

ADVANCEMENTS IN DESIGN RESEARCH

11 PhD theses on Design as we do in POLIMI



edited by Lucia Rampino and Ilaria Mariani



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DESIGN INTERNATIONAL

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Internationalizing the Fashion Design Curriculum: Nurturing Internationalized Talents

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Abstract

Globalization has created a new norm that affects all aspects of our daily lives. We may have noticed that the fashion industry in our time has not only become more global but also more knowledge-based. The new realities and shifts in the job market have fundamentally changed our fashion education system. With an increasingly diverse student body, universities are requested to rethink their long-standing philosophies towards the emerging paradigm. There has been much discussion about ways in which more advanced systems can support the development of fashion education internationalization where there is an urgent need to nurture internationalized talents. Hence, with this study, the researcher intends to explore the operationalization practice of curriculum internationalization within and across the discipline of fashion design, while at the same time identifying potentially effective strategies to internationalize the fashion design curriculum. By applying the defined theory of curriculum internationalization and translating it into new practices, demonstrating the connection between the theory of implementation and the reality of implementation practice. The researcher hopes that the positive and practical results of this study might offer a valuable reference point and inspire other educators from different backgrounds to better explore the theory and practice related to curriculum internationalization in the future.

Introduction

When looking up the word ‘globalization’ in the etymology dictionary, we could find that the term derives from the word ‘globalize,’ which refers

to the appearance of global economic systems. In the book *The World Is Flat*, the American journalist Friedman (2006) conceptualizes three stages of globalization: Globalization 1.0 (from 1492 to 1800) shrank the world from large to medium, due to countries' globalization. Globalization 2.0 (from 1800 to 2000) shrank the world from medium to small, as a result of companies' globalization. Globalization 3.0 (from 2000 till now) brought the world from small to tiny, with individual becoming globalized.

We may have noticed that in such an unprecedented period of globalization, the jobs that once required low educational level or less specialized skills have substantially disappeared, while new job types that did not exist before have been created. The cross-border mobility of ideas, people, and financing, intertwined with innovation in communication and technology, are fundamentally changing the job market environment as well as our higher education system. There was much discussion about ways in which the more developed systems can support the growth of internationalization of higher education where there is an urgent need to nurture the internationalized talents.

With this study, the researcher intends to explore the effective operationalization practice of curriculum internationalization within and across the discipline of fashion design. The motivation for studying curriculum internationalization is due to its vital role in the university internationalization process. While fashion design as a young yet significant academic discipline needs to expand its entrenched practical-concerned paradigm and to include a broader range of research activities, the rapidly evolving landscape of the fashion education market worldwide requires universities to rethink their long-standing philosophies towards the emerging paradigm. By carrying out this study in the fashion design disciplinary context, it provides us with valuable insight and possible ways forward for developing internationalized curricula in different contexts. The researcher hopes that this study might offer a solid basis and reference point for relative future works.

Stating the problem

Over the past 25 years, internationalization has become a priority for both universities and governments. In the Bologna Declaration of 1999, two demands of internationalization were brought forward: 'cooperation and competition' (De Wit, 2011, p. 244). However, the definition of these two intertwined dimensions brought about confusion and misconceptions about what, why, and how to internationalize global education. As Barnett and Coate (2005) claim, one big challenge for internationalization of higher education depends on its

core concept of ‘curriculum.’ They observed that, in higher education, most educational programs and projects are proliferating, with ‘ironically scant attention’ (Green and Whitsed, 2015, p. 11) paid to the curriculum. ‘Curriculum design is rarely a reflective practice in universities’ (Barnett and Coate, 2005, p. 2). Leask (2015) concurs that, as a crucial concept, curriculum internationalization is ‘poorly understood’ and underdeveloped in practice across disciplines (Shiel and Takeda, 2008, as cited in Leask, 2015, p. 3). When dealing with internationalizing a curriculum, one of the fundamental questions was: ‘how can we internationalize the curriculum in this discipline area, in this particular institutional context, and ensure that, as a result, we improve the learning outcomes of all students’ (Green and Whitsed, 2015, p. 53)?

