

Critical Review of Internationalisation of Vocational Education and Training: An Adapting Curve for Teachers and Learners by Ly Thi Tran and Understanding VET Teachers Challenges in Providing Quality Education to International Students by Sonal Nakar

Ahabab Chowdhury

Abstract— Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia has experienced a strong growth in international student enrolments since 1997. A study carried out by Australian Education International (AEI) showed that in 2009 there were approximately 73,100 international student enrolments in the VET sector (AEI 2010). However, Bruce Baird's review (AEI 2010) points out that alongside the strong international student enrolment growth in the VET sector, the quality education outcome at VET providers has been in question. Nayak and Venkatraman (2010, p. 5) indicate that VET curriculums are not specifically tailored to the learning needs of international students. On this point, Marginson and Eijkman (2007) underscore the need to develop internationalised curricula to acknowledge the divergent learning needs of international students within the Australian VET context. Guthrie (2008) argues that the learning and assessment processes of the Competency-Based-Training and Assessment (CBTA) simply immersed in compliant context that in fact hindered the adoption of the international VET curriculum. Given the myriad issues associated with the management of the learning and assessment of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, it is crucial that VET teachers have sufficient confidence and willingness to confront the complex issues associated with managing international students. With these issues in mind, this paper reviews two research articles that deal with the growing trend of international pedagogy following the Australian VET framework and the challenges faced by the VET teachers in responding to the learning needs and expectations of international students in vocational education.

Index Terms— Australian Education International (AEI), Competency-Based Training and Assessment (CBTA), International Students, Vocational Education and Training (VET).

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Australia has experienced a strong growth in international student enrolments since 1997. A study carried out by Australian Education International (AEI) showed that in 2009 there were

approximately 73,100 international student enrolments in the VET sector (AEI 2010). However, Bruce Baird's review (AEI 2010) points out that alongside the strong international student enrolment growth in the VET sector, the quality education outcome at VET providers has been in question. Nayak and Venkatraman (2010, p. 5) indicate that VET curriculums are not specifically tailored to the learning needs of international students. On this point, Marginson and Eijkman (2007) underscore the need to develop internationalised curricula to acknowledge the divergent learning needs of international students within the Australian VET context. Guthrie (2008) argues that the learning and assessment processes of the Competency-Based-Training and Assessment (CBTA) simply immersed in compliant context that in fact hindered the adoption of the international VET curriculum. Moreover, the research findings expounded by Mitchell and Young (2001) had already demonstrated that VET teachers in particular were not adequately skilled in terms of course delivery and designing assignments for international students within an intercultural context. Rehm (2008) demonstrates that there is limited empirical research on the identification of VET teachers' challenges, particularly on their need to address cultural issues that affect their students' work knowledge and skill development. In a globalised context, international VET providers would be required to strike a balance between fulfilling the divergent learning needs of their international students and developing their teaching staff through culturally inclusive practices for the benefit of the international students.

Given the myriad issues associated with the management of the learning and assessment of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, it is crucial that VET teachers have sufficient confidence and willingness to confront the complex issues associated with managing international students. With these issues in mind, this paper reviews two research articles that deal with the growing trend of international pedagogy following the Australian VET framework and the challenges faced by the VET teachers in responding to the learning needs and expectations of international students in vocational education. The next section of this paper will critically examine the first article, by Ly Thi Tran (2012), and the subsequent section will evaluate

Ahabab Chowdhury, Department: Management, School of Business, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, Australia,

the second article by Sonal Nakar (2013).

II. ARTICLE 1: REVIEW OF 'INTERNATIONALISATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: AN ADAPTING CURVE FOR TEACHERS AND LEARNERS' BY LY THI TRAN (JOURNAL OF STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION, VOL.17, NO. 4, PP. 492-507)

A. The Quality of the Source

The first article chosen for this study, 'Internationalisation of Vocational Education and Training: An Adapting Curve for Teachers and Learners' (Tran 2012), was published in the Journal of Studies in International Education (JSI). JSI is a peer-reviewed journal in the area of the internationalisation of higher education with an impact factor of 0.611. The purpose of the research article is two-fold: first, Tran explores the diverse learning characteristics of international students in the Australian vocational education sector and second, she examines vocational teachers' self-efficacy and readiness with respect to the accommodation of the diverse learning needs of students, including those who have transnational connections. Her study employs semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to assess a convenience sample of 50 teachers with a wide range of teaching experience at VET institutes in three states of Australia.

