common. To think and research from the border would be to analyse in the language of data collection, but whether this is possible depends on the linguistic capabilities of the researcher or their team.

Where data involves transcription or even translation, it is particularly useful to think about researchers' roles in transmitting participants' discourses (Zhao & Carey, 2023). As part of analysis, translation can reproduce the hegemony of Western knowledge and norms where participants' words are translated word for word, that is, seeking lexical equivalence (Sutrisno et al., 2014), instead of delving into the non-Western contexts and presenting the

details of the sensemaking process to the reader (Zhao & Carey, 2023). To operate decolonially within this colonial constraint, some scholars suggest moving beyond lexical equivalence and towards conceptual equivalence which translates ideas (Cormier, 2018) thereby offering insight into participants' culturally embedded worlds (Zhao & Carey, 2023). Other practices may involve retaining key phrases in the source language (Oyinloye, 2021; Zhao & Carey, 2023), a practice which not only accords space to and makes visible the 'Othered' language but also invites readers familiar with the language to create their own interpretation. Further still, some researchers employ amplification, the inclusion of additional information to the translated text beyond what was in the original extract (Poblete, 2009, as cited in Zhao & Carey, 2023).

In addition to these linguistic analytical considerations, a decolonial praxis also extends to considerations of how international students are represented in the text (Dervin, 2011; Robinson-Pant & Singal, 2013), including how students are (in)advertently 'Othered', that is, through the deficit framings discussed earlier; pseudonymisation or anonymisation conventions; and demonstration of how participants' epistemological frames are legitimised in the research process. With pseudonymisation or anonymisation, it is particularly important to consult participants to determine preferences around the assignment of unique identifiers, pseudonyms and, where relevant, the use and representation of photographs and other artefacts.

Other ways of moving towards a decolonial praxis in reporting include providing nuances and thick descriptions of context (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023); conducting a reflexive literature review or purposeful scholarly referencing, that is, including references from the Global South (Song, 2023) and by Global South scholars, particularly those that represent literature on international students in Global South host countries (e.g., Pham et al., 2021); and applying a reflexive theoretical or conceptual framework which applies Southern theories or adopts a critical approach to the 'Western' theories employed to interrogate the extent to which they are relevant for the study context or participants. Notwithstanding the language of analysis and translation, much research is still reported in English, and there remains considerable scope for research to be published or translated into other languages and for reporting to be open to oral or performative possibilities which disrupt the hegemony of the written form.

The above ideas apply to research underpinned by different methodologies. However, a few additional considerations are relevant for quantitative research. For instance, applying a decolonial lens to quantitative research implies ethically engaging in sampling and representation and justifying inclusion and exclusion criteria of target groups (Cokley & Awad, 2013). Moreover, the interpretation of statistical data should be done with care, rather than used to confirm the superiority of certain groups (Cokley & Awad, 2013) or, in the case of international students, reproduce deficit discourses.

Reflection questions

- How can I deepen my understanding of the ways coloniality is reproduced by myself and others in research with international students?
- In what ways may I move towards a decolonial praxis, for example, in the topic conceptualisation, interrogation our research ethics frameworks, rethinking our methods, etc.?
- To what extent am I able to meaningfully involve the values and views of the international student participants in my research?
- What challenges have I experienced or do I foresee in trying to apply decolonial ideas?

Suggestions for researchers

Engage in everyday decoloniality. We encourage scholars to reflect on mundane, everyday research practices to explore opportunities for decoloniality, for example, reflecting on who chooses the research topic and how, which authors we reference and why, etc.

Explore decolonial values, not just cultural referential values. Particularly where participants are from multiple cultural groups, it is important to dialogue with all groups to determine the values which will guide the research conduct for all.

Apply decolonial ideas also to quantitative research. The ideas in this chapter apply to diverse methodologies and are just as relevant for quantitative research. We encourage researchers to reflect on other ways these can be applied to quantitative research as well (see also Chapter 23).

Example in practice

Article: Zhao and Carey (2023)

Article focus: Inclusion of participants' language to challenge cliched discourses about international students. Use of Chinese phrases to demonstrate how Chinese international students' nuanced worldviews are misrepresented or oversimplified in English.

Article strengths: Application of a decolonial praxis in its use of language in its methods and analysis and reporting.

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22

IT'S ONLY FICTION UNTIL IT EXISTS

Co-designing research with international students

*Mollie Dollinger, Samridhi Gupta and
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Introduction

Mediated on three key values – respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility – s*tudents as partners* is an increasingly popular approach to repositioning the roles of students as collaborators, co-creators, and co-researchers of their experiences (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2018). Frequently defined as "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision-making, implementation, investigation or analysis" (Cook-Sather et al., 2014, pp. 6–7), students as partners have been evidenced to have numerous benefits for students and staff, as well as institutions (Dollinger & Lodge, 2020; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). As we will showcase through this chapter, student and staff partnership is also a useful lens to design research and explore ongoing challenges in or outside the classroom.

Students as partners, while a relatively new approach, is underpinned by decades-old participatory design-based practices. Ellis and Goodyear (2019) reflect on this in their book by writing that the students as partners movement have 'given a new lease on life' to participatory design activities, as they are often harnessed as the means by which staff partner with students (p. 228). To illustrate, participatory design activities such as 'listening rooms' (where participants speak openly to one another through guided questions) (Heron, 2020) or narrative vignettes are a few of the many activities that staff could use to build empathy with students – which is a key factor in creating a successful partnership (Dollinger, Brown et al., 2022).

For the purposes of this chapter, we will discuss how university staff (in either academic or professional roles) can partner with students towards research relating to students' experiences. We use the terms 'staff' and 'students' to discuss these cohorts, as we advocate that all members of the university community, whether they be students, academic staff, or professional staff can engage in research and become 'researchers'.

Also relevant to this chapter is the recognition that, while the growth of students as partners approaches has been promising, scholars have previously underscored that much of the work to date has taken a Western dominant perspective (Bindra et al., 2018; Cook-Sather et al., 2021). Scholars such as Liang and Matthews (2021a, 2021b) have stressed the need to understand the nature of partnership in different cultures and the experiences of partnership for students from diverse backgrounds. In this chapter, we highlight student partnership approaches as imagined by two international students from non-Western cultures. We will begin by summarising two participatory design activities that can be used to support student-staff partnership and co-research, and then each student will provide a fictional narrative of how this activity could have been embedded in their student experience. Through their stories, it is also our hope that readers will see the unique and valuable insights that international students can bring to research in higher education and be encouraged to consider co-design with students in future research projects.

Critical considerations: example participatory design activities to support students as partners

CoLabs

CoLabs are design-thinking workshops where facilitators use a range of participatory design activities such as storyboarding, mind maps, and role-playing to build empathy across different stakeholder groups or explore ongoing issues or topics with participants (Dollinger & Vanderlelie, 2021). CoLabs can be hosted either in-person or online (supported through software such as Zoom) and often put participants into small groups to engage in dialogue and/or find collaborative solutions. Data collected through CoLabs can include transcripts, recorded idea pitches, and/or discussion boards (Tai et al., 2022).

CoLabs are a useful participatory design approach for researchers seeking to generate ideas or solutions from student participants. They are particularly impactful when students are also invited to help design the CoLab activities, facilitate the workshop, and/or help interpret the results. In a recent use of the CoLab model at Deakin University, a student and staff research team (five students and six staff) co-designed and co-facilitated a series of CoLabs with diverse students to explore how assessment could be more inclusive (see Tai et al., 2022).

Activities included an initial brainstorming by asking participants through an online word cloud 'What are your goals in completing assessments at Deakin?' as well as using a virtual discussion board to have participants, in small groups, share ideas on what advice they would give teachers when designing assessments. Student partners then helped researchers make sense of their peers' ideas and data.

Cognitive interviews

Another useful approach that researchers can use to improve the clarity and usability of their research instruments is cognitive interviews. Cognitive interviews are where the researcher(s) asks research participants to verbalise aloud their thoughts while answering surveys or other research instruments (Nápoles-Springer et al., 2006, p. 21) to assess for validity. By implementing cognitive interviews, researchers can check the language of their instruments and ensure the instruments are fit for purpose. They are also a useful technique for researchers who would like to evaluate or explore the usefulness of learning resources, teaching practices, or student services. For example, a staff member could ask students to verbalise their thoughts about a particular video explaining a key topic in their unit or course, right after the students have watched the video with them. Or in another example, staff could conduct cognitive interviews with students as they browse a new webpage for a career service offered at the university, asking students as they scroll, 'Does that section make sense?', 'What are your thoughts on the layout of the page?'. Similar to CoLabs, cognitive interviews can also be conducted by students with their student peers as the participants.

Cognitive interviews can be a powerful tool for researchers seeking to understand how English as a Second Language (ESL) students may interpret resources or text. As described by Wildy and Clarke (2009), who used cognitive interviews to develop a survey that would be distributed across 13 countries, cognitive interviews can do more than test the instrument validity – they can also help researchers understand how culturally diverse respondents process feelings and experiences prompted by research methods.

