From international PGR students to international GTAs: Academic rationales for international GTA recruitment in UK higher education institutions

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Abstract

The increasing supply of international postgraduate research (PGR) students has become an emerging market for international PhD programmes within the realm of international higher education. The United Kingdom has witnessed a sharp upsurge in the number of international PGR students enrolling in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) in the past decade. Additionally, a considerable number of international PGR students assume the role of graduate teaching assistants to support teaching activities in UK HEIs. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are essential to the delivery of instruction in universities, particularly in research-intensive institutions (Nyquist, 1991; Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Bort, 1993; Olaniran, 1999), working as tutors, laboratory instructors, supervisors, or even lecturers (Chiu & Corrigan, 2019). A rising number of international PGR students thus contribute to the undergraduate student learning process by lecturing and helping with teaching in the

UK (International Unit, 2016). International PGR students undertaking GTA roles are an important resource for UK higher education to assist with the instruction of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the academic benefits international GTAs bring to the UK's HEIs and summarises the academic rationales for UK HEIs' recruitment of international PGR students to work as GTAs.

Through a systematic and thematic analysis of previous articles and documents, this paper delineates four fundamental academic benefits and recruitment rationales for the employment of international PGR students as GTAs in UK HEIs. These academic benefits include improving reputation and ranking; enhancing internationalisation at home (campus internationalisation and decolonising the classroom); promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation; and improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration. The aforementioned findings facilitate a thorough and all-encompassing comprehension of the academic value implicated in the recruitment of international PGR students as GTAs in UK HEIs.

Introduction

International postgraduate research (PGR) students are increasingly being hired on a part-time basis to support undergraduate and postgraduate teaching in the United Kingdom's higher education institutions (HEIs). Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are PGR students who support academic and teaching staff with instructional responsibilities in HEIs. GTAs are critical to the delivery of instruction in universities, particularly in research-based institutions (Nyquist, 1991; Gray, Buerkel-Rothfuss, & Bort, 1993; Olaniran, 1999). In the academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, the percentage of international (non-UK) PGR students in the total PGR student population in UK universities remained constant at 41% (HESA, 2022). The number of international PGR students enrolled in UK HEIs was 46,735 in 2020/2021 and 46,350 in 2021/2022, according to HESA (2022). Commonly, international PGR students take on extra sessional and precarious teaching work to make up for the income shortfall. According to The Economist (2016), universities had already recognised that PhD candidates are inexpensive, highly inspired, and disposable labour. Meanwhile, according to Chiu and Corrigan (2019), in exchange for financial support, GTAs face significant pressure to conduct research and generate high-quality papers while concurrently working as tutors, laboratory instructors, supervisors, or even lecturers. International PGR students contribute greatly to the undergraduate student learning process by lecturing and

helping with teaching in the UK (International Unit, 2016). In addition, universities rely heavily on sessional (temporary or short-term) staff to teach undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (Croucher, 2016). Therefore, international GTAs assume a crucial and indispensable function in augmenting the provision of teaching and learning support at UK universities.

The current research on international PGR student recruitment focuses mainly on economic rationales. For UK institutions, international tuition fees are a profitable market (Humfrey, 2011; Robson, 2011). International students are considered to be of great importance to the UK's economy as they make significant contributions through tuition fees and other expenses incurred while studying in the country. According to Universities UK (2017b), the gross output produced by international students for the UK economy in 2014-2015 was £25.8 billion. International students bring significant consumption and investment to the UK, including expenditures on accommodation, food, travel, entertainment, and other related expenses, as pointed out by Zhu, Su & Cheng (2015). For example, data from 2011/12 reveals that there were 488,000 international students enrolled in UK HEIs, generating a total of £3.9 billion in tuition fees and £6.3 billion in living expenses, as reported by BIS (2013a). Additionally, the recruitment of international GTAs in UK HEIs provides universities with the opportunity to obtain international high-quality academic labour at a comparatively low cost, thereby effectively reducing labour

expenses. Provision of undergraduate courses by universities depends heavily on sessional faculty (Croucher, 2016); PhD candidates, on the other hand, are underpaid when they are required to do unpaid labour such as class preparation and replying to students outside of class hours (Baldry, 2019). Indeed, using PhD students to do most of the undergraduate teaching decreases the number of full-time jobs (The Economist, 2016).

According to Park (2002), employing multiple GTAs for undergraduate teaching is a cost-effective strategy, reducing salary expenses and allowing academics to concentrate on scholarly activities. As a cost-saving strategy, universities resort to employing cheap and precarious labour. As the supply of cheap but high-quality academic labour, international GTA recruitment in UK HEIs can mitigate labour costs. Consequently, there are a number of economic rationales motivating the UK HEIs' recruitment of PGR students as GTAs. However, there is a paucity of research about academic rationales for international GTA recruitment in UK HEIs. The concept of internationalisation in higher education can be defined academically as the incorporation of an international, intercultural, or global element into the objectives, operations, or implementation of tertiary education (Knight, 2003). International GTAs are a rich source of cultural, academic, and pedagogic experience and internationalisation at home. Meanwhile, international GTAs are essential components of international teaching staff; therefore, it is of great value to investigate the academic

benefits they contribute to UK universities. This article focuses on the academic rationales for international GTA recruitment at UK universities. This article aims to investigate the academic rationales behind the recruitment of international GTAs in UK universities and to summarise the academic benefits that they bring. The goal of this paper is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the academic benefits that international GTAs offer to UK HEIs and to highlight the academic rationales behind their recruitment.