B. The Focus of the Researcher's Work

Most studies in the field of adult education have focused on higher education, while very limited empirical research has been carried out on international pedagogy in light of the Australian VET framework. Given the small body of existing literature that covers the international pedagogical practices in the Australian VET context, the originality of Tran's empirical work is itself a strength. Reflecting on the semi-structured interviews of the 50 teachers, the author reiterates her concern that Australian VET teachers require continuous professional development training in order to enhance their knowledge and skills in relation to designing internationalised curricula for their international students. Tran's research is quite interesting and robust in terms of providing useful insight into the mechanism that would support the retention of international students in the Australian VET sector. Therefore, the article has significant merit as a result of the implications of its findings.

C. The Appropriateness of Research Design to Research Question and Literature Review

Nonetheless, the author attempts to define the research problem in light of the empirical data and the existing research literature. There is no clear set of research questions that could potentially determine the focus of the paper. The literature review on international pedagogy appears to be up-to-date and well integrated; however, when defining international pedagogy, Tran overlooks the need to provide a clear explanation of this emerging topic, particularly in the current international VET context. The literature in this context is slightly disjointed and moves back and forth between existing studies about international pedagogy and a discussion of what the author aims to do in relation to the

international VET system in Australia. The author appears to base this study on empirical work and journal-based literature; however, the technique of the literature review is not explained by the author and it is unclear which search technique the author has used.

D. Theoretical Framework

Drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology and Bakhtin's theory of dialogicality, Tran attempts to define international pedagogy in detail; however, a more focused approach to the literature is required. The discussion of international pedagogy, its applications in collaborative learning, with respect to Vygotsky's sociocultural psychology and Bakhtin's theory of dialogicality is quite brief and superficial'. The discussion might have been more convincing if Tran (p. 496) had touched on the work of Vygotsky and Bakhtin by exploring the inextricable connection between teaching and learning in relation to international VET pedagogy (Vialle, Lysaght, & Verenikina 2005). In addition, it would have been far more persuasive if the author had addressed Malcolm Knowles's theory of andragogy to refer to the art and science of reaching international students in the VET sector (Boud 1987).

E. The Appropriateness to Researcher's Methodological Decisions

To shed light on the empirical work undertaken to explore the psychology and adaptability of VET teachers with respect to the management of international students, Tran carries out semi-structured interviews with a number of teachers. This method of obtaining data seems appropriate to explore the complex phenomenon of international VET pedagogy; however, Tran does not make it clear why the interviews were chosen to collect the data. In addition, the author employs open-ended questions in the interviews, but does not discuss at length the main reason for choosing this approach to interviewing. Moreover, there is little discussion about the process of choosing and recruiting the research participants: firstly, the author does not make it clear on what basis the fifty VET teachers were selected for interviews and secondly, the demographic backgrounds of the research participants, which might comprise age, sex and ethnicity, are not explained in detail. Tran's paper would have been more original had she demonstrated how the selection of VET teachers could have changed the purpose of the research. Furthermore, it is not evident from Tran's research methodology how many VET teachers were initially requested to participate in the interviews and what the response rate was. The response rate is important because it makes a difference to the research if only a few VET teachers responded or if the majority agreed to participate. Nor is it shown in the author's study how she evaluates whether the sample represents the population. For example, it is not evident whether the author has checked for non-response bias: one method to check for this bias would be to compare the early and late respondents, assuming that the late ones represent non-respondents (Creswell 2013).

The data in the study has been analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach. In addition, the data analysis in this paper is inductive. The author describes data analysis procedures that include coding interview data with the aim of

identifying emergent themes in international VET in Australia. However, it would be useful to learn more about the process of inductive coding and, in particular, the inductive approach adopted for this study could be explained in greater detail. Furthermore, it is not clear which are the outcomes of the inductive approach. The inductive analysis could result in the development of categories into an emergent model or framework that ultimately postulates key themes and processes (Thomas 2006, p. 240); however, it is not demonstrated in this paper which category labels would be used to refer to category and there is no discussion of a category system that might be incorporated into an emergent model (Thomas 2006). It has also not been explained clearly whether the coding is triangulatory (Creswell 2013) and, most importantly, how the VET teachers' perceptions are compared following the process of inductive coding.