Students' fictional narratives

Inspired by other scholarly works using self-narratives (Fyffe, 2018; Kelly, 2015), we, the student partners (Samridhi and Thuy-Anh), have been inspired to write our own fictional narratives to showcase how participatory design activities can be embedded into co-research with international students. While our stories are only small glimpses into how staff can harness partnership approaches, we hope they will encourage readers to consider how their next research project could be more collaborative. As seen later, Samridhi's story is about her idealised experience with a CoLab workshop, while Thuy-Anh discussed her ideal experience with a cognitive interview.

Samridhi's story

I am on my way to something called a CoLab workshop. I saw it promoted a few days earlier, with tutors telling us that both teachers and students would be facilitating the workshops. The purpose was to plan a Mental Health Wellness Week, and they wanted diverse student perspectives to ensure the event would be culturally inclusive.

At first, I didn't think I wanted to attend the workshop. I still felt intimidated by the local culture and the language, and I didn't think that my suggestions would be taken as seriously as the Australian students. What did I know about how to improve Australian universities? However, I reflected on the emphasis on diverse students and felt it was important to represent other students like me.

When I walked into the workshop, I saw small tables scattered throughout the room and a student and staff facilitator on each. In the first activity, we were asked to collectively create a mind map of common mental health issues and concerns. The student facilitator put me at ease, as they too were an international student and we had similar experiences. I shared a story about a time I met with a university counsellor when I first arrived in Australia. I told the counsellor that this was my first time accessing mental health services and they were surprised. Their reaction made me feel like there was something wrong with my culture. I told the group how condescending this experience was for me and that the counsellor clearly didn't understand different cultures.

As the activities progressed, I gained greater confidence in sharing my point of view. I asked questions like, "Why can't we have more non-Australian speakers at the event?" or even "Does every activity have to be in English?". It felt good to challenge the status quo, and I saw the researchers excitedly writing down my suggestions.

At the end of the workshop, the student facilitator approached me and thanked me for coming. They told me that they were going to publish the findings with the staff, and I would be sent a copy. I couldn't believe that the staff were truly partnering with the students, and I asked them to let me know when I can sign up to organise a CoLab research project too one day.

Thuy-Anh's story

It was almost 8:00 AM. I briskly walked onto the campus grounds for a very unlikely meeting with a university lecturer. This was the kind of meeting I would have never even considered possible several years back. A professor was asking me to participate in something called a cognitive interview. As they had explained to me, cognitive interviews were a mechanism for teachers or staff to understand how students interpreted text, like the readability or the logical flow.

As an ESL learner, I was invited to participate so I could offer specific advice on how to make the learning resources and assessment instructions more inclusive to international students. They told me that during the cognitive interview, I was the expert and they were the student. I must admit, it was the first time I truly became aware of how much my university cared about making international students feel valued, respected, and included.

During the interview, I tried my best to help the lecturer. I pointed out areas where the language was unclear or vague. I also suggested that additional text or resources might be useful, as some of the activities, such as writing a critical analysis essay (i.e., formal critique), may be new to international students. Additionally, I expressed my worries about how asking learners to observe an authentic educational situation for an assignment (e.g., in a local school) was putting international students at a disadvantage because we may not have the local connections that domestic students do to get us into these education settings in the first place.

As I was leaving, the lecturer asked me if I wanted to be more than an active participant in their research. I didn't know what they meant until they explained that I could become a co-author. They said they had conducted dozens of cognitive interviews with students but needed help interpreting the results and bringing it all back together. They thought maybe I could help them and I couldn't believe it! Of course, I said yes.

My only regret looking back is that more teachers didn't do this. For example, the Human Resources classes I took only ever explored Australian HR policies, even though more than half the class was from a country other than Australia. If teachers only took the time to reflect and research on their practice and to listen to students' perspectives, the education system would be so much more inclusive.

Reflection questions

Co-design with international students can be a powerful, transformational method to invigorate research. The inclusion of perspectives from both sides of academia (i.e., students and staff) can help identify, highlight, and challenge pre-existing power dynamics between staff and students, reiterating that staff have as much to learn as students do from the staff. Reflecting upon these opportunities, we found that co-designing helps break down the binary student-teacher relationship – thus, emphasising a synergetic relationship over a didactic one. One can continue to respect a teacher/staff for their expertise while simultaneously involving students to provide insight into their unique experiences. Co-designing opportunities bring in individuals from diverse areas with varying experiences, shifting the educational culture towards that of growth, introspection, and collaboration, reducing the hierarchy. As such,

co-designing is a dynamic and flexible approach that aims to decolonise knowledge construction (Chapter 21) and give space to diversity and partnership. This cooperative paradigm provides students with a platform to share their voices and perspectives making teaching processes more efficient, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of those involved. The attention to and consideration of co-designing with students also highlights that there is no monolithic student voice (Chapter 1) – Thuy-Anh and Samridhi have brought in their unique ideas and experiences, but these are not a prototype for every student experience. Students are there to provoke important conversations and reflections, not provide solutions.

However, our self-reflection also brings to light several key questions for staff engaging in research relating to the student experience, including:

- What provoking conversations do I want to have with international students? What do I hope to learn?
- How might international students as co-researchers support my understanding of research topics? What could be gained by seeing students as partners rather than objects in research?
- How can I approach international student voices and perspectives in a way that identifies and supports the needs of diverse cohorts?
- What culturally relevant knowledge do I need to consider when approaching co-designing with international students?
- What am I willing to unlearn through this research process?
- How could international students as co-researchers help address issues like stereotyping, Othering, or deficit narratives (Section 2)?

Through our chapter, we have also been able to reflect on the co-authorship between students and staff. It is a process which has proven beneficial for both participating parties. For the students involved in the production of this chapter, co-authorship presented as an unexpected opportunity to learn more about the research and writing process and experience firsthand the nuances of working with an academic. Rather than having to wait until postgraduate research, undergraduate co-authorship gave us (the students) a chance to explore the research process earlier on. Further, the co-authorship of this chapter and the suggested co-design research activities we shared through our fictional narratives also demonstrate how novices can meaningfully contribute to research.

Co-design approaches help researchers shift from research that is about international students, to research *with* international students. However, we recognise the potential challenges of student-staff co-authorship and co-research, much of which might be unfamiliar to staff (Dollinger et al., 2022). Staff interested in this process are encouraged to start small, for example,

hiring students to help facilitate focus groups or help analyse data as a first step. Because while there are challenges to co-authorship, we also advocate for more international students to be included in research that is about – or impacts – them. This is particularly true for studies that relate to international students, as there are potential cultural differences and implications when researchers interpret and speak for others. We encourage staff to refer to other key publications about participatory design and students as partners such as those found in the International Journal of Students as Partners (IJSaP) and Co-Design (a journal exploring human-centred design).

We also invite staff members to consider several key questions when planning for a co-authorship project, including:

- How can I design my research to be inclusive to student co-authors rather than have them conform to traditional research methods? What alternative formats can support their self-efficacy and engagement?
- What learning experiences am I offering to participating students? How will this co-authorship project enhance relevant skills?
- What collaborative structure can I set up to ensure students' authentic (rather than superficial) contribution, whilst also providing supportive guidance throughout?

Suggestions for researchers

Adhere to the principle 'nothing about them, without them'. The popular slogan 'nothing about them, without them' is often used by equity-deserving groups, such as people with a disability or Indigenous people (Heckenberg et al., 2018; Waldschmidt et al., 2015), to highlight the disconnect between positions of power and affected groups. Here we use it to stress that research relating to student experiences should also do more to include students in the research design, analysis, and ultimately, decision-making or change.

Challenge your stereotypes. Another key suggestion from the creation of this chapter is to remind researchers to always challenge their stereotypes or biases they may, perhaps unknowingly, hold (Chapters 4 and 20). It is too common in our university climates to hear comments such as 'international students don't like speaking up' or other biased remarks that misrepresent students. By taking a relational approach, such as co-design, researchers can learn more from students and reflect on their assumptions.

Recognise that co-design is a continuous cycle. The experiences, ideas, and perspectives of one group of students are situated in a specific time and place, and the co-design process must be iterative to stay relevant and fit for purpose. We argue that co-design with students extends beyond a single project or study, to be an ethos or long-lasting commitment to the inclusion of student voices.

> **Example in practice**
>
> **Article:** Ahmadi (2023)
> **Article focus:** This article explores the cultural sensitives relating to collecting and harnessing the power of student voice.
> **Article strengths:** This article deploys a participatory design methodology known as action research to collect students' perspectives and experiences through journals or questionnaires. The findings highlight small steps that can be taken to build a culture of partnership, as well as tangible recommendations to improve teaching practices.

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23

REFLECTING ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' VOICES AND EXPERIENCES IN QUALITATIVE DATA

A narrative approach

Cosmin Nada

Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, research with international students has been marked by a rather negative perspective (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014), in which deficit views of international students are constantly perpetuated (Chapter 7; Carroll & Ryan, 2007; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). Not only researchers but also educational practitioners, diverse institutional actors and policymakers end up reproducing such views, expecting international students to improve their supposed deficits, whilst higher education institutions can remain unchanged (Chapter 17; Nada & Araújo, 2017, 2019). Often, difference is treated as a problem in need of solutions, rather than a source of cultural diversity and learning for all. In this context, international students tend to be represented through research as individuals in need of "extra attention, if not remediation, of supposed 'deficits'" (Asmar, 2005, p. 291).