This study conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) of 44 existing studies on international GTAs in the UK and academic benefits, published during the period from 2011 to November 2022. The review was based on the two research questions listed below, in accordance with the study's stated purpose:
RQ1. What academic benefits do international GTAs contribute to UK universities?
RQ2. What are the academic rationales for UK universities' recruitment of international GTAs?

International PGR students at UK universities

The increasing globalisation and regionalisation of societies and economies, coupled with the demands of the knowledge economy for a highly skilled and diverse workforce, have created a context that necessitates greater internationalisation in higher education (de Wit & Altbach, 2020). Internationalisation encompasses a broad variety of

issues, including curriculum internationalisation and local institution internationalisation, student and staff mobility, transnational collaboration, the construction of international campuses, and the recruitment of international students and staff (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Turner & Robson, 2008; Caruana, 2009). The UK has been at the forefront of the internationalisation of higher education, and its success in attracting international students over the past two decades demonstrates its competitiveness in the global education market.

The UK has systematically announced a series of international education policies aimed at attracting and recruiting international students. These policies include initiatives such as the British Full-Cost for Overseas Students policy introduced during the tenure of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (Humfrey, 2011; Walker, 2014), the UK Prime Ministers' Initiative (PMI) (Blair, 1999; British Council, 2003), and its subsequent iteration PMI2 for International Education (Blair 2006), the Coalition Migration Policy (Cameron, 2011), International Education Strategies (IES) introduced in 2013 (BIS, 2013a, b), IES: global potential, global growth in 2019 (HM Government, 2019), and the new Post-Study Work (PSW) visa policy implemented in 2019 (IDP Connect, 2019). These policies are indicative of the UK's sustained efforts to facilitate the recruitment of international students, attract international students, foster a diverse and inclusive learning environment and promote the UK's position as a leading destination for higher education.

According to The British Library (2017), the UK is regarded as the fourth-largest distributor of PhDs globally, owing to its high level of international mobility, resulting in an exponentially increasing number of new PhD graduates within the country. The number of international students enrolling in doctoral programmes in the United Kingdom has risen significantly over the last decade. For example, from 2007 to 2008, the amount of international PGR students has risen by 24%, from 22,300 to 27,610 (International Unit, 2016). International students represent about half of the yearly postgraduate research degree cohort in the UK (UKCISA, 2011). In science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, international PGR students are the essential source for the UK academic "supply chain" (Hsieh, 2012; Larner, 2015; Universities UK, 2018). In the academic years 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, the percentage of international (non-UK) PGR students in the total PGR student population at UK universities remained constant at 41% (HESA, 2022). The number of international PGR students enrolled in UK HEIs was 46,735 in 2020/2021 and 46,350 in 2021/2022, according to HESA (2022).
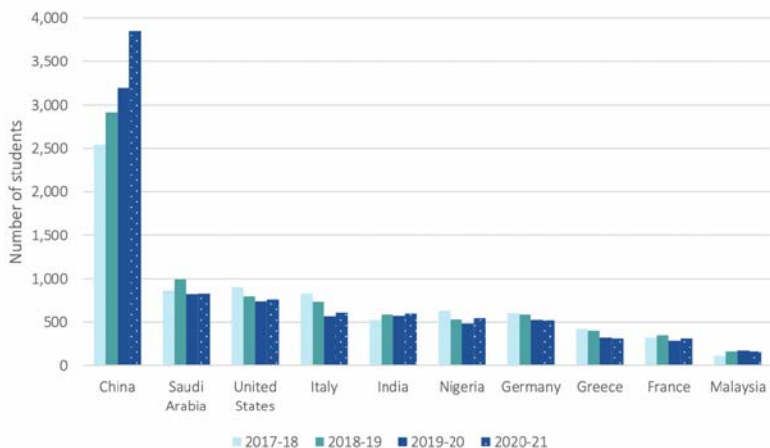
FIGURE 1. Top 10 domiciles of international PGR entrants in the UK, from 2017-18 to 2020-21
Source: Adapted from Universities UK International (2022)

Based on Figure 1, it can be ascertained that China, Saudi Arabia, and the United States occupy the top three positions as the leading sending nations of international PGR students enrolled in HEIs within the UK. Meanwhile, from the academic year 2016/2017 to 2020/2021, among international (non-UK) PGR students, Chinese PGR students studying in UK universities grew from 13% to 22% (HESA, 2022). The count of PGR entrants from China exhibited a surge of 20.5% during the interval spanning from 2019-20 to 2020-21(HESA 2022). According to HESA data (2022), China has been the leading sender of international PGR students to the UK's HEIs in the last decade.