III. ARTICLE 2: REVIEW OF 'UNDERSTANDING VET TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING QUALITY EDUCATION TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' BY SONAL NAKAR (INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TRAINING RESEARCH, VOL. 11, NO. 1, PP. 79-88)

A. *The Quality of the Source*

The second article, 'Understanding VET teachers' challenges in providing quality education to international students' by Sonal Nakar (2013), was published in the International Journal of Training Research (IJTR). IJTR is a peer-reviewed ERA-ranked journal that publishes articles relevant to VET in Australia and internationally.

B. *The Focus of the Researcher's Work*

In this article, Nakar mainly addresses the challenges VET teachers face with international students, particularly when they need to prepare their VET students to meet the new demands of the changing workplace context and provide them with transnational global skills and knowledge mobility. Her study employs responsive interviewing and inductive data analysis to assess a convenience sample of 15 VET teachers (53 per cent female, 47 per cent male) at public and private VET institutions in Brisbane, Australia.

When discussing the challenges faced by VET teachers, Mitchell and Young (2001, p. 25) show, in their empirical study, that VET teaching staff attract little attention in research. Mitchell and Young argue that the continuous professional learning of the VET teaching staff, particularly in private registered training organisations (RTOs), was viewed as an operational, rather than a strategic, concern (2001, p. 30). Drawing on this research, Nakar's article represents an excellent contribution to the research literature that addresses the issue of the challenges faced by VET teachers in terms of providing quality education to their international students.

C. *The Appropriateness of Research Design to Research Question and Literature Review*

The research problems in relation to the challenges faced by VET teachers are supported by the research literature and the empirical findings. The author addresses some of the potential gaps in the literature, specifically those that exist

between theory and practice. However, it would be more useful if the author had clearly framed the research problems within the context of the existing literature. Nakar's research question mainly emphasises the challenges and dilemmas that VET teachers confront while delivering quality education to their international students and the question seems to be clear, concise and complete. The author uses a combination of responsive interviewing and inductive data analysis to answer the research question, which seem appropriate.

The literature review is sound in terms of exploring the changes in the Australian VET sector over the last two decades; however, the author presents her argument on VET teachers' professional, personal, educational and ethical challenges, with only somewhat superficial analysis. It would be more persuasive if the author had included slightly more critical depth in the review of the literature, as it is used later in the findings.

D. *The Appropriateness to Researcher's Methodological Decisions*

It is evident that the research in this paper is exploratory and qualitative. Moreover, it is understood that the phenomenon studied is pertinent to the challenges and dilemmas of VET teachers of international students. However, to do justice to this complex phenomenon the author would need to explain clearly some of the key reasons that this paper is exploratory and essentially qualitative. Moreover, it is not explained by the author whether this research is epistemological or ontological, notwithstanding the data analysis approach adopted for this study entails following responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin 2005).

Though Nakar employs responsive interviewing of 15 VET teachers from both public and private VET institutions, she does not explain the responsive interviewing model in detail to supplement her point of view. From this study, it appears that the author uses this methodological approach to provide insight into VET teachers' professional, personal, educational and ethical challenges. Research shows that responsive interviewing relies on interpretive research and thus involves in-depth interviewing (Rubin & Rubin 2005). Creswell (2013, p. 256) underscores the need to adopt an interpretive approach in order to give a voice to the research participants. Drawing on these ideas, Nakar's study highlights the voice of the VET teachers in conjunction with their working environment; however, it would be more beneficial to the readership of *IJTR*, if the author were to discuss, in brief, the implications of the interpretive constructionist approach, particularly in light of the research method applied in her paper.

E. *The Appropriateness to Researcher's Interpretation of Results*

The findings are presented comprehensively based on the challenges that are touched on in Nakar's paper. The author uses an inductive approach to categorise 27 challenges into three general themes. By analysing the inductive approach as presented in this study, it appears that the author establishes clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data. However, it is not clear whether the author has ensured these links are able to be demonstrated to others and they remain to be justifiable in considering the objective of the research (Thomas 2006, p. 238).

The sampling procedures are adequately described and the subject samples (i.e., the VET teachers) are appropriate to the research question; however, it is not apparent whether any selection bias is addressed in this study. It is demonstrated that the author uses a convenience sample of 15 VET teachers, from different age brackets and with heterogeneous demographic characteristics; however, it is not explained which particular sampling approach is applied in terms of the recruitment of research participants. Moreover, it is not explained exactly how the research participants are selected. As it is apparent from the data analysis approach that the focus of this research is to gain an in-depth understanding, rather than a broad understanding, it would be more useful if the author had discussed the sampling procedures in light of purposeful sampling.

