Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology

ISSN: 1892-042X Vol 17, No 1 (2026) https://doi.org/10.7577/rerm.6437

Exploring Methodologies and Methods to Shape Internationalization of the Curriculum toward Decolonial Education

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Abstract

Reimagining the Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC) for social justice in higher education requires a paradigm shift to dismantle coloniality, neoliberalism, and capitalism embedded in institutional practices. Despite growing attention to equity and inclusion, IoC remains constrained by Western-centric frameworks. This paper advocates that centering decolonial education is essential for systemic change and engages this imperative through a twofold approach. First, a methodological literature review of IoC studies reveals that prevailing approaches—such as surveys, content analysis, and interviews—are rooted in conventional Western paradigms, limiting their transformative potential. Second, the paper conceptualizes methodological alternatives informed by decolonizing, Indigenous, and Global South perspectives, adopting a pluralistic orientation. Storytelling—anchored in the Indigenous concept of "story as theory"—emerges as a compelling method that prioritizes relational accountability, collective well-being, and co-created knowledge, offering a transformative framework for researching IoC in support of decolonial education. Ultimately, this paper contributes to and invites methodological reconsideration in IoC scholarship, opening pathways toward a more just and inclusive academic landscape.

Keywords: Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC); higher education; decolonial education; methodological reconsideration; storytelling; story as theory.

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Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, research on the internationalization of higher education has flourished (Kehm & Teichler, 2007), driven by rapid processes of globalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This global phenomenon has significantly blurred local, national, and international boundaries within and beyond the field of education (Leask, 2015). Postsecondary institutions worldwide are pursuing internationalization through a myriad of pathways, including curricular work, influenced by a dynamic amalgamation of political, economic, socio-cultural, and academic factors (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit, 2019). However, these internationalization efforts often prioritize the commodification of education, revenue generation, and institutional reputation building (de Wit, 2019; Knight, 2014), rather than fulfilling the institutions' social responsibilities—contributing to the well-being of both local and global communities and addressing their pressing challenges (Jones et al., 2021).

Scholars and educators have increasingly criticized the pursuit of internationalization in the post-secondary sector for its neo-colonial nature and insufficient focus on ethical commitments such as equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice (Jones, 2022; Wimpenny et al., 2022). Stein (2019) critiques the depoliticized approaches to internationalization that dominate universities, pointing to the persistence of Western-centric knowledge production, exploitative relationships, and unequal access to resources. The impacts of internationalization have significantly shaped higher education globally, reproducing and perpetuating coloniality, neo-liberalism, and capitalism within institutional practices (Jones, 2022; Shahjahan et al., 2021).

Within this context, curriculum work in higher education cannot be viewed as a neutral or isolated endeavour. It is shaped by and contributes to larger systems of knowledge production, situated within both the specific institutional settings and the broader academic context (Shahjahan et al., 2022). As such, the Internationalization of the Curriculum (IoC), despite being a central element of the internationalization agenda (Huang, 2006), falls short in disrupting dominant Western epistemologies and the ideologies and paradigms they uphold in teaching and learning (Heleta & Chasi, 2024; Ndaipa et al., 2023). As a consequence, higher education curricula continue to favour Western histories, knowledges, cultures, and practices while marginalizing ways of being, thinking, and doing that are different (Mestenhauser, 2011).

It is important to note that while terms such as "Western/non-Western" and "Global North/Global South" are often used to describe structural inequities, Moosavi (2020) reminds us that they cannot fully capture the complexities of coloniality. These axes frequently overlap asymmetrically—for instance, regions such as Latin America may be positioned within the Global South yet considered Western, while countries such as Japan or South Korea may be categorized as non-Western but part of the Global North (Moosavi, 2020). Moreover, such dichotomies risk obscuring internal heterogeneity and shifting positionalities, including scholars from the Global South working in elite Northern institutions or ethnic minorities within the Global North racialized as Southern, whose experiences further complicate these binary classifications (Moosavi, 2020). While conceptually useful, these categories require critical engagement, as they may reproduce overly reductive dichotomous framings of global inequity that decolonial scholars seek to challenge. With this in mind, I mobilize these terms as analytical constructs that denote historically

constituted and institutionally dominant configurations of knowledge production, which continue to structure, and constrain, the imaginaries and practices of IoC.

Moving forward, curriculum internationalization necessitates a fundamental paradigm shift to dismantle the neo-colonial ideology, ontology, epistemology, and axiology it endorses. To achieve this, IoC must be revisited and reimagined through a critical and decolonial lens (Heleta & Chasi, 2024). Leonardo and Singh (2017) unfold "decolonial education" as a revolutionary response to the enduring colonial logics and politics that shape education—an approach that holds significant relevance across global contexts still marked by ongoing colonial legacies. However, what constitutes decolonial education, and how it takes shape, is contingent upon the specific forms of colonialism and the particular tensions that give rise to it (Zavala, 2016). Although a single, unified definition cannot be pinned down, decolonial education—positioned within the broader scope of decolonial work—is grounded in "a variety of experiences, positionalities, cosmologies, and worldviews" (Leonardo & Singh, 2017, p. 94) that unmask and disrupt the colonial dynamics operating within educational relationships, philosophies, and the continuing construction of knowledge.

Extending this conceptual foundation, decolonial education engages fundamental questions of transformation, particularly how educational practices might contribute to processes of de-imperialization and decolonization (Baker, 2012), given the historical entanglement of the university with colonial expansion since the sixteenth century, and its embedding in imperial projects (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). Central to this endeavour is the recognition of epistemic plurality and the meaningful inclusion of diverse ways of knowing, grounded in the understanding that social justice is inseparable from cognitive justice (Baker, 2012). In this context, decolonial education reflects shifting geopolitics of knowledge, where Eurocentric epistemologies are no longer treated as universal or detached from their geohistorical and biographical conditions (Baker, 2012). It therefore seeks to expand educational possibilities by foregrounding subaltern knowledges long marginalized at the peripheries of dominant knowledge systems (Baker, 2012).