I argue that one of the most effective ways of surpassing these problematic conceptualisations of international students – for example, dehumanizing (Chapter 3), stereotyping (Chapter 4), Othering (Chapter 5), coloniality (Chapter 6) and deficit narratives (Chapter 7) – is to listen to their voices and complex experiences. However, it is not enough to listen to the voices of international students if research objectives and questions are already rooted in a problem-oriented perspective. In this chapter, I will describe the experience of conducting an in-depth narrative research at a time when I was an international student myself, in which the voices of international students were at the centre of the research endeavour and where I sought to understand the diversity and complexity of their migratory and learning experiences. Certainly, 'the' international student experience takes place in an international,

transcultural and migratory context of notable complexity, which renders its empirical exploration a particularly challenging endeavour. More broadly, the study of human experience comes with its own set of challenges. According to Plummer (2001, p. 7), experience and life form a "fluctual praxis always in flow and ever messy".

Critical considerations

In this context, I began to understand that listening to students' voices might not be enough, if evidence of their international experiences may not be readily available in their minds. For instance, students may not be fully aware of their ongoing learning processes (Mezirow, 1990; Nada & Legutko, 2022), thus they would find it difficult to provide insights about a process of which they are simply unaware. Considering that "questions should shape methods and not the other way around" (Plummer, 2001, p. 122), I, therefore, decided to move from a process of mere data collection to a more complex interaction in which research participants' reflexivity is stimulated and meaning is constructed through the interaction with the researcher. Acknowledging that the reflexivity of research participants does not often constitute a concern in many research designs, in line with Enosh and Ben-Ari (2016), I consider reflective processes as moments of "deliberate awareness, involving a contemplative stance and intentional activity" (p. 578). In other words, encouraging reflexivity among international students means deliberately engaging in a process of reflection on their own international experiences, giving them the necessary time and support to do so.

My choice of method was, hence, guided by this intention to give participants the opportunity to reflect upon their trajectories and potentially reach new understandings of their international experiences. I choose narrative inquiry to do so since it allows researchers to "get at information that people do not consciously know about themselves" (Duff & Bell, 2002, p. 209). In fact, I argue that one of the most important potentialities of biographical and narrative research lies in its capacity to surpass the typical process of *data collection*, engaging both researchers and participants in a process of *data construction*. Whilst narrative research can facilitate data construction, as opposed to its mere collection, other methods can be used to this end, as long as this intention is reflected by the research design.

Instead of starting from the assumption that our research subjects hold all the information that we need in order to achieve our research objectives, we should acknowledge the possibility that the information we seek may not be readily available for us to collect, as if we were picking vegetables from a garden. Drawing on this metaphor, before actually being able to harvest, it is necessary to plant the seeds, water the soil, and patiently wait for the vegetables to grow. The approach that I recommend for research with international

students is precisely one that allows researchers to 'grow' meaning rather than collect it, encouraging participants to reflect upon their own international trajectories.

Considering that "narrative research is not just a specific way of carrying out research, it is also a distinct way of viewing the social world and how we experience it" (Mitchell, 2013, p. 70), researchers working with international students should always clarify, in detail, the way they see (social) reality and knowledge production. That is, clarify the ontological and epistemological assumptions that guide their research (see also Chapter 4). In my research with international students, I regard reality as a fluid, ever-in-construction, and socially negotiated dimension. Especially concerning the experience of international students, I start from the assumption that each student's reality is different and singular. This requires a methodological lens capable of identifying students' subjectivities and continuously fostering them. In this sense, I subscribe to Ferrarotti's (2003, p. 35) view, according to which "a person is never an individual. It would be better to call him [sic] a singular universe".

Consequently, the fluidity and multiplicity of those 'universes' require a focus on students' lived experiences and not on the idea of 'facts'. According to Bochner (2001):

> It is not the "facts" themselves that one tries to redeem through narrative tellings. Rather, it is an articulation of the significance and meaning of one's experiences. It is within the frame of a story that facts gain their importance. Life stories may be based on facts, but they are not determined by them.
>
> *(p. 153)*

Rather than focusing on 'facts', and seeking to collect them, the focus falls on international students' experiences and how they are being constantly configured and reconfigured, and this renders them somehow immune to a traditional process of *data collection*. According to Mitchell (2013, p. 71), "narrative constructs and shapes reality rather than merely reflecting or mirroring it; narrative is reality and not just a representation of it". Indeed, students' experiences and realities are not simply sitting there, somewhere, patiently waiting to be collected. Instead, they are being narratively constructed and reconfigured throughout people's lives and sinuous trajectories; therefore, researching the diversity and complexity of international students' experiences requires a methodological tool capable of constructing meaning rather than simply collecting it. This dichotomy of data collection/construction is also intrinsically linked to the way we see our research subjects and value their knowledge. In England's (1994) words, "those who are researched should be treated like people and not as mere mines of information to be exploited by the researcher as the neutral collector of 'facts'" (p. 82). In this sense, engaging with international students' voices, valuing their knowledge and co-constructing meaning

constitutes a way "to produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently" (Lather, 2001, p. 200).

Drawing on the ontological and epistemological assumptions described earlier, I will now describe one possible methodological approach through which researchers can engage in collaborative knowledge production to value international students' knowledge of their own trajectories, whilst accounting for their complex experiences. This is key in avoiding deficit and reductive views of 'the' international student experience (Section 2).

Upon identifying the research participants, I engaged with them in a process of co-construction based on several rounds of interviewing sessions in the form of lightly structured in-depth interviews (Wengraf, 2001). However, for reasons of methodological consistency, I do not refer to these sessions as interviews but as *biographical encounters*, a term previously applied by other biographic researchers (Araújo, 2004). Such encounters are radically different from interviews in the sense that researchers do not continuously rely on questions to construct a story, and in turn, allow participants' life stories to emerge of their own accord (Yuen, 2008). After starting with a 'generative' narrative question (Riemann & Schütze, 1987) to elicit and provoke storytelling, researchers' "interventions remain very restricted" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 11). In my case, this question assumed the form of a request since international students were invited to recount their lives from the moment in which the idea of going abroad started to take shape. This request initiated the process of storytelling, starting from the time in which participants were still in their home countries, slowly progressing to the stage in which they engaged in mobility, and finally to the moment in which the research took place. Acknowledging that storytelling may not always be linear or follow a strict chronological order (Horsdal, 2012), participants were free to recount their experiences as it suited them and at their own pace.

Once the research participants concluded their storytelling, the recordings of the first session(s) were transcribed. Rather than simply sharing the resulting transcripts with the participants and booking a following biographical encounter to discuss them, the researcher met each participant again and read aloud, paragraph by paragraph, the text that had resulted from the initial storytelling. This strategy was rooted in the epistemological assumption that "if story-givers are to make sense of and provide coherence to their lives, they must have sufficient opportunity to read, reflect upon, and find meaning in their stories" (Larson, 1997, p. 467). After listening to each paragraph read by the researcher, participants were invited to comment on its content, complement it, or correct potential inaccuracies.

This methodological decision may seem rather unusual, especially since it is extremely time-consuming to read aloud the full transcript and then invite research participants to comment on every paragraph. However, this strategy was rooted in my objective to encourage research participants to reflect upon their international experiences and give them the necessary time to express

new reflections and potential insights. In other words, this dynamic was key for going beyond data collection and engaging in a process of data co-construction. With some research participants, the data construction process was so enlightening for both sides that we met up to five times in order to complete their narratives (the average duration of each biographical encounter was two hours).

This methodological decision emphasises another important aspect of research with international students that truly listens to their voices and values their individual experiences: its collaborative nature. As noted by Riessman (2001, p. 699), narrative data can be seen "as an interactional accomplishment, that is, as a joint production of interviewer and respondent". This is, in my view, key when conducting research *with* international students, rather than research *on* international students. According to Webb (2006, p. 228), this interactional process "stresses both the importance of the relationship and the acknowledgement of the expertise". Indeed, the relationship between myself as a researcher and my participants (Trahar, 2014) played an important role. To acknowledge international students' expertise and capacity of analysing and reflecting upon their own lives, I adopted a "researcher-as-supplicant" position believing that "the knowledge of the person being researched (at least regarding the particular questions being asked) is greater than that of the researcher" (England, 1994, p. 82). It is international students' themselves who are best qualified not only to recount but also to analyse their own experiences and, when conducting research *with* international students, we have to ensure that the research design allows the necessary time and space for that.

International students reflect on the actual research method

The fact that I was not merely collecting data but actually constructing it jointly with the research participants was confirmed by international students themselves. At the end of our last biographical session, I asked students to comment on their very experience of participating in this narrative research. One student clearly acknowledged the potential of this method for encouraging and fostering reflection:

> I never thought about these things, I never reflected on some of them by myself and, now that you are asking, I'm reflecting, I have a newfound respect for myself
>
> *(Jaidev)*

This excerpt is a confirmation of the relevance of this methodological approach which allowed international students to achieve new understandings of their own experiences. The research participants themselves ended up going beyond initial assumptions about their own trajectories, ascribed new

meanings to their experiences and verbally acknowledged this (transformative) process (Nada et al., 2018).