International PGR students are a significant source for the

UK's higher education, especially, in fields such as STEM and to assist in the instruction of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Additionally, for UK institutions, international tuition fees are a profitable market (Humfrey, 2011; Robson, 2011). Thus, the UK's ongoing efforts to attract and retain international PGR students are propelled by the heightened economic profitability associated with recruiting international students and the country's desire to maintain its status as a leading destination for international higher education. Consequently, with the ongoing increase in the enrollment of international PGR students in UK higher education, there is an emerging trend involving the active participation of PGR students in supporting undergraduate and postgraduate instruction.

International GTAs in UK universities

Within higher education institutions, PGR students are frequently hired to teach undergraduates and postgraduates, and occasionally this position is included as part of a doctoral studentship. Due to visa restrictions and higher costs, international PGR students study in the UK under heightened pressure to finish their studies within three to four years. Previous studies on international GTAs have mainly focused on how they strive to combine their identities being instructors and researchers (Winstone & Moore, 2017), as well as the establishment and assessment of structured GTA teaching support programmes (Chadha, 2015; Beaton, 2017). Additionally, international GTAs are commonly described by

a deficit approach (Collins, 2021a), where they are perceived as lacking in teaching experience (Plakans, 1997; Muzaka, 2009); and GTAs are generally regarded as having an imperfect professional identity (Harland & Plangger, 2004; Winstone & Moore, 2017). Meanwhile, international GTAs encounter difficulties with both linguistic and cultural translation (Winter et al., 2014). The lack of English proficiency and different cultural backgrounds (Borjas, 2002; Jia & Bergerson, 2008; Kim, 2009); cultural bumps and adjustment stresses emerging (Wan & Guo, 2022) in international GTA literature, and the difficulties that international employees encounter in adjusting to the UK HE context are common themes (Luxon & Peelo, 2009). While some studies seek to address the benefits of GTAs' work (Winter et al., 2014; Jordan & Howe, 2018), GTAs are also referred to as both fish and fowl (Winstone & Moore, 2017), as they can switch between the roles of academic staff and students depending on the context (ibid).

International GTAs offer tremendous opportunities for internationalisation at home and are a great source of academic, educational, pedagogical, and cultural experience for domestic students. Internationalisation at home refers to the intentional integration of international and intercultural elements into both formal and informal curricula within local educational settings, targeting all students (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Regarding the expanding amount of international personnel in UK HE, international GTAs deserve further attention (Universities UK, 2017b). Additionally, the

range of possibilities to benefit from the rich academic and cultural resources that international faculty provide the broader campus is underutilised in UK HE (Hsieh, 2012). Furthermore, a diverse campus academic community can assist in curriculum and pedagogical innovations (Kim, 2010; Bodycott et al., 2014). Similarly, the HEA (2014b) advocates for greater acknowledgement of the academic community's diverse spectrum of cultures, knowledge, experiences, values, attitudes, beliefs, and meanings as it works to internationalise classrooms and campuses. Hence, international GTAs are vital components of teaching staff. Consequently, it is of tremendous significance to shift the focus from exploring the perceived challenges and issues faced by international GTAs to exploring the academic benefits they contribute to UK HEI.

Methodology

The systematic literature review (SLR) method (Keele, 2007) was used in this paper to identify and analyse the available studies on international GTAs at UK universities in order to investigate the academic benefits international GTAs provide to the UK's HEIs. In this research, the author followed the principles and SLR procedure template supplied by Kitchenham & Charters (2007). First, a systematic literature search was conducted on Scopus to find relevant studies examining the academic benefits international GTAs contribute to the UK's HEIs. The terms "graduate teaching

assistant," "international academic staff," and "international graduate teaching assistant" were used to search the titles, abstracts, and keywords of articles. After searching with these terms, 3836 relevant research studies were found in Scopus. The search was then refined, and articles were selected for analysis based on the below inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Figure 2).

Several inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to decide which research would be included in this review. Regarding the inclusion criteria, first, the type of paper should be an article or conference paper. Second, the title, abstract, or keyword had to contain "UK" referring to the context. Additionally, articles had to focus on the benefits, contributions, and advantages of international GTAs. Furthermore, only English journal articles were included in this review. To assure coverage of publications published over the previous decade, the data timeframe was set between 2011 and November 2022. In terms of the exclusion criteria, book chapters, reviews, books, and dissertations were not considered. Additionally, the author excluded the papers that were not original research and not relevant to the topic. The search was performed in November 2022.