As the understandings of curriculum internationalization ‘vary in different disciplines and institutions’ (Leask, 2015, p. 27), there have been a number of practical and methodical inquiries into the relationship between curriculum internationalization and academic disciplines, circumstances regarding the discipline of fashion design are even fewer. Fashion is a remarkable indicator of cross-cultural interchange has entwined throughout our society. Today’s revolutionary change within the fashion industry and education market worldwide has evoked a great challenge and impact with regards to the current dominant paradigm in the fashion education system. Therefore, with this study, the researcher attempts to explore the boundaries between the dominant and emerging paradigm, by applying the defined theory and translating it into new practices, demonstrating the operationalization practice within and across this discipline area, while at the same time identifying the potentially effective practical strategies aimed at internationalizing the fashion design curriculum.

Research methodology

As the objectives of the study had not been previously studied comprehensively, the researcher decided to adopt an instrumental case study as the leading research strategy. The case study approach enables the researcher to gather ample data and to examine it closely within a specific context (Zainal, 2007). One particular case is adopted as an instance to shed light on the study’s questions. The structure of this study comprises means methods of data collection, which lead to a triangulation of methods (fig. 1) for the analysis. Since a single method can hardly shed light on a complex phenomenon, adopting multiple methods can help researchers develop a comprehensive understanding of the internationalized fashion design curriculum.

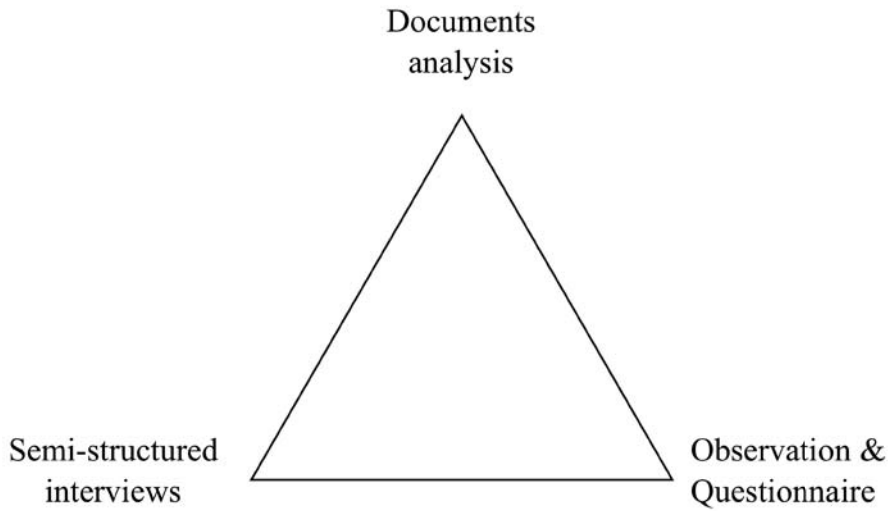


Fig. 1 – Triangulation of research methods..

Setting the scene

Fashion design education differs dramatically from country to country, due to their distinctive educational systems, various demands from local workplaces, and perceptions towards fashion as an academic discipline. This research stresses primarily the interaction between Italian and Chinese fashion design education systems. According to the *First Education Market Monitor Summit* in 2017, there is a pressing demand to analyze the Italian fashion education system on a global scale, while at the same time understanding the evolutionary trends and competitive positioning of the Italian fashion design schools. While in China, greater emphasis has been placed on design education, especially the curriculum system. Internationalizing the curriculum, as an essential aspects, has been assigned a key role in the internationalization agenda for higher education in fashion and design in China. In view of this context, a unique international program focusing on the internationalization of fashion design education between Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI) in Italy and the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology (BIFT) in China was established in 2014. With this program, the hope is to better explore the practices and strategies regarding the internationalization of the fashion design curriculum.