Together with the opportunity of reflecting upon aspects that could, otherwise, remain unquestioned other research participants noted that engaging in this research constituted a means of finding answers to questions that hovered over their lives for a long time:

> Sometimes people do not think about certain things or, if they think, they don't persist [with that thought] in order to find an answer. Some questions emerge but then they remain unanswered. Meanwhile, I think that during this phase, so short, we only had few encounters, I managed to find . . . answers for some questions.
>
> *(Corina)*

The in-depth character of this co-constructive exercise is notable, where persistence in thought led to answers to questions that could otherwise remain unanswered. Listening to the voices of international students is, therefore, just the very first step. Actively engaging with those voices and reverberating them is the most important. Of course, this requires time and dedication from both participants and researchers, and one could hardly engage in this co-construction process by conducting one-time interviews.

Reflection questions

- Once the research questions that I want to address have been defined, what are the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that will guide my research?
- Are my research design and chosen research methods consistent with the objective of conducting research *with* international students and not simply research *on* international students?
- How can I go beyond the mere process of data collection and engage, instead, in a process of data co-construction?
- How are my chosen methods encouraging research participants to reflect upon, question and give new meanings to their international experiences?
- How are my research design and my position as a researcher respectful of the knowledge that my research participants have about the topic being researched?
- Are my research participants given the necessary time and space to engage in reflection about their own international experiences?

Suggestions for researchers

Remain vigilant throughout your research to avoid reproducing the very deficit views that research with international students should overcome. As illustrated in this book, the subfield of knowledge dedicated to

research with international students is strongly marked by deficit and reductive views of their experiences. Since most of the theoretical and analytical frameworks on which you rely are inspired by previous research (Chapter 4), there is a risk of reproducing such views even without intending to. Continuous vigilance and reflection are therefore key throughout the entire research process. This can be achieved through the use of a research diary in which you can reflect on a weekly or monthly basis on how your research is going beyond the current understandings of international students. Also useful is to discuss your research with other scholars working with international students.

Consider that the knowledge that you might need to answer your research questions may not be readily available for 'collection'. According to Erichsen, "The discussion of the perceptions, experiences, and learning processes within international contexts is developing, but the process is difficult to describe, interpret, and conceptualize" (2011, p. 111). For this reason, a method that values the voices of research subjects and actively engages them in a process of data construction is fundamental. Engage in readings on methodological issues to become familiar with diverse approaches and understand their underlying assumptions and potential.

Make sure you are prepared to value the knowledge and diversity of your research participants' experiences. As noted by Elliott (2005, p. 29), "Narratives will emerge naturally during in-depth interviews (if only researchers are prepared to hear them)". Quite often, when we collect data through less participatory instruments, we end up extracting the information that we want and promptly silence our participants when they approach topics that we deem as going beyond the scope of our research. More often than not, the process of categorising our data happens without a deep reflection about why some elements are included in the analysis and others pushed to the side. Engaging with the diversity of voices, complex meanings and experiences is crucial when conducting research with international students. According to Bridges (2006, p. 98), "once we accept not knowing, really not knowing, then we can meet each other and the world with openness and innocence. Then we can create something truly fresh and valuable". To this end, it is important to develop your own analytical frameworks that can encompass the diversity of international students' experiences and do justice to their complexity.

Buckle up for the resistance you may find (even) within the scientific community. In a knowledge subfield marked by deficit and reductive views, the very objective of understanding international students' experiences in their diversity and complexity through a collaborative and interactional process of data construction can be interpreted as a disruptive act. Questioning existing logics and understandings through the use of methods that are not well-established in the subfield will place you in a vulnerable position. You should not be discouraged by this and use it, instead, as a motivation to further strengthen your theoretical, methodological and analytical descriptions.

Example in practice

Article: Trahar (2014)

Article focus: This article reflects on the experiences of the author as a visiting academic at a Malaysian university, where she interviewed international students and academics.

Article strengths: This article describes a narrative enquiry conducted with international students in Malaysia. Rather than collecting data, the author engages in a process of meaning co-construction, with a strong emphasis on research participants' reflexivity. The article illustrates some key advantages of engaging in biographical and narrative research as a means to understand the complex experiences of international students.

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CONDUCTING CRITICAL QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Keanen McKinley

Introduction

Researchers who conduct quantitative research with international students seldom approach their work from an explicitly critical perspective. For example, consider how researchers might define and operationalize *international student* as an indicator variable. Most researchers would be challenged to neatly define and distinguish international students, especially as new educational technologies further blur the line between students considered "at home" or "abroad" (Mittelmeier et al., 2021). From a critical perspective, though, quantitative researchers would question the utility of categorizing students as either an international student or a home student and further investigate how those labels perpetuate deficit discourses and systemic inequities (Section 2). Critical researchers would recognize categorizing students as either an international student or a home student creates an artificial "logical dichotomy" that maintains social relationships that favor the privileged and shape research agendas (Chapter 1; Sprague, 2016).

This chapter outlines how researchers working with international students can utilize critical quantitative approaches to conduct research that remains sensitive to international students, respects the diversity within international student populations, and challenges conventions to bring about greater equity and social justice. The first part of this chapter introduces critical quantitative research and reviews lingering influences on quantitative research, including positivism and operationalism. Then, drawing upon Critical Race Theory, this chapter outlines well-established approaches for conducting critical quantitative research and how researchers might apply them to research with international students.

Critical considerations

Rethinking quantitative research

Within social science research, all data are socially constructed and shaped by researchers, including quantitative data (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022). Although quantitative research concerns numbers, it is important to distinguish the numbers of mathematics, the result of logical calculations accepted as true, from the numbers of statistics, a form of applied mathematics that deals with uncertainty (Zuberi, 2001, p. xvi). Statistics are not "*necessarily* oppressive" (Gillborn, 2010, p. 271) but knowledge based on unquestioned quantitative methodologies privileges certain groups, naturalizing and sustaining their position (Sprague, 2016). To understand how quantitative research can privilege or marginalize groups, researchers should approach their work from a critical perspective.

Quantitative criticalists are researchers who use "quantitative methods to represent educational processes and outcomes to reveal inequities and to identify perpetuation of those that were systematic . . . [they] question models, measures, and analytical practices, in order to ensure equity when describing educational experiences" (Stage & Wells, 2014, p. 1). In addition to questioning the technical aspects of quantitative research, these researchers investigate the history behind research practices and conventions. For example, Zuberi (2001) details how the problematic eugenics movement continues to influence contemporary research practices and conventions, specifically by defining populations by race and class.

One enduring influence on quantitative (as well as qualitative) research is positivism. Positivism can be defined as a philosophy that "the methods and procedures of the natural sciences are appropriate to the social sciences" (Bryman, 1988, p. 14). Positivists view scientific knowledge as the "paragon of rationality" (Howe, 1988, p. 13) and often endorse objectivism, the idea that meaningful entities exist independent of consciousness and experience (Crotty, 1998). Many researchers now acknowledge the problems of positivism, instead subscribing to some philosophies like postpositivism (Phillips & Burbules, 2000), yet such offshoots remain at odds with critical approaches to quantitative inquiry (Tabron & Thomas, 2023).

Operationalism is a concept closely associated with positivism that should also concern researchers who work with international students. The doctrine of operationalism requires researchers to precisely define concepts and develop procedures for measuring them – concepts without operational definitions have little or no use (Bryman, 1988). Philosophically, operationalism can be considered discredited, though it remains contentious because it continues influencing approaches to operationalizing concepts, constructs, and variables (Williams, 2003). The limitations of operationalization can be made clear with population statistics, including data on race, ethnicity, and international student status.

Population statistics are particularly important to research with international students. Indeed, many researchers begin their articles by citing the number of students that go abroad for higher education (Glass & Bista, 2022), including in the introduction to this book. These statistics, like census data, are important because they shape our understandings of populations and view of the social world (Walter & Andersen, 2013). However, returning to the issue of operationalizing *international student* as an indicator variable, how would researchers define *international student* to calculate an accurate count of the international student population?

Since countries may use their own definitions of international students (Bista, 2016), researchers may turn to organizations like the OECD for international student statistics. The OECD defines international students as:

> those who received their prior education in another country and are not residents of their current country of study. When information on international students is not available, foreign students – students who are not citizens of the country in which they study – can be used as a proxy.
>
> *(OECD, 2022)*

This definition presents at least two problems. First, it suggests statistics on two different student populations may simply be combined. Second, it demonstrates how inappropriate research practices endure: using data on "foreign students" to represent students who cross borders for studies has long been a criticized practice (Kelo et al., 2006). Together, these problems demonstrate the difficulty of collecting data that represent international students well.

Population statistics lead to real consequences (James, 2008). In the case of international students, these statistics frequently fuel deficit discourses that suggest students need to be "acted upon" rather than "acted with" (O'Shea et al., 2016, p. 332). Categorizing students by country of origin, for example, emphasizes differences among students coming from abroad, as well as between international and home students (Lomer, 2018). These discourses can inform policies and initiatives intended to help international students, like "International Welcome Week," but instead lead students and staff to perceive a sense of segregation between international and home students (Schartner & Cho, 2017).