The author then followed the process outlined above to come up with the final pool of articles to be analysed. This resulted in 34 journal articles and conference papers that were included in this analysis. The author excluded redundant and identical digital object identifier studies. The

number of papers in the pool of analysed papers then dropped to 30. Furthermore, the forward and backward chaining approaches were used for this review. Through this step, the author further selected and added 18 relevant papers, reducing the likelihood of omitting pertinent studies. Meanwhile, the author used the quality criteria (Guyatt et al., 2011) as illustrated in Figure 2 to evaluate the research quality of the chosen studies for this review. The author analysed each study using these quality evaluation criteria, which are comprised of questions that serve as an assessment tool to assess the amount that each paper contributes to this study. As a result, 44 reports were retained in the final pool (42 journal articles and 2 conference papers). The method is presented in Figure 2.
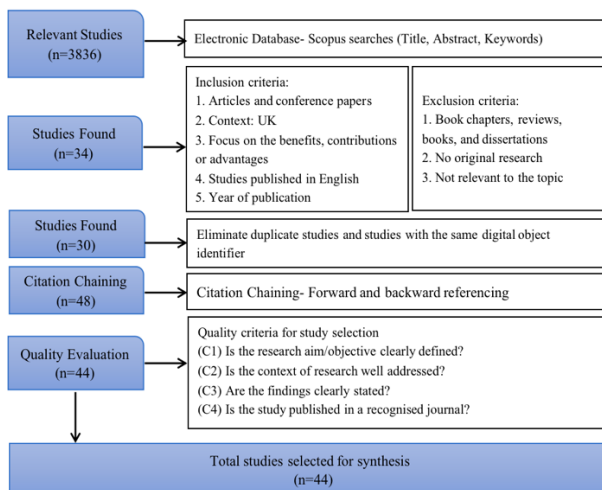

FIGURE 2. Research protocol

To illustrate the profile of existing relevant studies on Scopus, the yearly research output, subject area, and affiliation of the researcher for the chosen studies are presented below in Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5. Figure 3 illustrates the annual output of journal articles and conference papers. The increasing number of papers on Scopus further suggests the significance of this subject area. Figure 4 presents the Scopus-defined subject areas of the related papers: 72.6% of the studies are in the social sciences, and 9.7% of the studies are in business, management, and accounting. As evident from Figure 5, most articles were published by authors who listed affiliations with the University of Kent, University College London, UCL Institute of Education, and University of Surrey.
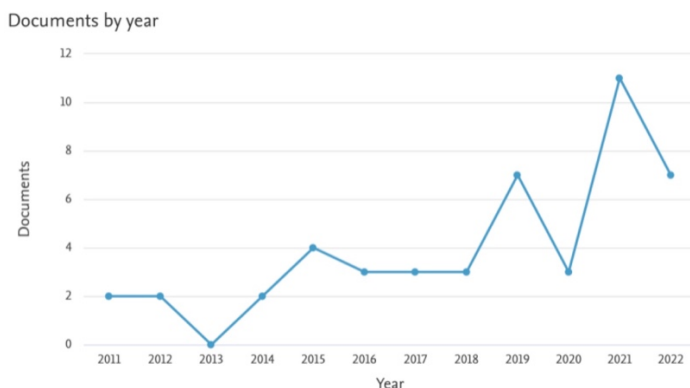

FIGURE 3. The final pool (k = 44) by year of publication
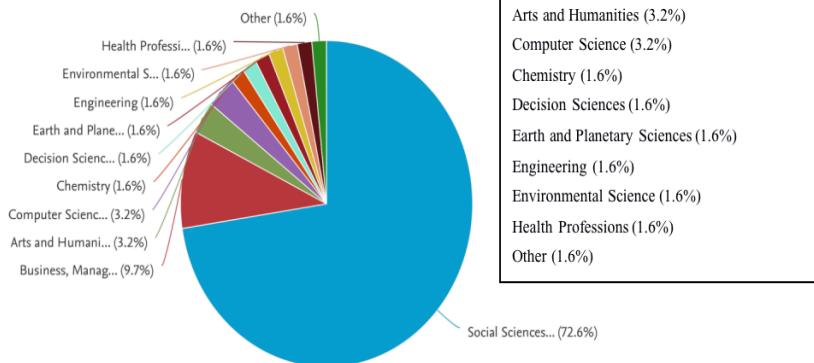
Documents by subject area

Social Science (72.6%)
Business, Management and Accounting (9.7%)
Arts and Humanities (3.2%)
Computer Science (3.2%)
Chemistry (1.6%)
Decision Sciences (1.6%)
Earth and Planetary Sciences (1.6%)
Engineering (1.6%)
Environmental Science (1.6%)
Health Professions (1.6%)
Other (1.6%)

FIGURE 4. The final pool (k = 44) by subject area

Documents by affiliation ⓘ

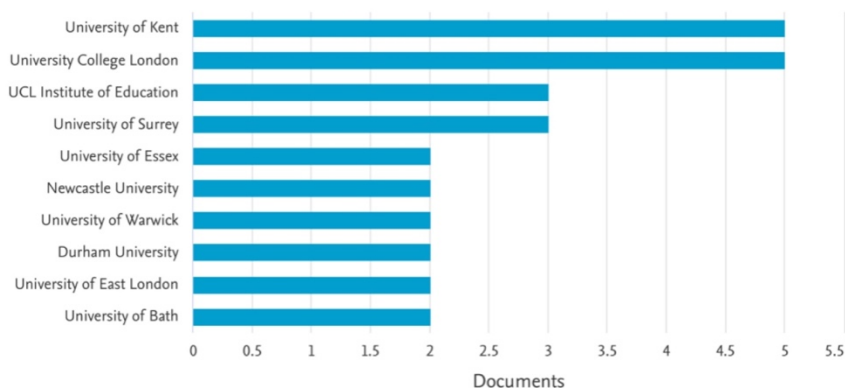Compare the document counts for up to 15 affiliations.

