



Research

Perceptions of faculty in health care and social sciences on teaching international students

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Abstract

Background: Increased cultural diversity of higher education (HE) students has created both learning opportunities and teaching challenges for vocational health care programs. An internationalized curriculum reflects sociocultural issues in professional practice and enhances intercultural competency amongst students. However, the literature is limited in seeking the key perspective of those delivering the curriculum. This study explores the awareness of health care teaching staff on issues related to internationalization, perceived responsibility in supporting international students, and teaching practices toward an inclusive curriculum.

Methods: An anonymous questionnaire was developed, consisting of different types of questions (Y/N, Likert scale, and multiple choice) with opportunities for free text on each main theme. The questionnaire was sent to all 205 staff members with a teaching remit at Cardiff University Schools of Postgraduate Medicine, Healthcare Sciences, Pharmacy, and Social Sciences.

Key findings: In all, 102 responses were received. Despite 70% of respondents feeling that the responsibility for an improved learning experience for international students lies beyond them—with the University, their School, or students themselves—inclusive teaching practices that consider cultural diversity are widely reported. Some individuals feel unprepared to teach international students, citing a lack of cultural knowledge and training. The proportion of international students is perceived as the most important aspect of internationalization. Other key components of national and institutional HE strategies, such as “internationalization abroad”, appear to be relatively unimportant. Findings from this study provide a basis for all higher education institutions educating health and social care professionals to reflect critically on the realities of engaging with the internationalization of vocational programs.

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Keywords: Internationalizing higher education; Staff perceptions; Inclusive teaching practices; Preparedness for internationalization

Introduction

Continued professional development in health and social care practice over the last decade has seen a shift in approach from the individual professional to the multi-disciplinary team, with the patient at the center. Greater diversity within health care professionals and improved cultural competence of health care providers have been

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highlighted as key strategies to improved patient outcomes.¹ Implications related to issues of cultural competency for pharmacy have been explored in both the United States (US)^{2,3} and the United Kingdom (UK),⁴ with an emphasis on internationalizing higher education (HE) provision, and specifically pharmacy education, to prepare graduates to meet emergent patient needs.

US universities have piloted and evaluated a range of teaching practices^{5–8} that emphasize cultural sensitivity and respect of diverse patient backgrounds. Such diversification of curricula aims to create opportunities to broaden students' intercultural perspectives, and ultimately impacts positively on patient health needs. Cultural diversity within the classroom is the other main approach toward internationalizing learning in higher education, seen by many educationalists and policy makers as being of critical importance to the future health of HE in the US and the UK.^{9–14}

A critical element of the likely success for both of the approaches above is engagement of teaching staff with the strategic framework of internationalizing learning. Lecturers are directly involved in improving the student experience, and thus share significant responsibility in ensuring quality of teaching and learning. In this context, it is surprising that teachers' perceptions of internationalization and the practices adopted to provide support for culturally diverse students have not been explored in a more systematic manner. Previous studies have compared staff and student views on internationalization,^{15–17} but with no specific focus on staff views or on health care HE.

The aim of the current study was to explore how teaching staff from a school of pharmacy, and three other health or social care disciplines at Cardiff university, perceive internationalization. Teaching staff views were sought on

1. awareness of cultural diversity and internationalization, related strategies, and available support;
2. perception of responsibility in supporting international students;
3. teaching practices toward providing an inclusive curriculum for international students.

Methods

To address the aims and objectives, a cross-sectional descriptive survey design was used.¹⁸ A questionnaire was adopted as the research instrument, which had the ability to collect large amounts of anonymous data from a relatively large sample in a timely manner.¹⁹ Responses could be cross-tabulated and an opportunity was provided for explanatory text.

Participants

The sampling frame consisted of all staff members with a teaching remit at Schools of Postgraduate Medicine, Healthcare Sciences, Pharmacy, and Social Sciences in

Cardiff University. Each of the four researchers identified all teaching staff in their own School, and their current e-mail address, through academic staff lists on the respective Schools' web page. In total, 205 eligible members of staff were identified. Each prospective participant received a group e-mail from the researcher within that School outlining the aims of the study, explaining the terms of confidentiality and anonymity and inviting participation in the survey (a link was provided to an online questionnaire). Staff involved in both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) teaching were asked to choose either PG or UG teaching for the purposes of answering the questionnaire.

Data collection tool

A questionnaire was developed based on previous studies on experiences of HE teaching of international students.^{14–16} The questionnaire consisted of a series of largely closed-ended questions of different types (Y/N, Likert scale and multiple choice) and was arranged into three main constructs that reflected the study objectives:

- (a) Perceived responsibility in supporting international students academically. A set of statements explored the individual's perception of his/her role as a lecturer in a culturally diverse classroom. Responses were based on strength of agreement with each statement. Individuals were also asked for his/her views regarding where the primary responsibility for an improved learning experience for international students lies.
- (b) Teaching practices influencing inclusive teaching and learning. A series of statements was presented relating to teaching practices that may alter the learning experience of international students, and participants were asked to state frequency of use (always, usually, occasionally, and never).
- (c) Awareness of cultural diversity in the classroom. To explore links between involvement in teaching outside of the UK and increased engagement in the process of internationalizing teaching practices, lecturers were asked whether they had taught at the university level outside the UK (excluding guest seminars, guest lectures, or similar). Respondents were additionally asked whether the topic of international students is a regular agenda item in scheduled meetings in their school.

To provide context to all of the answers above, and explore the ethos toward internationalization, the survey provided participants with a list of seven features that the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in the UK proposes would be included in a fully internationalized HE institution.²⁰ Respondents were asked to rank each statement in order of importance from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important). Participants were given the opportunity to

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