The program

The program between POLIMI and BIFT started in September 2014. The curriculum developers and researchers from both institutions believe that a program of this kind is a precious opportunity to investigate the connection between theorizing about the implementation and the reality of implementation practice. As of September 2018, there have been seven groups and a total of 79 students who have participated in the program. The participating students are third and fourth-year undergraduate students from various schools in BIFT, who take part in the program and spend an academic year in Milan. Even though this program has been highly valued and praised strategically, from a practical perspective, we can barely find other similar cases academically available for reference. Therefore, the researcher intends to delineate the program in detail and hopes the delineation of this case, the reflection, and the discussion might contribute to the current understanding and future studies.

Delineation and discussion

Review and assessment

In the early stages of analyzing the program, it is essential to clarify its goals and to think to what extent the curriculum should be internationalized (Leask, 2015). It is, therefore, fundamental to have a comprehensible understanding of the participating students, of their specialized skills and background, competencies and capabilities. This phase of curriculum internationalization process lays the foundations for mapping out the subsequent³ stages. In this study, three complementary methods are adopted to shed light on the issues at hand: documents analysis, student's competencies assessment, and interviews with curriculum developers.

Documents analysis

Before planning the curriculum structure, it is essential to compare the similarities and dissimilarities between different educational systems and approaches, in order to identify the gaps in the existing set of curricula. The researcher, therefore, carefully reviewed the curriculum profile from both schools. The documents analysis reveals that the pedagogical approaches

adopted in the two schools are rather different. In BIFT, the fashion-related majors are subdivided into various specific areas. The curriculum focuses more on the vertical training of student's intra-disciplinary skills and intra-personal competencies. In POLIMI, the degree programs are delivered in a systemic manner. The curriculum focuses more on the horizontal training of students' inter-disciplinary skills and inter-personal competencies. Different teaching methods train students with different abilities, it would be beneficial for students from both institutional backgrounds to work together and learn from one another.

Student's competencies assessment

The analysis of the written material related to the curriculum profile gives us a broad insight into a student's specialized background, while the assessment of a student's competencies is also considered valuable to curriculum planning. In this study, the researcher applied a specially designed students' core competencies assessment questionnaire, in order to acquire a general understanding of these students' competencies and abilities. Besides the numeric data collected through the questionnaire, the researcher also conducted a workshop at BIFT in 2016, intended to perceive the student's competencies further and to observe their attitudes when engaging with a differentiated studio-based teaching approach. The student's competencies assessment results suggest that the curriculum could be designed with the aim to train the following competencies:

- Cognitive: critical and reflective thinking, rational decision making.
- Inter-personal: communication and presentation skills, collaboration and teamwork, leadership, global awareness.
- Intra-personal: independent learning, self-awareness, self-motivation, flexibility, and adaptability.

Interviews with curriculum developers

During the early stages, interviews with experienced international curriculum developers provided essential knowledge while designing the curriculum for the program. The curriculum developers understand the learning processes of young students. They can correctly guide the curriculum towards an effective transmission of knowledge. In this study, the researcher has interviewed three curriculum developers from three different countries and institutions.

The interviews with the curriculum developers indicated that an international program of this kind should be viewed multilaterally:

- Firstly, it is fundamental to identify what kind of disciplinary knowledge and cultural experiences should be offered to international students.
- Secondly, it is essential to consider how to deliver the equivalent or appropriately differentiated knowledge and experience for both international and local students.
- Thirdly, it is crucial to balance the short-term achievements with long-term goals. The policymakers should direct and balance the values that the international students bring into the program and that they bring back with them.

Design and implementation

Based on the knowledge acquired, a ‘pro forma’ internationalized curriculum model (fig. 2) was elaborated for the program. The curriculum structure is composed of two complementary integral modules. The ‘polytechnic module’ and the ‘personalized module.’ This curriculum model has then been tested over two to three periods in order to gather student feedback in view of further adjustments and improvements.