FIGURE 5. The final pool (k=44) by affiliation

The present investigation employed mixed methods to analyse the collected data. Specifically, both thematic analysis and NVivo tools were utilised as the principal methods to derive meaning from the data. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify patterns and themes within the data, whilst the NVivo software was employed to arrange, manage and expedite the analysis process. The use of thematic analysis provided the author with the freedom to identify themes that were not pre-determined, thereby allowing the data to be presented objectively. Furthermore, the discussion section of the paper was structured based on the themes that were identified through the thematic analysis, thereby providing a coherent and organised presentation of the findings in accordance with the research objectives.

Study findings

Based on the systematic and thematic analysis of the previous articles and documents, this paper summarises four main academic benefits and recruitment rationales, including improving reputation and ranking; internationalisation at home (campus internationalisation and decolonising the classroom); promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation; and improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration. Each theme and its respective factors are summarised and discussed in detail below.

Improving reputation and ranking

The recruitment of international PGR students as GTAs is essential to improving UK HEIs' reputation and university ranking. The expansion of higher education has been partially driven by the pursuit of internationalisation agendas by academic institutions, which seek to enhance their position in global rankings (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). International students and international staff are not only a symbol of a high-quality image and a tool for internationalisation; they are also seen to improve the prestige of HEIs (British Council, 2010; DTZ, 2011; Lomer, 2016). In the UK, increasing global competition for knowledge and the proliferation of high-quality education options for students have led to a perceived need for academic institutions to develop brand awareness and unique selling points to attract students (Lomer et al., 2018). It is common practice for universities to recruit international GTAs, associate lecturers, and contract employees as part of their international orientation strategies to increase the staff-to-student ratio, which is regarded as indicative of high-quality education by many ranking organisations (Chadha 2013). Additionally, market-framed research contests (Kim, 2009), which are institutionalised in the United Kingdom via the Research Excellence Framework (REF), assist the internationalisation push. To get a high ranking in the REF, UK HEIs should recruit international personnel qualified of producing high-quality outputs (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). Thus, international teaching staff recruitment is strongly tied to the institution's international

reputation in its pursuit of becoming a world-class university. International GTAs are considered important members of the academic community, contributors to the university's status as an international institution, and significant contributors to the university's research endeavours.

The significance of world university rankings is highly pronounced for universities engaged in international competition, as these rankings serve as a critical avenue through which institutions can attain esteemed international recognition (Fernandes, Shukla & Fardoun, 2022). The Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings is widely regarded as one of the most reputable organisations for evaluating educational institutions. It is the only ranking table that examines all of a university's core missions, including teaching, science, knowledge transfer, and international acceptance (Anowar et al., 2015). To rate universities around the globe, the following metrics and weights are used: 40% is decided by peer review, 10% is determined by ranking by major (mainly international) graduate recruiters, 20% is determined by citations (per capita) of published academic journals, 20% is determined by teaching staff and student ratios, and 10% is determined by international orientation (Soh, 2013). In addition, accreditation frameworks, which are highly sought after for their ability to improve institution ranking positions, are another worldwide standardising factor. Some accrediting schemes, like EQUIS, require an institution to have a particular percentage of international employees (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). As a result of

academia's incorporation into a market-based discourse that places an emphasis on worldwide competitiveness as a need for success, universities in the United Kingdom have begun to increase their international staffing levels to promote internationalisation (Johansson & Sliwa, 2014). Thus, international GTAs working as international teaching staff are beneficial to the teaching staff and student ratios, and international orientation promotes the university's global ranking, enhances competitiveness, and expands the HEI's global influence. Rankings are also important in shaping student choices, and many academics will most likely seek to work at highly-ranked institutions that attract ambitious students (Lim & Øerberg, 2017). According to BIS (2011), international students are attracted to the United Kingdom based on its reputation for both educational excellence and worth. With a higher percentage of international GTAs who work as teaching staff, the HEI will be in an advantageous position in terms of global ranking and reputation. Therefore, the recruitment of international GTAs who have multiple roles in the university, such as international PGR students, academic staff, and teaching staff, holds the potential to boost the global ranking and reputation of UK HEIs.