In the coming decades, IoC needs to transcend the limitations imposed by monocultural perspectives and hierarchical epistemologies that have historically dominated, and continue to dominate, courses, disciplines, and educational institutions (Shahjahan et al., 2022). Centering decolonial education is essential to this transformation. The pursuit of change not only involves the outcomes of decolonial approaches to curriculum in higher education settings but also entails scrutinizing the prevalent methodologies and methods that shape research in the field. Such inquiry may offer valuable points of departure for future IoC efforts by identifying methodological approaches that anchor and guide scholarly work, while simultaneously uncovering gaps and envisioning possibilities for decolonial education.

As an educational developer and researcher at a Canadian university in Global North—dedicated to supporting, guiding, and collaborating with instructors and other educational practitioners on their IoC initiatives—I am particularly interested in drawing on empirical studies in efforts to reshape IoC within the field. This interest is informed by the recognition that Canadian higher education is situated within a settler-colonial landscape structured by the ongoing processes of Indigenous dispossession and the enduring impacts of Eurocentrism, and thus continues to

reproduce colonial logics through its knowledge production practices (Tsosie, 2017; Cote-Meek, 2020). The persistence of settler colonialism makes efforts to center decolonial approaches within IoC both necessary and complex, as they must contend with deeply ingrained institutional norms that sustain colonial power relations (Tuck & Yang, 2012) and normalize Eurocentric standards (Stein, 2017). These dynamics resonate with broader global challenges related to epistemic hierarchies, neoliberal restructuring, and capitalist ideologies within higher education systems (Shahjahan et al., 2022), albeit being shaped differently by the specificities of geopolitical, national, and intellectual contexts (Sinha, 2025).

Through this inquiry, I aim to address the following questions, with the hope of contributing to the ongoing discourse on more equitable and inclusive approaches to IoC.

1. What are the prevailing methodologies and methods used in the field of IoC research in higher education?
2. How might these prevailing methodologies and methods constrain possibilities for reconceptualizing IoC toward decolonial education?
3. What alternative methodologies and methods might better shape IoC research for decolonial education?

Driven by these questions, I first conducted a focused methodological literature review, which synthesizes methodological practices to examine how research is carried out and to map empirical approaches in the field (Aguinis et al., 2023). I begin by positioning myself within this inquiry, acknowledging that my personal histories and cultural contexts inform the way I approach and interpret my work (Hampton, 1995). Drawing on my lived experiences as a former international student and later an immigrant of color from the Global South, I hope to pave a path toward educational equity and social justice in higher education through IoC—fully embracing diversity and realizing inclusion across all facets of academia. This positioning is crucial for laying the foundation for my exploration of methodologies and methods for IoC, leveraging empirical work within the field. I contend that meaningful systemic change in higher education curricula requires weaving decolonial thinking, across both content and methodology, into research to inform practice. Such an approach is essential for reorienting IoC in ways that truly embrace decolonial education. Research practices grounded in conventional Western methodologies and methods are less likely to facilitate this transformation.

The following sections examine how prevailing methodological approaches in IoC remain rooted in conventional Western paradigms and, as such, are inadequate for reimagining the field through a decolonial lens. In response, I propose methodological alternatives informed by decolonizing, Indigenous, and Global South perspectives. Anchored in a pluralistic orientation, these approaches open up space for critical reflection and imaginative possibilities in the ongoing evolution of curriculum internationalization.

Methodological Literature Review

I adopted a methodological literature review to uncover prevailing methodologies and methods in the field, as well as their constraints. While literature reviews are broadly understood as

systematic approaches to collecting and synthesizing existing research (Tranfield et al., 2003), they can also serve as a method for assessing and integrating evidence within a given area of inquiry (Snyder, 2019). Building on this understanding, methodological literature reviews specifically analyze prior research with attention to methodological issues, synthesizing existing practices and generating recommendations to improve research practices (Aguinis et al., 2023). By centering methodology as the object of analysis, this approach enables a critical examination of how knowledge is produced and how methodological constraints may be sustained in IoC studies. In doing so, it identifies recurring patterns, notable absences, and underlying methodological tensions within the literature (Snyder, 2019), as well as in associated real-world practice.

The methodological review was conducted in the following three stages.

Stage 1: Search Strategy and Study Identification

I identified peer-reviewed, empirical studies on IoC in higher education through searches in Google Scholar, Omni, and EBSCOhost Education Source. No date restrictions were applied to capture the breadth of the field. The search strategy employed combinations of keywords, including 'Internationalization of the Curriculum,' 'Curriculum Internationalization,' 'Internationalizing the Curriculum,' 'Post-Secondary Education,' 'Post-secondary Institution*,' 'Higher Education,' 'Universit*,' and 'College*.'

Stage 2: Screening and Selection

I manually screened search results to determine eligible studies—this involved reviewing abstracts and methodology sections to exclude conceptual or theoretical papers. Studies were included if they reported original empirical research related to IoC in higher education. This process resulted in a final sample of 15 articles.

The selected empirical studies covered a wide range of IoC topics, including student understanding, experiences, engagement, and needs (Cheng et al., 2018; Liang, 2024; Heffernan et al., 2019; Jackson & Huddart, 2010; Mittelmeier et al., 2021), faculty and staff understanding, perspectives, experiences, and engagement (Clifford & Montgomery, 2015; Lemana II et al., 2024; Ndaipa et al., 2023; O'Connor et al., 2013; Renfors, 2021; Ryan et al., 2020; Teshome et al., 2024), evidence of curriculum internationalization (Wamboye et al., 2015), international students' contributions (Sawir, 2013), and a postcolonial perspective on curricular design (Wang et al., 2022).

Stage 3: Data Extraction and Analysis

To specifically explore the first question—identifying the prevailing methodologies and methods used in IoC research—I reviewed these studies and categorized the methodologies and research methods they employed. Particular attention was given to research design (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods), data collection methods, and analytical approaches.

Table 1 presents an overview of the selected articles, including author(s) and year, their research focus, methodology, and research methods.