Conducting critical quantitative research with international students

International students face unique challenges and discrimination that must be addressed, but it is also important to acknowledge their resilience, strength, and role as agents of knowledge formation (Glass et al., 2015; Madge et al., 2015). Quantitative criticalists can work toward both objectives. By questioning long-standing conventions influenced by positivism and operationalism, quantitative criticalists can improve research practices and contest discourses that portray international students as deficient. Researchers can also highlight

the strengths of international students by bringing their experiential knowledge to the forefront using statistics and other quantitative data valued by decision-makers. Since few researchers who work with international students have published critical quantitative research, this chapter draws upon well-established approaches from the literature on Critical Race Theory to illustrate the potential of critical quantitative inquiry.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) "advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25). Over the last decade and around the globe, CRT has grown in awareness and importance for combating race inequities (Gillborn et al., 2018). CRT researchers challenge normative paradigms and critically assess unstated assumptions that underlie policies and decision-making (Teranishi, 2007). CRT researchers have also considered how CRT principles can be applied to the research process.

With regard to quantitative research, CRT researchers have proposed QuantCrit, a framework of five principles that should be used to "apply CRT understandings and insights *whenever* quantitative data is used in research and/or encountered in policy and practice" (Gillborn et al., 2018, p. 169). Although QuantCrit emerged from CRT, these principles can inform research practices in other (sub)fields. The following paragraphs outline how researchers who conduct research with international students might apply each principle.

The first principle states racism is a complex concept that cannot be easily quantified (Gillborn et al., 2018; Zuberi, 2001). Variables such as *race* and *ethnicity* are social constructs that vary by context and measures of these constructs risk "presenting a wholly *social* category as if it were a natural and fixed difference" (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022, p. 8). Researchers who work with international students could certainly relate this principle to research on racism and neo-racism (e.g., Lee & Rice, 2007) and extend it to other identities, such as gender. Continuing the example of international student status, an indicator variable oversimplifies the complexity of what it might mean to be an international student since students *become* international students rather than choose to be one (Carlson, 2013). Students' educational biography, including life course events and past educational decisions, can influence their intention to study abroad (Lörz et al., 2016). Indeed, "international student" is a temporary identity (Bista, 2016). Thus, simply labeling and analyzing a student as an international student overlooks the social processes that led them to study abroad, disconnecting from their interpersonal, historical, or physical context (Sprague, 2016). Researchers should also consider the intersections of identities and how students negotiate the dimensions of their identities in different contexts while abroad (Section 3; Bryant & Soria, 2015). More explicitly, researchers should reflect upon their own positioning to student identities and consider including a

positionality statement in their research (Chapter 20; Castillo & Gillborn, 2022; Tabron & Thomas, 2023).

Researchers must take care not to conduct analyses or draw inappropriate conclusions that associate identities with any perceived differences (Gillborn, 2010). This point underscores the second principle of QuantCrit: numbers are not neutral and can promote deficit discourses and normalize race inequities (Gillborn et al., 2018). Chapter 7 covers deficit discourses, so here the non-neutrality of quantitative data is highlighted. For example, consider researchers who have proposed that universities collect data on the percentage of international students by nationality to measure and benchmark their internationalization performance (Gao, 2019). Since the purpose of categorizing students this way legitimizes and values difference (Lomer, 2018), international students become portrayed as "repositories of exoticism or otherness" that home students can learn from, so it is perceived as problematic when international students do not interact with home students (Page & Chahboun, 2019, p. 874; see also Chapter 19). Therefore, rather than using quantitative data to improve the experiences of international students, universities primarily benefit and risk entrenching deficit discourses (Lee & Rice, 2007). One way to draw attention to systemic issues is to use alternative labels for variables in statistical analyses. For example, Van Dusen and Nissen (2020) use *race/racism* and *gender/sexism* in their analysis. Researchers who work with international students might, when appropriate, use terms like *race/neo-racism*.

The third principle of QuantCrit states categories, particularly race, are neither natural nor given. As a social construct, race cannot be neatly parsed into mutually exclusive categories (James, 2008; Zuberi, 2001). Researchers may, thus, struggle to use a suitable number of categories: too few categories fails to recognize the diversity of identities, yet too many categories reduces cell counts to the point researchers cannot draw meaningful conclusions (Gillborn et al., 2018; Teranishi, 2007). Critical researchers suggest participants be allowed to select categories that align with their personal identities and provided the space to add their own categories (e.g., citizenship on surveys). Researchers can then decide when it may be necessary to collapse categories for analyses, making sure to report those decisions (Castillo & Gillborn, 2022). Additionally, instead of dummy coding variables (e.g., using 0 or 1 to indicate if the student identifies as Asian American), researchers might use effect coding (using –1, 0, or 1, where –1 indicates the base group) to compare outcomes across groups rather than to a reference group (Ro & Bergom, 2020). Race is just one dimension of identity, though, and strongly tied to CRT is intersectionality (Chapter 8). Researchers have explored how to adequately capture the intersectionality of identities in statistical analyses. For example, including interaction terms in regression models may be appropriate, though much work remains in this area of research (Bauer et al., 2021). Collectively,

these strategies can help address the limitations of categorical variables but they should be used with care.

The fourth principle of QuantCrit is data cannot "speak for itself," meaning quantitative data and the significance of analyses can be interpreted differently (Gillborn et al., 2018). As a way to feature the experiential knowledge of marginalized groups, some CRT researchers have adopted mixed methods research approaches (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2021). The general growing acceptance of mixed methods research has the added benefit of tempering the debate about whether quantitative approaches are appropriate for critical inquiry since they can further social justice and are often associated with pragmatism and prioritizing the research question over the research approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mertens, 2012). CRT researchers have also developed counter-storytelling. Counter-stories are narratives that expose a majoritarian story that "distorts and silences the experiences of people of color" by presenting a non-majoritarian perspective in an accessible manner grounded in real-life experiences and empirical data (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 29). Counter-stories do not just present research in a novel way – they ask readers to learn how to hear and listen to the messages within them (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Researchers who work with international students may find counter-storytelling helpful for reaching and informing a wider audience among anti-oppressive activists, too (Gillborn, 2010). Regardless of their study's design, researchers should consider how to spotlight the experiential knowledge of international students.

The last proposed principle of QuantCrit states statistical analyses have no inherent value but can contribute to the struggle for social justice (Gillborn et al., 2018). However, researchers who work with international students must be prepared to defend critical quantitative research. Critics suggest quantitative research is at odds with critical inquiry, yet these arguments tend to be more about positivism than quantitative methods (Sprague, 2016; Stage & Wells, 2014). Further, as some proponents of mixed methods research might argue, critical inquiry is determined less by the researcher's selection of methods than by their motivations and research questions (Stage, 2007). Quantitative research must play a role in critical inquiry: it is already being used in decision-making and the promotion of deficit courses, so refusing to use quantitative approaches restricts critical researchers to other research approaches that may hold less sway over policymakers and powerful actors (Bryman, 1988; Walter & Andersen, 2013).

Concluding thoughts

Despite growing interest, there is limited published CRT research that uses quantitative approaches (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2021). There are likely even fewer critical quantitative studies among research with international

students. This chapter shows how researchers can utilize critical quantitative approaches in their work by drawing upon the CRT literature. In addition to studying approaches established in other research (sub)fields, researchers who work with international students should pursue several areas of future research. For instance, what critical inquiry has already been undertaken with international students, and what challenges did researchers face? How can researchers improve data collection efforts, such as including data on students' prior life experiences or recognizing various international student statuses (e.g., dual citizenship)? As a budding area of research, how might researchers work with quantitative research methodologists to develop guidelines on using statistical techniques and strategies for critical inquiry? And since many researchers who work with international students identify as practitioners, how can individuals working "within the system" and that rely on institutional data produce research that meaningfully questions the status quo? There is great potential for these areas of research, though this should not be misconstrued as an invitation to conduct critical quantitative research. Research with international students must aspire to the principles of critical inquiry to produce research that thoughtfully contests dominant discourses and practices to create a more just society.

Reflection questions

- What research paradigms inform the design of my study?
- How might QuantCrit principles support my study design?
- How are variables defined and categorized in my study? If *international student*, *home student*, or other socially constructed terms are included in my analysis, how are those terms defined and operationalized within my study? What are the limitations of those definitions?
- Have I reflected on how social constructs underpin and influence the variables included in my analysis?
- What identities and processes are related to my research question and what measures might be conceptually meaningful?
- Have I included a positionality statement and reported the decisions I made throughout my study that could have affected my conclusions?
- Had I made a different decision, how might that have impacted my conclusions?

Suggestions for researchers

Justify why a quantitative approach was warranted and acknowledge the limitations of this approach. While researchers should always aim to conduct rigorous research, critical quantitative research is largely determined by the researcher's motivations, though good intentions are insufficient

(Gillborn et al., 2018). A high-quality study is more likely to be "ethically defensible" (Rosenthal, 1994, p. 127).