IV. COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ARTICLE 1 AND ARTICLE 2

While the literature finds many similarities and differences in international VET pedagogy in Australia, the research articles, 'Internationalisation of Vocational Education and Training: An Adapting Curve for Teachers and Learners' and 'Understanding VET teachers' challenges in providing quality education to international students' share the same recommendation: that is, that the existing international VET framework be redesigned. Nakar's article provides considerable discussion that is pertinent to international VET pedagogy on the current shortcomings of the professional learning of VET teachers, particularly in terms of teaching international students according to the structure and content of the existing VET programmes. These issues are, however, not among the focuses of the first article. In the exploration of the research problem, both articles are supported by the empirical data and the existing research literature. In comparison to Tran's article, the second article addresses more information derived from the empirical findings. Moreover, the research question seems to be clear, precise and well-articulated in Nakar's study, while Tran's study appears to lack a research question.

In regard to the literature review, Tran's article is robust in terms of shedding some light on addressing the learning characteristics of VET international students. In contrast, Nakar's literature review is rather superficial with respect to exploring VET teachers' challenges in providing a quality education outcome to VET international students. In terms of using search techniques, neither Tran nor Nakar have explained their literature review technique clearly. Further, neither article has defined the international pedagogy in light of existing Australian VET framework in detail.

Regarding the research methodology, the first article employs the semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, while the second article uses responsive interviewing. The main purpose of the research methods adopted in both articles emphasises VET teachers' shortcomings, as well as the challenges they face in meeting the learning needs of VET international students. The sampling procedures are described sufficiently in Nakar's study; however, one of the limitations of both articles is that they do not explain which

sampling approach is to be applied in terms of the selection of research participants. Tran's study tends to be quite superficial in regard to introducing its research participants' ethnic backgrounds, while the second article is quite informative in providing details of the demographic characteristics of its research participants.

When it comes to data analysis, Tran and Nakar both adopt an inductive approach, notwithstanding the fact that both articles merely state what kind of coding system emerged from their analysis. On this point, examples of the coding systems presented in a table would be beneficial to the readership of the JSI and IJTR, particularly to those who intend to conduct similar research in future. Both articles present the findings comprehensively following a narrative approach. Tran highlights her findings by using quotes from the research participants; the use of a table in Nakar's findings, on the other hand, provides a great visual aid to understanding the results of her study.

The conclusions in Tran's and Nakar's articles are clearly stated and both follow from the research design, methods and results. In contrast to the first article, the conclusion in the second article remains consistent in terms of giving a voice to its research participants. On the contrary, the practical significance of the VET teachers' adaptation of internationalisation is more thoroughly discussed and guidance for future studies is more clearly offered in the first article than the second article.

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Personal Profile

Ahabab Chowdhury is currently working as Sessional Academic at the University of Wollongong and as Adjunct Lecturer, Post Graduate Programs at International College of Management Sydney (ICMS). In addition, Ahabab is presently serving as Associate Editor for the International Journal of Doctoral Studies (IJDS). IJDS is among the highest ranking journals in the area of Doctoral Studies. Apart from Ahabab's identity as academia and researcher, he has possessed more than ten years of management as well as teaching experience in Australia and overseas performing a range of roles. While working in the education and training industry, Ahabab has held various senior management positions to demonstrate his pedagogical and instructional leadership practices—Principal of Central College (Group Colleges Australia), National Director of Studies of Martin College (Study Group Australia), Principal of Australian Nationwide College (Wentworth Institute), Director of Studies of Sydney College of Business and IT (collaborates with Southern Cross University), General Manager of The Education Group (TEG), Australia. Ahabab holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA), a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), a Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Ahabab has developed research interests in the areas including curriculum design and assessment, instructional leadership practices, organisational behaviour, human resource management. In regard to publication, Ahabab's one of the papers had been published in an international peer-reviewed journals entitled "*Learning and Assessment Practices of Doctoral Studies of Developing and Developed Countries: A Case Study of Doctoral Studies in Bangladesh*". It can be accessed directly at <http://iisit.org/Vol11/IISITv11p013-030Chowdhury0481.pdf> . As PhD candidate at University of Wollongong, Australia, Ahabab is currently investigating on the elements that distinguish high quality PhD programmes from low quality PhD programmes.