Table 1

Overview of Selected IoC Empirical Studies

No.	Methodology	Research Methods	Focus of **IoC** Study	Author(s) & Year
1	Quantitative	Paper-based questionnaires	Student understanding and perspectives on experiential learning	Heffernan et al., 2019
2		Online questionnaires	Student perspectives on curriculum policy change	Mittelmeier et al., 2021
3		Online questionnaires	Faculty perspectives	O'Connor et al., 2013
4		Online questionnaires	Evidence of curricular enactment	Wamboye et al., 2015
5		Hybrid questionnaires	Lecturer engagement and perspectives	Ryan et al., 2020
6	Qualitative	Course discussion prompts analysis	Educator perspectives on transformative curriculum	Clifford & Montgomery, 2015
7		Case study: interviews	Student experiences and needs	Cheng et al., 2018
8		Case study: public documents analysis/semi-structured interviews/reflective journals	Student understanding and engagement in formal curricula	Liang, 2024
9		Semi-structured interviews/questionnaire	Faculty perspectives and experiences	Lemana II et al., 2024
10		Semi-structured interviews	Faculty understanding and engagement	Ndaipa et al., 2023
11		Semi-structured interviews	International students' contributions	Sawir, 2013
12		Curriculum content analysis/semi-structured interviews	Postcolonial perspective on curricular design	Wang et al., 2022

13		Unstructured interviews	Lecturer experiences	Renfors, 2021
14	Mixed-Methods	Focus groups/survey	Student perspectives	Jackson & Huddart, 2010
15		Questionnaire/semi-structured interviews	Academic staff perspectives	Teshome et al., 2024

Prevailing Methodologies and Methods in the Study of IoC

Emerging from my review, the methodologies employed in these studies reflect a comprehensive spectrum—five adopted quantitative methods (Heffernan et al., 2019; Mittelmeier et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2020; Wamboye et al., 2015), eight engaged in qualitative research (Cheng et al., 2018; Clifford & Montgomery, 2015; Lemana II et al., 2024; Liang, 2024; Ndaipa et al., 2023; Renfors, 2021; Sawir, 2013; Wang et al., 2022), and two studies implemented mixed-methods (Jackson & Huddart, 2010; Teshome et al., 2024). The sampling strategies varied as well, encompassing purposive (Heffernan, 2019; Lemana II et al., 2024; Ndaipa et al., 2023; Teshome et al., 2024), representative (Ryan et al., 2020; Sawir, 2013), theoretical (Cheng et al., 2018), voluntary response (Liang, 2024), and randomized (Teshome et al., 2024; Wang, 2022; Wamboye et al., 2015) approaches to align with the specific research objectives.

Methods Used in Quantitative Studies

In the quantitative studies reviewed, questionnaires served as the primary research method, distributed through a mixture of online (Mittelmeier et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2013; Wamboye et al., 2015), paper-based (Heffernan et al., 2019), or a hybrid formats (Ryan et al., 2020). These quantitative surveys incorporated multiple questioning strategies, including demographic questions to identify frequencies and percentages for correlation or relationships with the study variables (Mittelmeier et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2020; Wamboye et al., 2015), open-ended questions to capture perspectives beyond the hypothesis or close-ended questions based on specific variables (Heffernan et al., 2019; Mittelmeier et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2020; Wamboye et al., 2015), and Likert scale questions to elicit participants' levels of agreement or engagement (Heffernan et al.,2019; Mittelmeier et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2020).

While open-ended questions in the surveys added a qualitative dimension, the overarching methodology of this selection of studies remained quantitative. The qualitative responses were analyzed to determine influential factors (O'Connor et al., 2013), evaluate or formulate hypotheses (Ryan et al., 2020; Wamboye et al., 2015), or convert into quantitative data (Heffernan et al., 2019)—except in one study where qualitative data provided deeper insight into student perspectives on IoC (Mittelmeier et al., 2021). Leveraging statistical evidence, these quantitative studies aimed to uncover objective, measurable, and stable truths about IoC in higher education, contributing to a scientific understanding of the topic that can be generalized across diverse contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Methods Used in Qualitative Studies

In contrast to the quantitative studies that predominantly utilized surveys, the qualitative studies employed a diverse array of methods, including case studies and interviews, to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of students, faculty, and staff regarding IoC.

For example, Cheng et al. (2018) employed a case study approach using interviews, focus groups, and surveys, and adopted a dual-phase data collection process to compare students' experiences with curriculum internationalization from different countries. Liang (2024) conducted an interpretive case study using public documents, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journals, analyzing the data through content analysis and reflexive thematic analysis to understand international postgraduate students' interpretations, experiences, and expectations of IoC. Ndaipa et al. (2023) utilized semi-structured interviews to examine faculty members' understanding of IoC. They also explored how local knowledge systems are integrated into IoC to assess whether it is moving toward decolonization or still centered on the Western paradigm.

Sawir (2013) used semi-structured interviews to explore international students' contributions to curriculum internationalization and their impact on domestic students' intercultural learning. Wang et al. (2022) combined curriculum content analysis and semi-structured interviews with program directors to understand the rationale behind program designs, followed by additional interviews with students to gauge their attitudes and experiences. Lemana II et al. (2024) gathered data through semi-structured interviews and an open-ended email questionnaire with international faculty members to understand their experiences with IoC, which were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Renfors (2021) employed unstructured interviews to gain in-depth insights into lecturers' experiences with IoC across disciplines, analyzing the data through thematic analysis. Clifford and Montgomery (2015) undertook a longitudinal study over a five-year period using content analysis to examine educators' transformative learning in an online course on curriculum internationalization. Data was collected from course discussion prompts and analyzed inductively.

Methods Used in Mixed-Methods Studies

Jackson and Huddart (2010) used a mixed-methods approach to explore domestic students' attitudes toward IoC. The study began with focus groups identifying gaps in students' understanding of internationalization, followed by a thematic analysis of the discussions. The second phase involved a survey with close-ended and Likert scale questions to determine strategies for integrating internationalization into the curriculum. Teshome et al. (2024) also employed a mixed-methods design to explore academics' beliefs about IoC. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with academics and analyzed thematically.