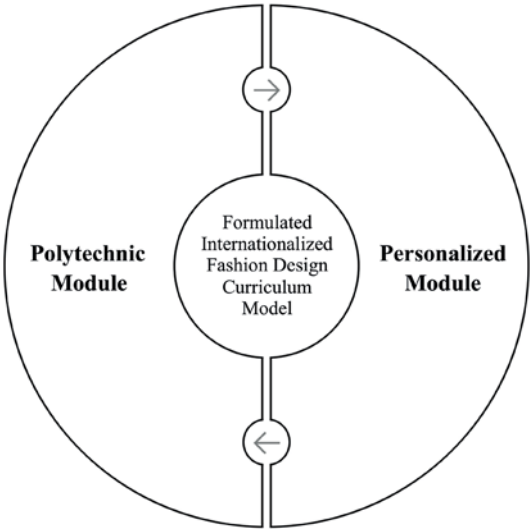


Fig. 2 – The formulated internationalized fashion design curriculum model.

The polytechnic module

In the POLIMI education system, the *laboratorio*, as a distinguishing characteristic of the university, improves and connects its fashion degree programs. In the polytechnic module, the priority is, therefore, given to the fashion design *laboratorio* courses. The ‘*laboratorio*’ is an educational innovation emerged at the end of the seventies in Germany. Those who supported this innovation considered that learning is not the product of a teaching process, but a process in which direct experience engages the learner. It is a place in which to combine theory with practice, to construct cognitive knowledge, and to work cooperatively. One entire *laboratorio* lasts a semester and sees the participation of a multidisciplinary team of professionals, designers, students from different design disciplines and cultural backgrounds. The courses aim to give students through short intensive workshops the most extensive knowledge of the fashion industry.

The personalized module

When talking about how to design the curriculum for international students during the interviews, the curriculum developers suggested that it is beneficial to design the corresponding teaching content and activities according to students’ various cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, for the program, a personalized module is integrated to complement the polytechnic module. This personalized module aims to emerge the formal curriculum with the informal and hidden curriculum, it helps students to overcome their cultural limitations, open their minds, and guides them to apply the knowledge they acquired immediately to the real world. This is achieved by involving the students in activities such as visiting museums, companies, international fairs, participating design events, seminars and workshops, helping them to fully immerse themselves and grasp the meaning of fashion and design ‘intuition’, as a way to also transfer tacit knowledge to the students.

Evaluation and adjustment

Curriculum design is a cyclical process: each time one course is taught, the feedback is collected from the students. As the tutor of the program, the researcher was able to observe and have honest conversations with students and teachers throughout the entire program. From the feedback and obser-

vation during the teaching and learning processes, several potential adjustments can be proposed for the improvement of the program:

- An integrated preparatory course: to reduce the impact of the teaching and learning styles' mismatch, and help students to build up self-confidence in their ideas and attitudes.
- A practice-led research methods course: to fill up each student's knowledge gap in design methods and help them develop logical thinking with regards to various practices.
- An improvement in designing the learning materials: since the English language is not the official language of these two countries where the program is delivered, more attention should be paid when designing the learning materials and activities.
- A potential online and remote-learning module: such a module should be considered for further revision in order to illustrate the program's flexibility.