Consider who is the intended audience for the research. Counter-stories can be an effective means to challenge majoritarian stories and reach individuals less familiar with quantitative research, but some decision-makers may prefer traditional forms of research or perceive counter-stories as a threat to the status quo (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Embrace the complexity of what it means to be an international student. Quantitative data and analyses are complicated by the numerous definitions of *international student*, but Sablan (2019) notes, "CRT thrives on the recognition of the complexity of race relations" (p. 182). Similarly, critical researchers who work with international students and embrace the complexity can uncover areas for future research that, more importantly, lead to nuanced understandings of what it means to be an international student, dismantling deficit discourses and advancing social justice.

Example in Practice

Article: Gillborn (2010)

Article focus: This article is presented as a counter-story to outline the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative research on race equality in education.

Article strengths: This article highlights how quantitative research may be influenced by researchers and misinterpreted by decision-makers and other consumers of research. As a counter-story, the author's arguments are clear and easily understood and serve as an example for researchers who work with international students.

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25

LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN RESEARCH WITH AND BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Considerations for research design and practice

Richard Fay, Jane Andrews, Zhuomin Huang and Ross White

Introduction

This chapter focuses on research with and by international students and explores some issues arising from linguistic diversity of which researchers, across disciplines, need to be aware. These issues may arise directly from the research topic focus; for example, co-author Huang led a team exploring the multilingual choices made by UK-based Chinese international postgraduates (Huang & Fay, 2022). They may also arise less directly; for example, co-author White led a study of a global mental health intervention in Uganda involving a community of multilingual speakers (Andrews et al., 2018a, 2018b). Either way, the linguistic diversity of the people and contexts involved is important for research design and practice. The issues arising might be instrumental in nature; for example, what is the effect on the research if the data is translated before it is analysed? They might also be political; for example, how will it be negotiated which of the languages shared by the researcher(s) and research participant(s) will be used?

We begin by rehearsing why linguistic diversity should be valued, then consider how the linguistic aspects of research are often under-explored except in disciplines where language is the main focus, and then review a prototypical trajectory of researcher development with regard to linguistic diversity, a trajectory which may culminate in more purposeful and activist stances regarding linguistic diversity. We conclude with some practical considerations regarding linguistic diversity in research with and by international students.

Critical considerations

Valuing linguistic diversity

In ecological and sustainability debates, biodiversity is critically important. Our parallel belief is that linguistic diversity is critically important for the sustainability of our collective knowledge-work – the richer the linguistic and epistemic resources (as sustained, for example, through research with and by international students), the more likely that our collective knowledge-work can respond to the contingencies arising in a changing and unpredictable world. The worlds of research are strikingly diverse in linguistic terms and many of those involved – researchers and participants and also supervisors, examiners, reviewers, editors, and publishers – have rich linguistic resources. So, too, do many of the contexts and phenomena being researched and the academic settings in which the research is located. This linguistic diversity is a significant shaping influence both on research with international students (e.g., studies in which they are co-researchers and/or participants providing insights for someone else's study) and by international students (e.g., the studies they undertake for their university programme).

The practices of researchers are shaped by:

- micro aspects including their individual linguistic repertoires, those of the participants, the communities involved in the research, and the institutional homes for the research; and
- macro aspects including the national and institutional language policies where the researchers are based and/or focused, and the linguistic aspects of the international landscape.

Regarding the macro aspect, we are currently based in the United Kingdom and, whilst we recognise the different linguistic ecologies of our own institutions and the varied national language policies impacting those ecologies and our practices, we also note the dominant role of English in our contexts and also in the international research landscape. Some might view this role benignly (with English as a lingua franca of research and its dissemination), but this dominance can lead to a devaluing of work undertaken and disseminated in other languages. In this chapter, we acknowledge but seek to move beyond the linguistic particularities of our current research ecology and focus instead on the broader issue of how research design and practice considerations are shaped by the particularities of their research ecologies. Our hope is that this broader focus may speak not only to readers working in linguistic contexts which have parallels with ours but also to researchers in contexts with different linguistic considerations in play.

Policy

University institutional language policies regarding teaching and learning, research, and international aspirations and engagements, can be unhelpfully under-specified. Staff and students may have to identify by themselves the linguistic opportunities, challenges, and responses for research with and by international students. For instance, when research involving multiple languages is reported with data quotes in the original languages as also translated into English, are both sets of words for quoted data counted? And how precise are the referencing guidelines for when the citations include works in languages other than English?

Such under-specification is also apparent in macro-level frameworks and guidelines. For example, in the British Educational Research Association's (BERA, 2018) ethical guidelines, 'language' is only mentioned six times, and the British Psychological Society's *Code of Ethics and Conduct* (BPS, 2021) does not directly address language. In research domains where language is a more central concern – for example, the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL, 2021) *Recommendations on Good Practice* – many of the issues raised have wider applicability. For example, we would argue that the linguistic diversity embedded in many studies with and by international students means that the following advice given to applied linguists would be helpful for researchers across disciplines:

> [Para.2.11] . . . Given that applied linguists work in a range of languages other than just English, the practices of translating such documents into multiple languages, using accessible and jargon-free writing, and providing translators to explain the process of gaining consent are often crucial to the data collection and should be planned for in advance.

All those involved in research with and by international students should make themselves conversant with such macro-level guidelines as these may shape research design and practice. Whilst the advice provided may be skeletal, the act of familiarisation can trigger the researcher to systematically consider opportunities and challenges arising from linguistic diversity.

From triggered awareness to purposeful action

In response to this policy under-specification, the Researching Multilingually project (Andrews et al., 2020; Holmes et al., 2016, 2013) identified a prototypical researcher development trajectory regarding the opportunities for and challenges of using multiple languages in research. This involves an initial stage of realisation of such opportunities and challenges, a realisation often triggered by a supervisory discussion:

> I first realised that I could, in the sense of having the permission to, conduct my doctoral research multilingually when [my supervisor] explained

the way in which I could handle my multilingual data. Being permitted to present the data in its original language within the thesis surprised me to the extent of not believing it at first.[1]

Improved policy specification might make such moments of realisation more likely. So, too, might researcher development sessions as informed by the literature on linguistic diversity in research design and practice.[2]

The next stage in this trajectory is the systematic consideration of the possibilities and complexities. One framework for this is suggested by Davcheva and Fay as based on their study of one language (Ladino), researched through fieldwork largely undertaken in another (Bulgarian), with analysis largely in a third (English) and several options for dissemination (Spanish, Bulgarian, and English) (Davcheva & Fay, 2016; Fay & Davcheva, 2014). They developed the following four-space heuristic for mapping the linguistic possibilities (Davcheva & Fay, 2012) which we extend for research (a) with and (b) by international students:

- **Space 1: the <u>researched</u> phenomenon**, that is, what is being researched (the "what")
  - (a) for example, research on the linguistic practices of international students during their studies;
  - (b) for example, research by international students on the experience of technology in education.
- **Space 2: the <u>research</u> context** (the "where")
  - (a) for example, our current research "homes" are largely English-medium or English-foregrounded UK universities;
  - (b) for example, our international students are similarly located.
- **Space 3: the <u>researcher</u> linguistic resources** (the "who")
  - (a) for example, a UK-based researcher may have multiple linguistic resources (see, for example, Lim & Huang, 2022 where the linguistic resources of Chinese international students and the second researcher (i.e., also co-author of this chapter) include both Chinese and English);
  - (b) for example, a UK-based international student researching a phenomenon in her home context may have multiple languages relevant to that context and those in it (see, e.g., Chahal (2015) where the researcher's linguistic resources facilitated data collection when interviewing street-connected children from different parts of India).
- **Space 4: the <u>representational</u> possibilities**, that is, dissemination in English only and/or (an)other language(s) (the "for where" and/or "for whom"),
  - (a) for example, the decision by researchers working with international students to quote them in their original languages as well as in English in the project report (e.g., Huang & Fay, 2022);
  - (b) for example, the decision by a Chinese international student in the United Kingdom to present the reflections of the Chinese participants

participating in her MA dissertation primarily through their original Chinese formulations with only a basic English translation.

All those involved in research with and by international students could use this or a similar heuristic to map linguistic opportunities and complexities shaping research design and practice. From this research consideration, informed choices may follow (as have been explored using the construct of purposefulness or intentionality; Stelma & Fay, 2014; Stelma et al., 2013). Zhou (2010) researched the academic acculturation experiences of international students (like herself) in the United Kingdom. She was concerned that the English-foregrounded nature of her research location might lead her to miss philosophical understandings of concepts available to her through her Mandarin language resources and reflect "Western biases" in English-medium literature. In her thesis, she reports how she reconciled English and Mandarin conceptual (re)sources and decided (in the absence of clear institutional policy/practice specifications) how to (re)present the Chinese terms and their translation, for example, "文化 [culture]".