In summary, surveys are the preferred method in the quantitative studies and in the quantitative components of mixed-methods research, while content analysis, case studies, and interviews dominate the qualitative studies and the qualitative portions of the mixed-methods studies. These conventional methods are invaluable for academic inquiry in the field of curriculum internationalization in higher education. However, their predominance also reflects particular epistemological assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge and "truth," often

privileging forms of data that are standardized, measurable, and generalizable (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2021). As Wilson (2008) contends, conventional methods such as surveys may not fully capture the relational, contextual, and situated dimensions of knowledge production. This raises important questions about whether these conventional approaches can capture diverse ways of knowing in methodological practice. In this regard, approaches that prioritize standardization and generalizability, such as randomized designs, may be limited in their capacity to account for the contextual and relational dimensions (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008) that are central to rethinking IoC research through a decolonial lens. Building on this analysis, it becomes crucial to further examine the potential limitations and constraints these dominant methods may impose on reconceptualizing IoC in ways that meaningfully center decolonial education.

Questioning the Prevailing Methodologies and Methods

To inform IoC for decolonial education, traditional quantitative methods[1] are not ideal, as their focus on positivism and objectivity perpetuate a universalist narrative of knowledge (Lyotard as cited in Sullivan, 2003), failing to capture the nuances of experiences and social processes (Gillborn et al., 2017). Furthermore, Gillborn et al. (2017) critique these methods for upholding and reinforcing oppressive systems that permeate higher education, such as capitalism, colonialism, and neo-liberalism. While this critique may appear to be an overgeneralization, traditional quantitative methods have attributed disparities in educational processes and outcomes to the presumed deficiencies within students, overlooking the systemic injustices that "shut down, silence, and belittle equity work" (Gillborn et al., 2017, p. 17). In contrast, empirical approaches guiding IoC must move beyond research orientations and practices that exclude equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice from academic programs.

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, focus on personal experience, seeking to understand how individuals interpret their realities and assign meanings to their encounters (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These methods ground inquiries in their unique contexts, striving to interpret phenomena through the lens of personal significance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By employing qualitative methods, researchers can center the narratives, experiences, and insights of participants, thereby challenging the presumed neutrality and objectivity often associated with the numbers, statistics, and figures of traditional quantitative methods (Gillborn et al., 2017). In this regard, qualitative methods offer greater potential for uncovering the systemic oppressions and injustices that obstruct the realization of decolonial education in curricula and academic programs through IoC.

However, merely understanding IoC experiences is inadequate to eliminate the neo-colonial epistemics, structures, and practices entrenched in higher education curricula. I argue that researchers and educators committed to systemic change must go beyond simply applying qualitative methods. They need to weave decolonial thinking into their methodological approaches—not only to understand the world but also to leverage this understanding as a catalyst for transformation (Denscombe, 2024). Moreover, the qualitative methods that surfaced in my review—such as content analysis, case studies, and interviews—are conventional Western research approaches, which often devalue or marginalize knowledge production from other

[1] To distinguish it from QuantCrit, which takes a different perspective on quantitative data analysis.

cultures, or erase it entirely (Moyo, 2020), echoing Sinha's (2025) argument that such processes are marked by "invisibility and silencing" (p. 738). The inherent tension between Western research frameworks and decolonial thinking therefore demands a disruption of the dominance of conventional Western methodologies and methods in empirical practice (Sinha, 2025), including within the field of IoC.

When studying IoC for decolonial education, decolonial thinking must be woven into both the research design and process. Disrupting the dominant Western research frameworks requires creating space for alternative forms of knowledge production. This involves adopting a methodological stance that embraces ways of knowing and understanding that diverge from those traditionally valorized in academia (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024). As a researcher and educator committed to transforming higher education curricula, I echo Harari and Pozzebon's (2024) assertion that such research should not only address specific issues but, more fundamentally, contribute to eliminating exploitation and domination in their various forms—while remaining attentive to the complexities and limitations that both structure and circumscribe practice (Moosavi, 2025b; Sinha, 2025).

Exploring Methodological Alternatives

I bring my positionality and lived experiences into my exploration of methodologies and methods for IoC. As an educational developer and researcher of color, my inquiry is deeply rooted in a commitment to challenging dominant Western academic norms and confronting manifestations of oppression, while researching IoC for decolonial education. Inspired by Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021), I envision a collaborative space for conceptualizing research frameworks that embraces a diverse range of perspectives and practices, including decolonizing methodologies, Indigenous methodologies, and methodologies from the Global South. These methodologies are united in solidarity, albeit imbricated with differential access to power, to challenge and disrupt neo-colonial epistemics, structures, and practices.

Exploring empirical approaches for IoC requires a pluralistic orientation that preserves the distinctiveness of the methodologies on which a researcher may draw. It is unethical to blend these methodologies into a singular, homogenized framework, or to attempt to merge them through a reductive process. Drawing on Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux education scholar Kovach's (2019) metaphor of hatchlings in the nest, it is essential to attend equally both to the relationships between the methodologies and to the methodologies themselves. This dynamic relationship between methodologies opens up a complex and nuanced pathway for studying IoC, particularly in the context of guiding the realization of decolonial education.

Decolonizing Methodologies

While there appears to be significant overlap between decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies, Chalmers (2017) clarifies that this overlap depends on the researchers, their purpose, and the specific context. Kovach (2019) further declares that decolonizing perspectives and Indigenous epistemologies arise from distinct paradigms. Broadly speaking, decolonizing research confronts the Western academic framework as a whole, including "philosophy, pedagogy, ethics, organizational practices, paradigms, methodologies, and the discourses" (Smith,

2021, p. 2) that reinforce its hegemony. The decolonizing approach prioritizes non-Western worldviews and knowledges, emphasizing the importance of understanding research from the perspectives of the Other (Datta, 2018; Smith, 2021).