Reflection on the practice

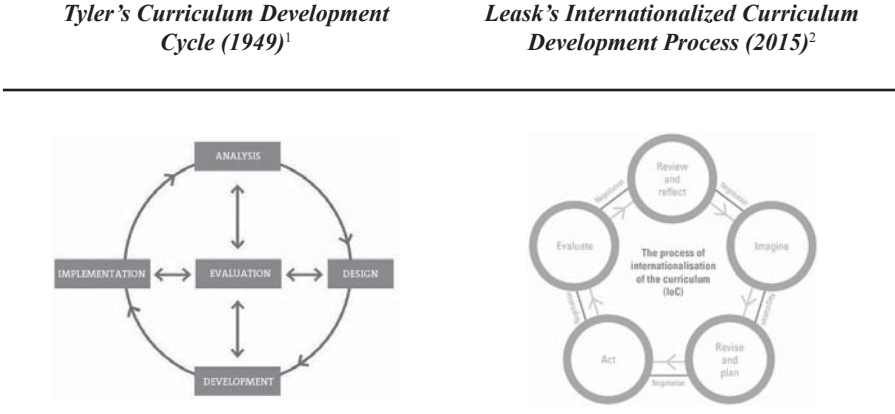
The development process of the internationalized curriculum

In 1949, American educator Tyler proposed a curriculum development cycle, providing a set of guidelines for institutions to formulate a curriculum fitting their purpose. Based on the traditional approach of curriculum development and review process, in 2015, Leask proposes a five-stage process of internationalization of the curriculum (tab. 1). Compared to Tyler's curriculum development cycle, Leask's process framework has one key difference: the *Imagine* stage. Leask (2015) believes that this stage could stimulate creativity by challenging the traditional and dominant paradigm, and including a broader and deeper engagement of the faculty while constructing the curriculum (p. 41).

However, during the practical implementation, the researcher observed that the boundaries between each *stage* as mentioned by Tyler (1949) and Leask (2015) were blurred, less clear-cut, sometimes even overlapping and repetitive. In order to avoid adopting a narrow focus when applying the frameworks, it would be advantageous to take a step back, to view the process from a relative broader-ranging standpoint of *phases*. Therefore, in this study, the practical side was carried out in three developmental phases: the prophase, the metaphase, and the anaphase. Every phase refers to major time segments that span the cycle of a curriculum internationalization process

from start to finish. With the stages considered as sub-phases, they could be adjusted and ‘customized’ to merge, to expand, to overlap, to interchange, in order to better adapt and reflect the specific implementation area of the process of internationalization of the curriculum. The relationship between the *phases* and the *stages* of the internationalized curriculum development is illustrated in fig. 3.

Tab. 1 – The development processes of the internationalized curriculum.



Four basic principles:

- What educational purposes should be the schools seek to attain?
- What educational experiences can be provided that likely to attain these purposes?
- How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
- How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (Tyler, 2013, p. 59)

Five core questions:

- To what extent is our curriculum internationalized?
- What other ways of thinking and doing are possible?
- What will we do differently in our program?
- How will we ensure that students/staff are best supported to achieve our internationalization plan?
- To what extent have we achieved our internationalization goal?

¹ Godden, P. (2014, September 26). Tyler’s basic principles of curriculum and instruction. *Talk curriculum*. Retrieved from <https://talkcurriculum.wordpress.com>. Accessed on December 10, 2018.

² Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalizing the Curriculum*. New York, NY: Routledge, p. 27.