Internationalisation at home: campus internationalisation and decolonising the classroom

Internationalisation is at the forefront of the agenda for institutions in the UK and worldwide. Since the 1990s, internationalisation initiatives in higher education have

expanded, from a focus on staff and student mobility to a greater emphasis on the internationalisation of the provider mobility, programme, and curriculum (Altbach, 1989; Blumenthal et al., 1996; Knight, 2014; Xu & Montgomery, 2019). This progression reflects a logical shift from concerns primarily focused on enhancing enrollment through curriculum modifications and innovative teaching methods to a more comprehensive goal of fostering students' global consciousness and intercultural understanding. Universities are focusing more and more on enhancing and expanding opportunities for domestic students to internationalise as part of their international strategies, and an internationalised curriculum and internationalisation at home (Jones & Brown, 2007; Altbach, 2017) are two key components of these strategies (HEA, 2014a; Harrison, 2015). Meanwhile, an additional topic that has come to the forefront of the literature on campus internationalisation is international student and staff recruitment (Altbach & Knight, 2007) and the subsequent attempts to combine domestic and international students (Harrison, 2015).

The engagement of international GTAs in the process of internationalisation of higher education has the potential to actively promote the decolonisation of the classroom and knowledge. The process of decolonising the curriculum entails undertaking a thorough critical analysis and questioning of the Eurocentric and colonial prejudices that permeate the content, methods, and pedagogical approaches utilised in educational settings. Since the Rhodes Must Fall

campaign started at the University of Cape Town in 2015, contesting the primacy of white voices and eurocentrism in academia, the decolonising academia movement has gained prominence in the United Kingdom (Charles, 2019). Hsieh (2012) asserts that institutions would greatly benefit from viewing their international staff not as a burden but as a valuable source of knowledge. Additionally, the active involvement of GTAs from postcolonial backgrounds, and potentially worldwide, in classrooms prompts academics to expand existing frameworks in order to acknowledge and appreciate the innovative and diverse teaching efforts made by these GTAs (Collins, 2021b). Robson (2011) claims that transformational internationalisation results from the incorporation of students' and instructors' diverse worldviews into curriculum design, instruction, and interaction. Evidence presented by Collins (2021a) demonstrated that postcolonial GTAs contributed a wide range of perspectives, methods, and subject expertise to the classroom. In addition to bringing expertise and teaching methods developed in their own countries to UK HEIs, international GTAs support removing boundaries between international students and domestic instructors and promoting an inclusive learning environment. According to Yang & Singh (2015), international GTAs assume the role of cultural mediators between international students and domestic instructors, fostering cross-cultural understanding and cultivating an inclusive learning environment. Thus, employing international GTA is beneficial for HEIs due to the unique perspectives they bring to campus culture, knowledge, and research. As a consequence,

international GTAs assist in internationalising the campus and diversifying the student and staff body, thereby contributing to the decolonisation of knowledge and the classroom. In accordance with the internationalisation strategies, international GTAs play a proactive role in promoting the process of internationalisation at home, encompassing both campus internationalisation and the decolonisation of the classroom.

Promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation

International GTAs are also important for promoting teaching, curriculum innovation, and pedagogical innovation at UK universities. The rising international faculty community in the UK gives significant prospects for altering the programme material and execution in UK higher education (Minocha, 2016). Evidence from UK HE highlights the necessity of greater integration of international academics, especially concerning their exposure to diverse academic, pedagogical, and cultural environments that may contribute to innovations in teaching and learning (Kim, 2010; Green & Myatt, 2011). The recruitment of international GTAs can contribute to this goal by bringing diverse cultural perspectives and pedagogical and academic experiences to UK universities. International staff who trigger a debate concerning pedagogical practice outside of the UK HE framework may facilitate pedagogical innovation by addressing latent assumptions about local pedagogical practices (Hristov & Minocha, 2017). Academics with international backgrounds can advance research and

knowledge generation, modernise teaching and assessment techniques, and deepen intercultural understanding (Sanderson, 2011). Similarly, incorporating diversity in HEIs and developing culturally inclusive curricula can promote campus internationalisation and academic staff integration into UK HE (Caruana & Ploner, 2010).

Meanwhile, Kim (2010) proposes that international academic personnel can support constructing pedagogy and networks of pastoral assistance for international students by leveraging their international academic and knowledge capital, consequently benefiting employers. Consideration of international academic staff as facilitators of campus internationalisation is congruent with Willis & Hammond's (2014) study, which stated that the academic cohort can develop both the curriculum and students' educational experience. Similarly, international instructors are able to educate students on international aspects of higher education, including contextual comparisons, intercultural awareness, and cross-cultural knowledge transfer (Bailey et al., 2021). Furthermore, international staff can play a part in shaping the development of a globalised and internationalised curriculum (Willis & Hammond, 2014). International GTAs in the UK HE thus constitute an underutilised potential to shape the development of a curriculum that is creative and relevant to the global community and offers a variety of internationalisation opportunities. Academic staff that have gained experience abroad are viewed as a provider of educated worldwide

academic practice that fosters innovation in UK HEIs' teaching and learning practices (Hristov & Minocha, 2017). Like domestic GTAs, international GTAs are also filling teaching responsibilities that alleviate strain on already overworked permanent faculty members as the number of students at their institutions rises. As both teaching and academic faculty, international GTAs can thus be perceived as a provider of qualified global practice. As a result, UK HEIs will benefit from these international resources and the resulting diversity to improve pedagogical approaches and curriculum innovation. Drawing from international GTAs is likely to foster and maintain synergistic and inclusive learning contexts that serve all members. Therefore, international GTAs are crucial for promoting teaching, curriculum innovation, and pedagogical innovation.

Improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration

The recruitment of international GTAs is also crucial to improve students' intercultural competence and international collaboration. Instead of monolithic cultural domination, Ryan's (2012) concept of the transcultural classroom emphasises reciprocity between and inclusion within cultures. According to Reysen and Katzarska-Miller (2013), global citizenship involves a sense of belonging to a broader community and emphasises interdependence and interconnectedness between nations and people worldwide. To build students' intercultural competence and traits for

global citizenship, well-developed pedagogical frameworks demand academic educators who are proficient in fostering intercultural competence and global citizenship (Trede, Bowles & Bridges, 2013). According to Alberts (2008) and Pherali (2012), students believe that instructors who are foreign to their culture and demonstrate intercultural sensitivity can help them overcome preconceptions, while also exposing them to a range of perspectives, locations, and cultures. By adding elements of their local cultures and learning experiences, international GTAs can make their classrooms more accessible. Hsieh (2012) claims that rather than expecting the international staff to blend in, UK universities should deliberately benefit from them regarding the rich cultural diversity and pedagogical resources they represent on campus. According to Trede, Bowles & Bridges (2013), an international professional experience is well-positioned to provide possibilities for students to enhance intercultural competence, intercultural learning, and global citizenship. It has been stated that the presence on campus of international academic staff, in combination with international students, is a valuable tool for exposing the home student to international perspectives (European Commission, 2013). International GTAs can be viewed as a potential initial step toward transformative internationalisation in a way that challenges and modifies the values of staff members, students, and the community. Interaction with international GTAs could therefore assist students in generating a greater depth of concepts and strategies from intercultural communication, as well as

sharing and deepening their comprehension of intercultural learning. Consequently, international GTAs are valuable resources for inspiring students to embrace diversity and cultural differences, as well as to raise intercultural awareness and improve students' intercultural competence.

The classroom serves as a crossroads of global power disparities, internationalisation agendas, and firsthand experiences of student-teacher interaction for students. Regarding transcultural classrooms, international GTAs have the potential to position classroom transcultural engagement within a consciousness of multiple agendas and power relations operating at everyday, institutional, and national levels cutting across the classroom (Collins, 2021b). Additionally, international academic staff significantly contribute to international networks of researchers, providing a structure for cross-border collaboration and eventually leading to joint publications with a larger impact than UK-based articles, as stated by Universities UK (2017a). Furthermore, Lawson et al. (2019) reveal that native-born academics and students benefit from the international academic staff through increased international cooperation and collaboration. According to Edler et al. (2011), the international academic staff promote engagement with both domestic and foreign enterprises and researchers. Engagement with international GTAs can facilitate the establishment of international collaborations and the expansion of international networks, as demonstrated by previous research on the subject. In order to foster global

citizenship and advance cultural understanding, intercultural competency, and global interconnectedness, international GTAs are a crucial component of higher education programmes. Therefore, international GTAs are also essential to improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration.

Discussion and conclusion

Based on a thematic analysis of the study findings, this paper further discusses the summarised four main academic benefits and academic rationales of recruiting international GTAs to teach at UK universities. Below are detailed discussions and conclusions of four major themes:

Improving reputation and ranking: The recruitment of international GTAs to teach at UK universities can contribute a range of benefits related to reputation and ranking. The recruitment of international teaching staff is closely tied to an institution's international reputation as it strives to become a world-class university. International GTAs are viewed as valuable components of the academic community and are considered important contributors to the university's status as an international institution and its research endeavours. Their presence as international teaching staff can benefit the student-to-teacher ratio and international orientation, which enhances the university's global ranking, competitiveness, and global influence. By demonstrating a

commitment to diversity and global perspectives, the recruitment of international GTAs who have multiple roles in the university can enhance the reputation, ranking, and influence of UK HEIs. Overall, the recruitment of international GTAs to teach at UK universities can bring a range of benefits related to reputation and ranking, including improved reputation and influence in the academic community, enhanced influence and higher rankings, and increased prestige, which can attract more students and funding.

Internationalisation at home: Another academic benefit that international GTAs can contribute to UK HEIs is to promote internationalisation at home, including campus internationalisation and decolonising the classroom. International GTAs teaching in the UK contributes to creating a more diverse and international environment on campus. International GTAs bring a wide range of diverse perspectives, methods, and subject matter expertise to the classroom. In addition to sharing their own established teaching techniques from their home countries with UK HEIs, they also emphasise the importance of inclusivity and breaking down barriers between international students and domestic instructors in the learning environment. In addition to enhancing students' learning experience, the recruitment of international GTAs can also contribute to efforts to decolonise the classroom and challenge traditional power dynamics. By bringing in international perspectives and promoting inclusivity, these GTAs can help disrupt traditional hierarchies and create a more equitable teaching and

learning environment and a more inclusive and representative space for learning and knowledge-sharing. As a result, employing international GTAs can be beneficial for HEIs, as they bring diverse perspectives, knowledge, and research to campus. Therefore, the recruitment of international GTAs to teach at UK universities assists in internationalising the campus for diverse students and staff, helping to decolonise knowledge and the classroom, and stimulating internationalisation at home.

Promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation:
International GTAs have the potential to facilitate innovation in teaching, curriculum, and pedagogy and boost the learning experience for students at UK universities. The recruitment of international GTAs brings diverse cultural perspectives and academic and pedagogical experiences that can contribute to integrating resources and strategies that can encourage creativity and innovation in pedagogy and curriculum. Additionally, the international GTAs also represent an untapped resource for shaping the development of a globally relevant and innovative curriculum, as well as providing various internationalisation opportunities. Meanwhile, international GTAs play a crucial role in filling teaching positions that address faculty shortages and alleviate the burden of overworked permanent faculty as student enrollment increases. As both teaching and academic faculty, international GTAs can be regarded as a provider of qualified global practice, and UK HEIs can benefit from these international resources and diversity to improve pedagogical

approaches and curriculum innovation. Furthermore, international GTAs also bring diverse and international perspectives and experiences to the curriculum, which can engage students and provide students with a more diverse range of learning experiences. By drawing on international GTAs, universities can promote an inclusive and collaborative learning environment that benefits all community members. Therefore, international GTAs are essential for promoting innovation in curriculum, and pedagogy in UK HEIs.

Improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration: Improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration skills can be a significant benefit of recruiting international GTAs to teach at UK universities. International GTAs can be viewed as a potential initial step toward transformative internationalisation in a way that challenges and modifies the values of staff members, students, and the community. Interacting with international GTAs, students can gain deeper insights and approaches to intercultural communication and enhance their understanding of intercultural learning. Interactions with international GTAs enhance students' capacity to collaborate successfully with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Students can improve their ability to collaborate across cultural boundaries, which can be a valuable skill in a variety of fields. International GTAs are valuable resources for promoting diversity, cultural awareness, and intercultural competence among students. In a globalised society where individuals are increasingly

required to work with people of varied cultural origins, cross-cultural communication and collaboration skills can be desirable skills to help students stand out in the job market. Consequently, engagement with international GTAs also leads to the development of international collaborations and networks. As such, the incorporation of international GTAs into higher education programmes is crucial for fostering global citizenship, intercultural understanding, and global interconnectedness, as well as for enhancing students' intercultural competence and international collaboration.

Overall, through a systematic and thematic analysis of previous research, this paper summarises the four main academic rationales for recruiting international GTAs and the benefits they contribute to UK HEIs. International GTAs, therefore, represent an important aspect of the internationalisation of higher education that contributes to improving reputation and ranking; enhancing internationalisation at home (campus internationalisation, and decolonising the classroom); promoting curriculum and pedagogic innovation; and improving students' intercultural competence and international collaboration. International GTAs provide enormous potential for internationalisation at home and are a significant provider of cultural, educational, pedagogical, and academic knowledge. International GTAs are critical components in internationalising higher education including campuses, curricula, teaching and the learning experience. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate the academic benefits and contributions they provide to UK

universities. Therefore, international GTAs merit additional consideration, and I would recommend future researchers delve deeper into their contributions.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study, which include:

Scope: This study only considers the academic rationales for recruiting international GTAs and the academic benefits that they contribute to UK universities. Hence, this study does not address other potential rationales, benefits, or impacts, such as economic, social, or national rationales or benefits. There are still other ways that international GTAs contribute to UK universities, which should not be disregarded. Thus, I would recommend that future research expand on the benefits that international GTAs can generally contribute to UK HEIs. Additionally, whilst the study primarily focuses on international GTAs, it is pertinent to acknowledge the limitations of the paper concerning the treatment of domestic GTAs. Local GTAs have received limited attention in this study. To gain a more comprehensive view of GTAs, it is imperative to develop a more nuanced understanding of their diverse backgrounds and experiences, including their ethnic, racialised, cultural, and class identities. Therefore, it is crucial for future research to achieve a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the experiences of all GTAs.

Methodology: The Scopus database may not include all relevant studies or sources, and the search may be limited to a specific time period or language. This can potentially limit the scope and comprehensiveness of the findings. The inclusion criteria used to select relevant studies for the review may be biased or may exclude important studies or perspectives. Thus, this study may rely on a limited range of research methods and sources, which may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of experiences of international GTAs or the institutions they work at.

Generalisability: The findings of the study may not be representative of all the academic benefits that international GTAs can contribute to all UK universities and may not be generalisable to other countries or contexts.

The single perspective: The study may only consider the perspective of the institutions and may not consider the perspectives or experiences of international GTAs or other stakeholders.

Therefore, a study that mainly focuses on the academic rationales for recruiting international GTAs and the academic benefits that they contribute may not fully capture the complexity and diversity of the rationales and impacts of these international GTAs or the HEIs they work at. It is important to consider a range of perspectives and to use a variety of research methods to acquire a deeper comprehension of the benefits and limitations of recruiting

international GTAs to teach at UK universities.

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