Coming from the Global South, with lived experience in contexts marked by its historical legacies, I position myself as an insider in relation to the Other. From this standpoint, I engage with decolonizing methodology not only as a research orientation but also as a wholehearted advocate for alternative ways of thinking, being, doing, and more importantly becoming—specifically inspired by Sámi[2] scholar Guttorm (2018) in understanding multiplicities. Decolonizing methodology hence becomes a critical site through which I challenge the presumed neutrality and universality of Western academic norms, while centering long marginalized practices and approaches. My insider perspective echoes decolonizing commitments to reconfigure whose knowledge is valued, how it is produced, and to whom it is accountable (Shahjahan et al., 2022).

Smith (2021) asserts that decolonizing methodologies go beyond critiquing colonialism; they necessitate the creation of new ways of knowing and the critical revision of conventional Western approaches, opening alternative avenues for producing knowledge. This call to action also highlights the need to confront what Ndhlovu (2021) identifies as "methodological stasis"(p. 196)—the continued dominance of Western knowledge systems, research methods, and practices—even in fields where there has been significant enthusiasm for change and transformation. Hui (2023) extends this, noting that over two decades after Linda Tuhiwai Smith's initial publication of *Decolonising Methodologies* in 1999, her appeal for reforming methodologies and research frameworks remains largely unrealized. In the third edition of her book, Smith (2021) acknowledges limited progress in decolonizing knowledge and political structures of academia despite shifts in discourse toward terms like reconciliation, inclusion, and diversity. This recognition underscores the need for researchers to continue these conversations, urging a critical reassessment of methodologies, anchored in a genuine commitment to transformation and social change (Hui, 2023).

However, this stasis should not be interpreted as evidence that no progress has been made, but rather as a critique of the trajectory and nature of the changes that have taken place thus far (Hui, 2023). In response, Ndhlovu (2021) advocates for engaging with the complex, dynamic nature of research interactions, moving beyond binary oppositions, and developing “methodological approaches devoted to finding connections, points of confluence, and opportunities for transfer of concepts” (p. 199). Echoing this call, Hui (2023) introduces the concept of “methodologies-in/as-practices” (p. 1080) to tackle methodological stasis. Methodologies-in/as-practices recognizes that the world is composed of diverse researchers and research practices, providing a foundation for furthering the decolonization of knowledge production and stimulating methodological transformation (Hui, 2023).

First, this methodological concept encourages viewing methodologies as practices—an inquiry into the actual process of doing methodologies, specifically how they are designed and enacted in

[2] The Sámi are the only recognized indigenous people of Europe, inhabiting the specific areas of Northern Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia (Guttorm, 2018, p. 47).

response to particular research goals and contexts (Hui, 2023). Second, it broadens the scope of methodologies by calling for collaboration with various communities and leveraging multiple pathways to transformation, thereby resisting the marginalization of experiences beyond the traditional boundaries of the academy (Hui, 2023). According to Moosavi (2025a), methodologies-in/as-practices serves as a reminder that academics do not own methodologies or methods—a point that reinforces the need to approach research as open, relational, and not confined to academic authority.

By shifting the focus of critique in methodological discussions to prioritize diverse practitioners and practices, methodologies-in/as-practices prompts critical reflection on bridging theoretical discussions with concrete strategies for decolonizing methodologies (Hui, 2023). This well aligns with Smith's (2021) assertion that meaningful decolonizing practices are not purely theoretical nor solely action-oriented, but instead reside in the realm of praxis, where theory and action converge. It invites researchers to examine not only what needs to be transformed, but also which existing practices might already serve as foundations for change (Hui, 2023).

In this light, methodologies-in/as-practices—a methodology absent from the empirical approaches reviewed in the field of IoC—holds significant promise for addressing the persistent ambiguity surrounding what constitutes an internationalized curriculum in higher education (Liang, 2024). While scholars such as Leask (2009, 2015), de Wit and Leask (2015), and Green and Whitsed (2015, 2020) have proposed evolving definitions, the practical application of IoC remains elusive—often criticized as "a hollow shell behind the rhetoric" (Green & Whitsed, 2015, p. 3). As a means of addressing methodological stasis, methodologies-in/as-practices encourages engagement with communities that have effectively adopted decolonizing methodologies and calls for analysis of the factors that determine whether these changes have impacted other interconnected practices (Hui, 2023). In doing so, it offers valuable guidance for the development and implementation of IoC, particularly in support of decolonial education.

Indigenous Methodologies

Wilson (2001) expounds that Indigenous methodologies are grounded in Indigenous philosophical frameworks or epistemologies. These methodologies are defined not only by the method used but by the relationship between the method and the underlying paradigm and alignment with Indigenous worldviews (Kovach, 2019). While avoiding the oversimplification of pan-Indigenization, to be considered Indigenous, a methodology must follow a process that emphasizes relational accountability (Wilson, 2008). Broadly speaking, Indigenous methodology centers on core principles such as respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, which are essential for establishing healthy (ethical and accountable) relationships between researchers and communities (Wilson, 2008). More specifically, Kovach (2009) outlines a methodology that draws on several key elements of Plains Cree traditions, including: "(a) holistic epistemology, (b) story, (c) purpose, (d) the experiential, (e) tribal ethics, (f) tribal ways of gaining knowledge, and (g) an overall consideration of the colonial relationship" (p. 44).

Story holds particular significance as a way of knowing not only within Plains Cree traditions but across Indigenous research contexts, wherein it is conceived as both a methodological and epistemological practice within Sámi scholarship (Guttorm et al., 2021). For example, Guttorm et

al. (2021) conceptualize “research-storying” (p. 113) as a decolonizing approach that integrates Indigenous ontologies and ways of knowing into academic research and writing—framing storytelling not simply as a means of representing Indigenous experiences and wisdom, but as a process through which knowledge is actively generated. This approach unsettles conventional academic norms and opens space for relational, embodied, and more-than-human understandings of knowledge production (Guttorm et al., 2021). It also resonates with Nxumalo and Nayak’s (2024) call for “(re)storying anticolonial place relations” to reimagine education by positioning belonging as a situated, ongoing practice of relation-making among human and more-than-human beings, grounded in “ecological reciprocity” (p. 592).

Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies offer invaluable insights for reconceptualizing IoC methodologies, given their holistic, relational, and reciprocal nature. However, their application may not easily translate to non-Indigenous research, as they are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts (Held, 2019). Although some Western paradigms—such as critical and transformative—may share core commitments like valuing relationships, recognizing the complexity of reality, and amplifying marginalized voices, they do not fully align with the aims and principles that underpin Indigenous research (Mertens & Cram, 2016). Furthermore, Indigenous scholars caution that Indigenous paradigms are fundamentally distinct from Western research paradigms and that the former cannot simply be absorbed within the latter. Attempting such an integration risk undermining the distinctiveness and locatedness of Indigenous approaches to education and research (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Many Indigenous scholars have voiced strong concerns about fitting Indigenous methodologies into Western categories (Gaudry, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Engaging with Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies necessitates adherence to ethical protocols that emphasize respect, care, and the recognition that these knowledges remain the intellectual and cultural property of the Indigenous communities from which they originate, even as they are shared for the benefit of others (Wilson, 2008). Local protocols may govern the appropriateness of specific methodological approaches (Simonds & Christopher, 2013), which researchers are encouraged to carefully respond to in their practice. McGregor et al. (2018) suggest that non-Indigenous scholars and educators should not attempt to fully adopt Indigenous methodologies, but instead, adapt Indigenous values to inform their own research contexts in a respectful and ethical manner.

Despite the concerns, debates, and critiques of incompatibility between Indigenous and Western paradigms, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) argue that dialogue between these perspectives is crucial for methodologies focused on justice and equity, and as such research must move beyond reliance on a single paradigm. Hart (2010) asserts that worldviews or paradigms are not strictly Indigenous or non-Indigenous, but are fluid, “with strong overlaps and great chasms” (p. 11). While the overlaps can be reconciled, the chasms reveal the incompatible facets of the different paradigms that must always be considered (Held, 2019). As Tuck and Yang (2012) caution us, bring decolonial thinking into research entails an unsettling collaboration marked by contentious solidarity and an unpredictable outcome, and it “cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks” (p. 3). This challenge is one that any IoC researcher interested in decolonial work must be

prepared to embrace, or at least critically account for.

Methodologies from the Global South

Castañeda-Londoño et al. (2024) contend that weaving decolonial thinking into research necessitates engaging with epistemological perspectives, worldviews, and contributions of scholars from the Global South, as the latter offers the theoretical foundation for the former. At the same time, a careful conceptual distinction is necessary between decolonial thinking and scholarship emerging from the Global South. While decolonial theory has been significantly shaped by scholars based in or engaging with the Global South, not all scholarship from the Global South is inherently decolonial (Moosavi, 2020). Conflating these two risks essentializing the Global South as a singular or inherently oppositional epistemic space in relation to Western ways of knowing—this reproduces the reductive binaries that decolonial scholars seek to unsettle (Moosavi, 2020). As Moosavi (2020) cautions, such essentialization can disregard internal diversity, exclude alternative or non-elite perspectives, and overlook how some Southern scholarship may reinforce Northern-centric assumptions. Bearing this distinction in mind, as I explore methodologies for IoC, one illustrative example that informs practice is metodologia otra, which demonstrates how decolonial perspectives might be woven into research design and conduct.

Metodologia otra or “methodology other” (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024, p. 24) refers to a knowledge creation and dissemination process rooted in the experiences of communities historically marginalized by colonial structures. This concept, derived from Mignolo’s (2003) notion of the paradigm other, emphasizes the importance of recognizing histories and epistemologies that have been obscured, suppressed, or overlooked by dominant Western frameworks (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024). In particular, the four key principles of metodologia otra profoundly shape my reconceptualization of methodologies for IoC, focusing on decolonial education. These principles challenge the hierarchical, linear, exclusionary, and rationalist structures of Western methodologies, offering new avenues for knowledge production.

The first principle, "from a critical stance to learning to unlearn" (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024, p. 68), advocates for moving beyond critical engagement with knowledge to actively unlearning colonial assumptions embedded in conventional academic practices. This process of unlearning and relearning is essential for deconstructing colonial power structures (Walsh, 2009). The second principle, "from reflexivity and place of speech to escrevivência" (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024, p. 70), emphasizes the role of reflexivity in decolonial methodologies. It encourages researchers to examine their biases and privileges while validating marginalized voices through escrevivência—the concept of ‘writing-living’ (Evaristo, 2011), which frames writing as lived subjectivity, narrating stories that link individual experiences to collective realities shaped by shared social positions (Cavalcante & Leite, 2021).

The third principle, "from dialogicity to interculturality" (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024, p. 72), extends the concept of dialogue to include intercultural engagement with conflicting cultural perspectives. Interculturality values diverse epistemologies and worldviews, promoting inclusive engagement with cultural differences and challenging hierarchical power dynamics in knowledge production (Walsh, 2009). The fourth principle, “from affectivity to *corazonar/sentipensar*” (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024, p. 73), merges *corazón* (heart) and *sentir* (to feel), integrating emotion and

intellect to challenge the rationalist approach of Western academic research. In addition, *sentipensar*, or 'thinking-feeling' creates a more holistic, embodied approach to the construction of knowledge (Arias, 2012). Together, these principles serve as a transformative framework for reimagining methodologies for IoC through a decolonial lens.