A translingual mindset and researcher activism

Our discussion so far is based on the value of linguistic diversity, an increasingly well-delineated path. Thus, attention has been given to the linguistic resources available in student and staff communities within the "multilingual university", particularly in the Anglophone world (e.g., Preece & Marshall, 2020) and has considered how, within and outside the university classroom, real linguistic landscapes (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006) generated within the institution by its members needs to be recognised. From this thinking about institutions and linguistic resources, new conceptualisations of international students emerge. For example, Preece (2019) explores UK-based postgraduate experiences might negotiate their university experience as plurilingual social actors. Such understandings encourage us to think about the total set of linguistic resources that each of us might bring to our knowledge. This applies to individuals who can read for gist in a number of languages and not just the one(s) dominant in their university context. It may also apply in collaborative, interdisciplinary teams like ours where English is the dominant language of our institutions but does not have to define our shared thinking. A translingual researcher mindset could be developed in researcher education in Anglophone university settings like ours (Andrews et al., 2018b) – researchers might be encouraged to consider linguistic possibilities within and beyond their own linguistic repertoires. To this end, Andrews and Fay (2020, p. 201) provide five principles to develop a translingual mindset in researcher education:

1. Language needs to be acknowledged as central to the research process . . . beyond questions of translation and interpretation.

2. Issues of researcher identity, positionality, and values cluster together with linguistic considerations in research projects.
3. Acknowledging linguistic repertoires within research (e.g., those of researchers and research participants) may improve the transparency of the research process but be challenging for the researcher (e.g., increasing the amount of data to be worked with) that needs to be acknowledged.
4. Foregrounding language in research involves mutual learning between research teams, such as doctoral researchers and supervisors, as critical and challenging questions are addressed in the research.
5. When researchers foreground language in their research, they are likely to need to challenge institutional norms and expectations as shaped by global practices (e.g., in publishing).

The final point in the above list foregrounds researcher activism to challenge institutional norms and expectations as shaped by global practice. Whereas researchers investigating linguistic citizenship (Stroud, 2001; Williams et al., 2022) tend to focus on researcher activism in communities and wider society, the concept of linguistic citizenship (and the related call to activism) is as important within academic institutions and the research practices which they support. Gramling, a researcher who intentionally writes multilingually to challenge the monolingual assumptions of the Academy (reported in Andrews et al., 2020, p. 83; see also Gramling, 2016), exemplifies such linguistically oriented researcher activism:

> Choosing to present in German and write in German is a little bit opaque and eccentric . . . because review committees can't read my German, [university-wide] tenure committees don't read German, and so immediately by [sic] making those selections undermined my own portfolio at my own university.[3]

He recognised that publishing in German and Turkish was unhelpful for gaining tenure. However, during the Researching Multilingually project,[4] he aimed to disseminate 20% of his research in languages other than English. This spotlighted his "monolingual privilege" and also provided an opportunity to problematise the academic capital of writing well in English. His decision stemmed from a reflexive awareness of the privilege embedded in his status as a native-English speaker, an ideological intentionality to "abdicate privilege" and an ethical intentionality to be morally accountable for his professional choices despite the pull towards that which naturally conferred him with a sense of self-worth and made him "feel good".

Such activism is not easily sustained, and by the end of the project, he regretted that he was no longer actively seeking to disseminate his research in different languages because the opportunities were not often available to

him unless he pushed. Gramling's stance (and others reported in Andrews et al., 2020) has encouraged us to propose that doctoral researchers and their supervisors need to "practise researcher activism with particular regard to injustices arising from epistemic and linguistic hierarchies" (Fay et al., 2021, p. 120). The value of such an activist habit is not restricted to doctoral-level study – it is an important dimension for all research by and with international students. Collaborative research often provides the linguistic diversity needed if researchers are to escape their own linguistic and epistemological silos.

Concluding thoughts

Embracing the total linguistic repertoires we each bring to research and knowledge-work enables us to also begin opening out the epistemic diversity informing our work. As the literature (e.g., Crystal, 2000) on language endangerment reminds us, different languages frame understandings of the world in particular ways, and the loss of a language is the loss of a way of understanding the world. Framed differently, knowledge-work informed by thinking in a smaller number of languages represents a potential loss of the insights arising from a wider linguistic pool. Thus, we can see the strong links between linguistic diversity and epistemic diversity. Our earlier call for a translingual mindset, thus, also points to the value of developing what might be termed a transepistemic mindset.[5] Embracing the total epistemic repertoires we each bring to knowledge-work – the epistemic resources we are engaged with through, for example, our disciplinary cultures – is a first step. Below, we provide some reflection questions and practical suggestions intended to help you do likewise

Reflection questions

- What are my own linguistic and epistemic resources and what resources do those with whom I research have? Which of these resources play a part in my research activities?
- In my researcher experience, what languages and sources of knowledge are typically present in the works with which I engage and in the ones which I myself produce and seek to produce?
- Are there particular policies available to me that shape which linguistic and/or epistemic resources are valued in my research environment?
- Are there practices of which I am aware that support or hinder the valuing of the linguistic-epistemic dimension of biocultural diversity?
- In my experience, how is the linguistic diversity demonstrated by university staff and international students viewed alongside the dominant languages in that context and in global research dissemination?

Suggestions for researchers

Be purposeful regarding your own linguistic and epistemic resources. Take stock of these resources, reflect on which might play a useful role in your research processes and products and on how they might shape your work, and purposefully use these reflections in your research and design and practice.

   Problematise the dominant linguistic resources in your context and in the research with which you engage. Monitor others' use of linguistic and epistemic resources in their research, reflect on what has shaped the use of particular resources, and consider how much linguistic and epistemic diversity is evident in their work.

   Embrace a critical intercultural ethic (see Example in practice below). Recognise the role of epistemological power and the way that certain ideas – and their origins and means of transmission – can accrue epistemic authority and dominate other less powerful ideas less powerful in their origins and means of transmission (see also White et al., 2022).

   Transparently demonstrate accountability regarding your linguistic and epistemological practices. Practise epistemic and linguistic activism by through your research by challenging the existing epistemic hegemonies and injustices evident in the wider environment.

Example in practice

Article: Huang et al. (2017)

Article focus: This article reflects on the term 念 (niàn) in Chinese – or Mindfulness in English – and its use across time, space, languages, cultures, disciples, and practices.

Article strengths: This article highlights the power dynamics, language issues, and knowledge-work practicalities that scholars in an increasingly interconnected knowledge landscape need to mediate. It proposes an intercultural ethic to help guard against the potential for epistemic injustice arising from these power dynamics.

Notes

1 The author was reflecting on the multilingual aspects of her doctoral study (Chahal, 2015).
2 For example, International Journal of Applied Linguistics 23(3), (2013), Gibb et al. (2019), Holmes et al. (2022), Magyar and Robinson-Pant (2011), Mar-Molinero (2020), Pant-Robinson and Wolf (2016), Temple (2008), and Temple and Edwards (2002).
3 End-of-project reflection, January 27, 2017.

4 *Researching multilingually at the borders of language, the body, law and the state.* Project [AH/L006936/1]. www.researching-multilingually-at-borders.com
5 We like this term for its equivalence to translingual which is an embedded part of our conceptual apparatus but we note that it is already in use also with reference to trans/gender thinking.

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26

RE-CENTRING CONSTRUCTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN WRITING

The 'empire writes back'

Catherine Montgomery

Introduction

Written discourses associated with international students have continued to be influenced by the history and geopolitics of colonialism and continue to be influenced by 'Western' colonial attitudes (as highlighted in the preceding chapters of this book and in Perraton, 2014; Montgomery & Nada, 2019). In the United Kingdom, colonial relationships with 'Commonwealth' countries such as India have often formed the basis of early forms of international education, particularly during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the cultural attitudes inherent in these historical relationships have influenced current understandings of international students (Chapter 6; Perraton, 2014). From a European perspective, Ploner and Nada (2020) underline the persistent influence of 'postcolonial heritage' on the written constructions of international students. The intersection of these colonial discourses and the influence of marketisation has had an impact on the ways the written accounts of international students have contributed to the deficit discourses present in both theoretical and methodological contexts (Chapter 7). The use of language in writing about international students has mirrored these attitudes and both research and practice publications show evidence of language and terminology that has contributed to perpetuating negative constructions with potential neo-racist implications (Lee, 2020).

This chapter presents an analysis of some of the key ideas and concepts that are used to construct international students and explores the ways in which these ideas dictate writing practices about international students. The chapter presents suggestions for more positive and productive positions in writing about international students and draws together a range of critical issues raised in the book through an analysis of the language and discourses which are common when writing up research with international students.

It is important to underline the relationship between key ideas or concepts and the words we use in writing as these exert an influence on thinking. When we write using particular concepts, we position ourselves both philosophically and methodologically. In his work on text and discourse analysis, Fairclough (1992) discusses the connection between texts and their social purposes, exploring how text and discourse analysis can explain the ways in which knowledge and social practices are structured. Discourses are the patterns of language which provide the histories and homes for ideas and concepts. Peters (2007, p. 17) notes, 'Concepts have histories. They also have homes'. Written text not only reflects social structures but can also actively construct them, and, most importantly for this discussion, discourses position people in different ways with ensuing social effects (Foucault, 1972).

In this chapter, some key concepts in writing about international students are explored and the potential impacts of ways of writing about these are considered. These ideas include approaches to writing about 'the international student experience', the dominance of Western theory and positionality in writing.