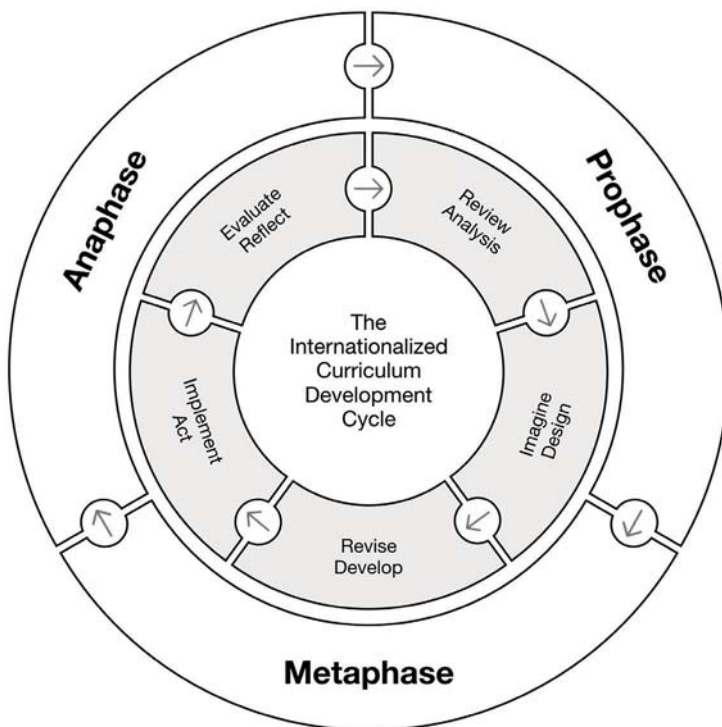


Fig. 3 – The internationalized curriculum development cycle.

The development phase cycle explained

Prophase

Key point: Avoid overstating or understating the extent of the program, a thorough investigation of the participants is crucial to balance the long-term goals with short-term achievements, the support from intermediate facilitators is indispensable.

For any process of curriculum design, from the very beginning, it is essential to clarify the program goals and objectives. It is fundamental to discuss with internal teams and negotiate with external partners to make sure that these are the same goals that both sides aim to achieve. During this phase, the support from intermediate facilitators is indispensable. Expert intermediate facilitators are able to interpret the implicit message of contexts, encouraging meaningful intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogues.

Metaphase

Key point: To consistently explore the boundaries between the dominant and emerging paradigms within the discipline, an appropriately differentiated curriculum is effective and beneficial, the establishment of a safe learning space is essential.

This phase is considered essential and integral, as it challenged the mechanism hitherto taken for granted, and demands a broader engagement in constructing the curriculum. The globalization phenomenon has had a significant impact on traditional teaching methods. With students coming from the different cultural and institutional backgrounds, it is challenging to have them together in the same class and teach them with predetermined methods. The curriculum developers suggested during the interviews that one solution is teamwork so that students can learn from each other. Another option is doing personalized curricula, which could help integrate students' disciplinary knowledge and competencies.

Anaphase

Key point: For ensuring the cyclicity of the process, the multilateral engagement is critical to diminishing the operational gaps: honest feedback and conversations are fundamental.

The curriculum structure should be seen as a whole rather than in its isolated parts, the evaluation of the achievements of the outgoing cycle and improvements of the incoming cycle should be discussed and negotiated together by all the participating members. To have an honest dialogue with participating members throughout the program is fundamental. Their genuine feedback can help to stimulate the further improvement and development of the process. By reflecting on the feedback collected, the sub-phases of the process and the methods adopted during the implementation practice could be adjusted accordingly, in order to ensure the effectiveness of the designed curriculum.

Conclusion and recommendations

The internationalization of the curriculum is an indispensable part of the higher education internationalization process. Even though much has been achieved in understanding the concept, there is still much more to be done. There is relatively little research and just as little practice regarding the op-

erationalization of curriculum internationalization in disciplines, even less so in fashion design. With this study, the researcher explored the operational practice of internationalization of the curriculum within the discipline of fashion design, with possible improvements and adjustments proposed and to be implemented in the future. However, in the meantime, we noticed that very little evidence had been found regarding the long-term impact of the students who have engaged in this internationalized fashion design curriculum. How did this experience influence and match up to their expectations and career developments after returning to their country of origin? That would be an exciting direction to investigate more closely. Another potentially interesting area to be researched would be the influence and impact that the curriculum internationalization brought to the local students and faculty. It would be very beneficial to follow up with their views and analyze in greater depth their concerns about curriculum internationalization, as well as the debates on the relationship between localization and globalization.

This study brings new knowledge and insights to the existed theoretical frameworks. Contributions are made to both the program participants, and the fellow researchers who intend to develop similar works. The researcher hopes that the positive and practical results of this study might inspire other educators from other regional, national, institutional, and disciplinary backgrounds to better explore the theory and practice related to curriculum internationalization in the future.

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