Attending to the methodologies discussed above gives rise to what Held (2019) describes as a "multiparadigmatic space" (p. 9)—one that embraces a wide spectrum of ontologies, ideologies, epistemologies, axiologies, and philosophical assumptions. In searching for IoC methodologies, this means that paradigmatic positions are not mutually exclusive; adopting one does not preclude engagement with others (Held, 2019). However, it is critical to recognize that while the methodologies explored in this paper share a common commitment to resistance—through challenging dominant Western research frameworks and centering the "concerns and worldviews of the colonized Other" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 13)—they remain distinct and, at times, even contradictory. For IoC researchers, grappling with this complexity is essential. Moreover, conceptualizing empirical approaches in ways that support decolonial education within this envisioned collaborative space foregrounds the need to integrate "decolonial reflexivity" (Moosavi, 2025b, p. 652) into methodological praxis—thereby enabling more nuanced engagement with the complexities, frictions, and limits inherent in such work and, in turn, guiding IoC research toward decolonial efforts.

Conceptualizing Methodologies and Methods for IoC

The aforementioned methodologies collectively emphasize ethical, community-engaged, and collaborative approaches to knowledge production—articulated through relational accountability, participatory engagement, and co-creation. Together, they advocate that shaping IoC for decolonial education requires prioritizing reciprocal knowledge exchange, wherein researchers and participants engage in processes of mutual learning, unlearning, and relearning to support curricular transformation. This approach counters extractive practices (Gaudry, 2011) and fosters a more relational and inclusive process (Chilisa, 2012). Furthermore, echoing the work of McGregor et al. (2018), methodologies for IoC must embrace diversity and multiplicity, moving beyond the rigid restrictions of Western hegemony. This orientation—rooted in holism, relationships, interconnectedness, and an understanding of knowledge and people within specific cultural and historical contexts—allows for a more inclusive, contextually relevant approach to knowledge production while empowering marginalized voices (McGregor et al., 2018).

Emerging from my conceptualization, IoC methodologies need to center relational accountability, mutual respect, reciprocity, and the collective well-being of all participants. Importantly, these methodologies are not static checklists or predefined endpoints (Kovach, 2009). Instead, they represent dynamic, evolving processes that engender continual dismantling and reconstruction of knowledge both within and beyond the academy (Zavala, 2013). Inspired by Kuokkanen (2009) and Smith (2021), decolonial IoC methodologies do not entirely reject Western theories and methods; rather, they create space for thoughtful adaption and selective incorporation of these approaches when they are relevant and beneficial to the research and the communities involved. In practice, this may include reworking conventional methods to foster collaboration, resistance, and confrontation, or developing new frameworks and tools for inclusive, relational, and ethical

knowledge production (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024).

While many research methods may align with these values and principles, I focus on story, and more specifically storytelling, as a compelling example that challenges dominant narratives and opens pathways for alternatives (Guttorm et al., 2021; Rice & Mündel, 2018). This method surfaced in my exploration of decolonizing, Indigenous, and Global South methodologies. In particular, Sámi scholarship offers a clear conceptualization—framing "research-storying" as a relational approach to knowledge production and dissemination that unsettles conventional academic forms—and calls on higher education institutions to engage with alternative modalities of knowing and expression (Guttorm et al., 2021). Extending beyond Sámi contexts, storytelling is also central to Plains Cree traditions, resonates with the concept of 'writing-living' in metodologia otra, and transcends the traditional boundaries of scholarly work as advocated by methodologies-in/as-practices. Taken together, these perspectives illustrate how storytelling can meaningfully inform IoC research for decolonial education by centering relational, collaborative, and non-linear approaches to knowledge and learning.

As Kovach (2019) observes, story-based research has gained recognition in recent years, with mainstream social scientists recognizing the significance of narrative in meaning-making. However, conventional Western research regards stories merely as theoretical tools for organizing and analyzing experiences (Rice & Mündel, 2018). In contrast, Indigenous scholars view stories as carriers of knowledge (Guttorm et al., 2021)—embodying worldviews and conveying beliefs about the world—where "story itself is theory" (Rice & Mündel, 2018, p. 220). While not uniform, Indigenous Peoples understand stories as co-creations that emerge from the dynamic relationship between storytellers and listeners, grounded in deep connections to land and spirit (Rice et al., 2022).

Reflecting on storytelling as a methodological approach, Thomas (2005) highlights its holistic nature, noting that it engages spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental dimensions of research. Bishop (1999) extends storytelling with the notion of "collaborative storying" (p. 6), where both researcher and participants co-create knowledge. This approach challenges hierarchical structures in conventional Western research that determine legitimate knowledge and those who control it (Rice et al., 2022). However, non-Indigenous scholars should refrain from directly adopting Indigenous storytelling practices, as these practices are embedded in specific cultural protocols and traditions (Kovach, 2019). Instead, they should listen to and learn from Indigenous thought leaders about Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies (Kovach, 2019), and explore how these perspectives can meaningfully inform and enrich decolonial approaches to research.

To guide IoC toward decolonial education through empirical research, I envision storytelling, particularly through semi-structured interviews, as a powerful method for collaborative generation of knowledge. Many decolonial researchers continue to draw on conventional qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews, to create dialogical spaces, where all voices are heard on their own terms (Harari & Pozzebon, 2024). Moosavi (2025a) echoes this point, proposing that some traditional research methods, including interviews, can still be employed in decolonial research, as they are capable of generating valuable insights. However, as Smith (2021) reminds us, such methods should never be adopted uncritically. This intersection

suggests not a contradiction but a productive tension, in which conventional methods are reoriented through decolonial thinking and reflexive practice. It is precisely at this intersection that a meaningful convergence occurs. In practice, the Indigenous concept of 'story as theory' offers a valuable analytical and methodological lens, inviting researchers and participants to view stories as vessels of knowledge, culture, and relationships—thus holding transformative potential to reimagine and reshape social systems (Rice & Mündel, 2018).

Reviewing Story Interviews in Application

To further illustrate the potential of story interviews as a research method that transforms IoC toward decolonial education, I have examined their application by consulting empirical studies that exemplify this approach in practice, focusing on 'story as theory.' Using the same research databases and search strategy employed in my analysis of the fifteen IoC studies (methodological literature review), I identified five articles in higher education that incorporated storytelling or narrative-based interview techniques. Key search terms included the combination of 'story interview*,' 'storytelling interview*,' 'narrative interview*,' 'conversational interview*,' 'study,' 'research,' as well as 'Post-Secondary Institution*,' 'Post-secondary Education,' 'Higher Education,' 'Universit*,' and 'College*.' A cross-comparative review reveals that story-based methods are taken up across diverse areas of the field.