Critical considerations

'The international student experience'

In previous research in this area, there has been an emphasis on the idea of 'the international student experience' (Montgomery, 2010), and whilst this is not in itself detrimental, research has at times had loose conceptions of the meaning of 'experience' in this context (Deuchar, 2022). In addition to this, the ways of writing about international students' experiences have at times obscured both the agency and the social and cultural capital of international students (Inouye et al., 2022). An over-emphasis on 'the international student experience' also highlights a binary understanding of 'international' and 'home' students rather than concentrating on the experience of all students (Chapter 1; Ryan, 2013).

Deuchar (2022) notes that the idea of 'experience' can be a powerful concept if it is understood as a form of knowledge that all students bring to the classroom. Furthermore, the more productive concepts around experiential learning locate experience as embedded in learning itself (ibid.). Therefore, in writing about international students' experiences, researchers should avoid a decontextualised construction of experience and should acknowledge that the experiences of international students vary and take on diverse forms in different regions or countries and across different institutions and disciplines (de Wit et al., 2015).

Writing about 'the international student experience' has also frequently engaged with ideas around 'adaptation' processes, and concepts such as 'adjustment' and 'integration' have been prominent in discussions (Chapters 1 and 16; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). These ideas were common in writing in the 1990s and tended to be drawn from disciplines around social psychology,

with implications around the need for international students to adapt to fit the (implicitly inflexible and unchanging) social and educational context of the host university (Chapter 2). These ideas and discourses gloss over the dynamic nature of an actively intercultural context where international students contribute knowledge and can engender positive change in the curriculum and learning cultures of higher education (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014; Stein & Andreotti, 2021). There remains a strong interest in writing about the psychological, social and cultural ways in which international students experience transition in education but this should be constructed as embedded in a dynamic learning environment where there is mutual experiential learning (Chapter 16; Deuchar, 2022).

Furthermore, writing about 'the international student experience' could be more usefully contextualised in debates around the mobility of academic talent and the ways in which this forms part of shifting global knowledge centres (Jöns, 2015; Xu & Montgomery, 2019). Here, educational geographers have a strong contribution to make and the literature around international educational place and space should be an integral part of writing about international students (Chapter 15; Waters, 2012). Brooks and Waters (2018) write about the intersection between materiality and mobilities in international education, and they highlight the importance of structural constraints on the agency of individuals in contemporary higher education. Migration studies are also very important in informing writing about international students' experiences as it provides alternative perspectives on the complexities of the multiple policies and contradictory pressures which constitute 'experience' (Riaño et al., 2018). These sorts of critical and interdisciplinary perspectives have much to offer the subfield when we are writing about the experience of international students and consolidate suggestions from this volume to engage in an interdisciplinary literature review during the formative stage of research design (Chapter 2).

The dominance of 'Western' theory

Despite the fact that those writing about international students are frequently international students themselves based in or returning to the 'Global South', research literature in this subfield often excludes the knowledge traditions of non-European writers and thinkers (Montgomery, 2019, 2020). Western education tends to devalue non-Western knowledge, and theory generated in the 'Global North' is seen to carry more weight. In this way, important alternative ways of thinking and writers from the 'Global South' are often erased or excluded by the dominance of a Western canon of literature explored in writing by privileged monocultural and monolingual voices (Connell, 2007, p. 4; Montgomery, 2020). This is a process the Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji terms 'extraversion' or the ways that researchers in the 'periphery', or the 'Global South' tend to defer to the institutions, the ideas, the concepts

and the methodologies of the Global North (Hountondji, 1983). Research in this subfield is global in nature but continues to be overshadowed by the dominance of the 'Global North'.

In an analysis of the doctoral theses contained in the British Library repository EThOS, which is a searchable open-access collection of almost half a million doctoral theses completed in UK universities, it became apparent that there was a predominance of Western theory used by international students as a lens to explore their non-Western educational contexts (Montgomery, 2019, 2020). In research with international students, many of the theses relied on concepts commonly associated with Western theory such as social capital, global citizenship or communities of practice. Connell (2007, p. 46) highlights the marginalisation of non-Western literature as a gesture of exclusion, where writers from the colonised world are not considered a part of the dialogue of theory. Connell (2007) also notes that contemporary education has 'recreated its own canon' and that in an unequal society, the 'the view-from-below' is required to challenge dominant ways of thinking (Connell, 2007, p. 221).

This underlines the need for those writing about international students to include a more pluralist discourse which includes and foregrounds the writing of non-European writers. When we write using theories which are located in particular knowledge traditions, we are constructing specific perspectives on international students. Querejazu (2016) notes that theories are processes through which we write and make sense of our environment and our reality. Querejazu (2016) uses the concept of 'the pluriverse' (see Chapter 21) to argue that introducing different ontological positions, such as relational visions of the Andean worldview, can enable alternative ideas and outcomes to emerge. It is crucial in constructing a genuinely internationalised understanding of international students that non-Western theory is written into research in this subfield. Writing with a plurality of global theory may act as a dialogic approach which can enable the co-existence of various voices rather than privileging a monocultural and monolingual voice (Fernández-Cárdenas, 2015; de Wit & Jones, 2022). Writing in this pluralistic way can avoid the prevalence of simplistic or binary thinking and reasoning or entrenched coloniality (Chapters 6 and 21).

The role of positionality in writing

Positionality re-occurs in a broad range of literature around international students, internationalisation and decolonisation (see also Chapter 20). Fairclough (2006, p. 6) asks: 'But what is the international community'? Who are 'we'? . . . The issue of who 'we' or 'you' are is particularly important when writing about international students as they are at a nexus of intersectional cultural and colonial positions. Emerging literature around international students is beginning to see the intersections between internationalising and decolonising the university (Montgomery & Trahar, 2023). This suggests that in

writing about international students, researchers should be aware of the language and discourses of decolonising agendas, particularly in relation to race and Whiteness in the academy. One of the main implications here is acknowledging one's own positionality in writing because our colonial or postcolonial positions influence the words we choose and the constructions we make.

Writing about our positionality as researchers is crucially important, and it is important for a writer to introduce themselves and their educational, social and cultural position. This can be a first step towards constructing critical perspectives on international students in writing research. It is very important to highlight the role of self-reflection, reflexivity and positionality in writing in this subfield.

Introducing discussions of positionality in writing about international students also underlines the complexities of our own and others' intersectional identities. Focusing on intersectional identities in writing about international students (Section 3) helps to avoid writing in binaries, such as those suggested in the terms 'home' and 'international', and it is important that the complexities and intersectionality of international students' identities should be reflected in researchers' writing in this subfield.

Conclusions and reflections

Ways of writing about international students can either contribute to perpetuating negative constructions with potentially neo-racist implications (Lee, 2020) or allow an opportunity for an 'Empire writes back' approach (Ashcroft et al., 1989; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012), which could re-centre international students in international education. The aim of this chapter was to raise awareness of the impact of the ideas and concepts used in writing about international students. As we write, we situate ourselves in a cultural and linguistic landscape which has implications for the construction of knowledge and ways of thinking (Collyer et al., 2019). Constructions of international students are dynamic and changing, but innovation in themes and methodologies is in the minority and more needs to be done to construct more intersectional and critical accounts of international students (Vavrus & Pekol, 2015). Whilst there has not been space in this chapter to consider the crucial significance of methodologies in research with international students (see other chapters in Section 5), intersectional research goes alongside more participatory approaches which would generate more focus on writing *with* rather than *about* international students.

Reflection questions

- How are the words I am using to construct international students situating my research in cultural, social, political, historical and disciplinary contexts?
- How can I construct a more contextualised and less binary perspective on international students in my writing?

- What are the ideas, concepts and critiques, including from other disciplines, I should be aware of when choosing words and forms of language in writing about international students?
- How can I ensure that I acknowledge myself and my cultural positions in writing about international students?

Suggestions for researchers

Demonstrate an awareness of the cultural, social, political, historical and disciplinary contexts of research with international students in your writing. Read the recent literature on critical internationalisation studies and ensure that this informs your thinking and your writing about international students. The work of Vanessa de Andreotti and Sharon Stein is a good starting point, as is the new journal which presents brief critical voices: *Critical Internationalisation Studies Review*.

Carefully consider the grammatical structures of writing, for instance, how "international student experience" and "experiences of international students" are denoting subtly different things (the first suggesting homogeneity in experience, the second recognising plurality).

Avoid simplistic or binary thinking and reasoning in your writing. Look beyond the literature on international students which presents simple, binary or anecdotal constructions of international students. Always check the evidence base in papers you cite and consider whether the methodology is robust.

Always consider and acknowledge your own positionality in your writing. In order to place ourselves in the colonising and post-colonising world, we must understand and recognise our own positions. Readers of your work need to know who you are and where you have come from culturally, educationally and politically so that they can read your work from an informed position.

Example in practice

Article: Song (2016)
Article focus: This article introduces a special issue of East Asia. It summarises a range of articles which present critical research which de-essentialises the construction of international students.
Article strengths: The article presents summaries which will guide researchers in their conceptualisations and therefore their written constructions of international students. These include pluralising curricula and programmes, proposing a reshaping of research and teaching practices away from cultural essentialism. Readers can engage with these critiques of the nature and practice of globalised higher education and explore these in further depth by reading a selection of the full papers.

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