Rovagnati and Pitt (2022) used longitudinal narrative interviews and audio diaries to examine how diverse literacies shape students' engagement with feedback over the course of a year in globalized higher education, highlighting how literacy backgrounds influence the interpretation and use of feedback. Sundermann et al. (2022) conducted a multi-case study using narrative interviews and conceptual maps to explore how students make meaning from sustainability-focused learning, showing how storytelling supports critical, reflective, and sustainability-oriented thinking. Adu-Yeboah and Forde (2011) used life history and episodic narrative interviews within an interpretive framework to examine the challenges faced by Ghanaian women returning to higher education, generating insights to inform institutional improvement.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that integrating storytelling into interviews can enrich scholarly research in meaningful ways. However, a key observation from my analysis reveals that their use of storytelling still falls within 'story in theory'—where storytelling is primarily seen as a technique for making sense of experiences, organizing narratives, and generating theoretical understanding—reflecting dominant qualitative research conventions (Rice & Mündel, 2018). Specifically, relationship building between researchers and participants appears ad hoc, limited in depth, and confined to the data collection phase of these studies. Moreover, commitments to relational accountability and reciprocity in knowledge exchange are not clearly articulated in their research design and practice. While storytelling adds valuable insights to the research landscape, it often operates as a prescriptive method with defined procedures, grounded in a Western scientific and realist paradigm (Rice & Mündel, 2018).

On the other hand, Moitra (2024) and Barnard et al. (2021) align more closely with 'story as theory' in their use of story interviews. Moitra (2024) explored Indigenous autonomy in higher education in Jharkhand, India, focusing on the perspectives of educators and administrators who were often silenced by the colonial legacies within the institution. Utilizing story interviews, the

study highlighted participants' life stories shaped by their experiences in contrasting educational systems. The research unfolded in two phases. Phase one involved rapport-building through initial telephone and WhatsApp conversations, followed by in-person meetings to establish trust. Phase two centered on collaborative storytelling during interviews and re-storytelling during transcription, emphasizing the temporal, social, and cultural aspects of each participant's narrative. Focus group discussions provided additional opportunities for participants to share their experiences, further informed by observations and reflections during data analysis. The study aimed to amplify silenced voices and allow Indigenous participants to reclaim and redefine their identities, validating storytelling and collective knowledge as legitimate sources of experience.

Grounded in an interpretivist and social constructionist framework, Barnard et al. (2021) examined women researchers' transitions into academic roles within Engineering through a three-year action research project in a UK university. The study was participant-led, with researchers and participants co-determining the direction and methods through in-person meetings. Time was intentionally dedicated to building relationships and trust to minimizing hierarchical dynamics. Three group discussions, followed by in-depth interviews, were facilitated as participatory spaces where career stories were collectively developed, interpreted, and situated within shared narratives. This co-creative process was also employed in data analysis, with interpretive authority distributed across participants and researchers—an approach referred to as socially-constructed data. Aligned with feminist commitments to ethical research, the study explored shared understandings of how higher education becomes gendered through social interactions. It generated nuanced insights into the formation of academic identities within structurally inequitable and power-laden contexts.

These studies illustrate how integrating storytelling into interviews can benefit researchers, participants, and knowledge outcomes. These benefits, as I interpret them, include identity validation, deepened understanding, navigation of systemic constraints, authentic engagement, empowerment of marginalized voices, and meaning-making within higher education. These elements not only enrich research process but also support the broader goal of transforming higher education curricula toward decolonial education through IoC—making both the research and curriculum more relevant and potentially impactful. However, as Dulci and Malheiros (2021) emphasize, the value of a research tool comes not from its use alone, but from the researcher's critical and intentional application of it. In other words, merely incorporating story interviews does not automatically introduce decolonial thinking into practice; rather, it is the deliberate and reflexive use of these methods to challenge neo-colonial epistemics, structures, and practices that bring decolonial thinking into IoC research.

Conclusion

The ongoing conversation on reimagining internationalization of higher education for social justice calls for a critical re-evaluation of its practices (Castiello-Gutiérrez et al., 2023), including curricular work. To unlock its transformative potential, IoC must be grounded in a commitment to decolonial education that challenges and disrupts entrenched neo-colonial epistemics, structures, and practices. To guide future practice, it is imperative to examine empirical foundations of IoC,

identify gaps, and envision new possibilities.

This inquiry revealed that prevailing research methodologies and methods are insufficient for re-shaping IoC through a decolonial lens. Instead, decolonial thinking must be woven into research frameworks to facilitate meaningful systemic change. In response, I conceptualized alternative methodological approaches to IoC, informed by my positionality as an educational developer and researcher of color from the Global South. Adopting a pluralistic orientation, I explored decolonizing, Indigenous, and Global South methodologies, emphasizing both their distinctiveness and relational connections.

This process highlighted reciprocal knowledge exchange and the co-creation of dialogic spaces, wherein researchers and participants engage in mutual learning, unlearning, and relearning for curricular transformation. It also brought forward core values such as relational accountability, holism, respect, and reciprocity—ultimately leading me to identify story interviews as a promising method for future IoC research, grounded in the Indigenous concept of 'story as theory.' My review of empirical studies employing story interviews in higher education further affirmed their potential to meaningfully weave decolonial thinking into IoC research, thereby contributing to the pursuit of decolonial education.

While acknowledging the limitations of this inquiry, particularly regarding the scope of the reviewed literature and studies, I remain optimistic that story interviews, framed as 'story as theory,' offer valuable insights into transforming curricula through processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning. I hope this paper contributes to shifting the discourse on curriculum internationalization toward decolonial education and inspires further reconsideration and reimagining of IoC research across higher education sectors—supporting efforts to cultivate a more equitable and inclusive landscape in academia.

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