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Globalization of Gerontology Education: Current Practices and Perceptions for Graduate Gerontology Education in the United States

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to document current practices and understandings about globalization of gerontology education in the United States. Better understanding of aging requires international perspectives in global communities. However, little is known about how globalization of gerontology education is practiced in U.S. graduate-level degree programs. The authors conducted qualitative interviews with representatives of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, the major national organization supporting higher education in gerontology, graduate program directors, and students. Although all respondents expressed their interest in globalizing gerontology education, actual practices are diverse. The authors discuss suggested conceptualization and strategies for globalizing gerontology education.

Keywords

globalization; gerontology education; grounded theory

INTRODUCTION

The concept of globalization has been applied to nearly all aspects of 21st-century social life, including the marketplace, the economy, food, music, sports, businesses, and education. Although there is a growing body of scientific literature on the definitions, causes, consequences, and history of globalization, the term and the concept are still used loosely. For higher education in general, and gerontology education (GE) specifically, it is useful to

consider carefully what this “globe talk” (Singh, 2004, p. 103) means—in definition. Because population aging is a global phenomenon (i.e., it is occurring in every nation around the world), the “globalization” of GE seems a likely prospect. Indeed, the tag line for the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE—the premier U.S. organization devoted to GE since its establishment in 1974) is “Globalizing Education on Aging.”

AGHE’s branding provides a good opportunity to look at what *globalization* means in the field of gerontology. Three facts are important. Every nation is dealing with the aging of its population (Bloom, Boersch-Supan, McGee, & Seike, 2011). The interest in GE around the world is increasing (in some cases as a means to build a work force prepared to serve the older population) (Porter & Vidovich, 2000; Sperling & Tucker, 1997). Also, the content of gerontology increasingly includes “global” content in multiple ways including a description of aging in other countries, comparisons across countries, and study abroad options (Kunkel, 2008). Consequently, a fuller and more explicit definition of the “globalization of gerontology education” is in order. This article contributes to that definitional process by applying ideas from the globalization literature to gerontology education, and by presenting findings from a study of faculty and students in gerontology doctorate-granting institutions.

Globalization: Overview and Application to Education

In general, *globalization* refers to processes that are manifest in “interconnectedness and interdependence of people and institutions throughout the world” (Epstein, 2002). This increasing interdependence and interconnectedness result from advancement in transportation, communication, and information technology (Fry, 2005). The shrinking of space attributable to physical and electronic travel and the increasing connectivity of people across geographic borders contribute to the characterization of globalization as “time-space compression” (Singh, 2004). Another important component of globalization is the growth of a global consciousness or a sense of the world as a singular, shared place (Robertson, 1992). Globalization has had a significant impact on most, if not all, societies, families, and individual lives in numerous ways (Vaira, 2004), including demographic shifts, economic change, and political and cultural movements (Polivka, 2001). Globalization—as reflected by the concepts of interdependence and interconnectedness—also touches higher education, primarily through the process of sharing of ideas, information, and practices (Spring, 2009). GE is no exception. Some graduate-level degree programs (i.e., master’s and doctoral programs—*graduate programs* hereafter) in gerontology within the United States emphasize internationally focused curricula, exchange programs, joint degree programs, research collaborations, and active recruitment of international students. However, the goals, processes, and outcomes of such initiatives vary significantly across institutions (Kunkel, 2008).

What Is Globalization of Education?

Spring (2009) defined *globalization of education*, “as the worldwide discussions, processes and institutions affecting local education practices and policies” (p. 1). A number of academic disciplines have incorporated globalization into their curricula; these include anthropology (Fry, 2005), history, sociology, psychology, economics, and political science, to name a few (Spring, 2009). For any discipline, the “globalization” of a subject matter can be reflected in curricular content, in the emergence of new pedagogy based on global exchanges among professionals around the world, or both. Although the meanings of the general term *globalization* significantly vary across contexts (Barry, 2003), *globalization of education* has several explicit definitions, including new cultural forms, media, and communication technologies that shape the relations of the affiliation, identity, and

interaction within and across local and global educational settings (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Spring, 2009).

Robertson (1992) argued that globalization has brought about an accelerated compression of the contemporary world and homogenization of world cultures into a singular cultural entity. As a result of such changes, educational ideas, practices, and policies have become diffused across the global education superstructure (Spring, 2009). In other words, the growing global networks of educational ideas and practices move toward the integration of world cultures in education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2006; Spring, 2009). Taken together, the globalization of education reflects a series of transitions from today's education systems to new ideas and practices to meet the needs of changing global communities.

Several theoretical approaches to the globalization of higher education can provide guidance to the task at hand (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Spring, 2009). Three specific approaches are relevant to gerontology in higher education: world culture theory, culturalist perspectives, and human capital world theory. The world culture theory acknowledges the existence of common global educational goals from a multicultural perspective (Spring, 2009). All world cultures then slowly integrate into a single global education culture (Robertson, 1992; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). According to this framework, the globalization of gerontology education would be manifest in a set of shared goals for the content, pedagogy, and outcomes of higher education about aging. Culturalist perspectives, on the other hand, view globalization of education as a process of borrowing and lending educational ideas. Such exchanges result in the existence of "different knowledge" or different ways of seeing the world across local communities in the process of globalization. Culturalists contend that, because "schooling is imposed on local cultures and local conditions" (Spring, 2009, p. 14), local actors (e.g., education policy makers) are able to adapt locally appropriate models of schooling from the global superstructure. In gerontology, this perspective might be evidenced in an emphasis on exchange programs, study abroad, cross-national research collaborations, and a programmatic focus on comparative study of issues of aging around the world. Finally, the human capital world theory of globalization suggests that the primary goal of education is to prepare workers for competition and performance in a world economy. This perspective has been supported by world political and educational leaders for its promise to enhance economic growth and development. Burbules and Torres (2000) argued that schools have not been actively concerned with the creation of a competitive international labor pool as the human capital world theory suggests. In gerontology, however, there is evidence that, in some regions of the world, gerontology education is developing in response to labor force needs. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa there is an emerging concern about, and interest in, training health care professionals in geriatrics and establishing accreditation systems which acknowledge "gerontology and care for the aged as vocational occupations" (Aboderin & Ferreira, 2009, p. 17).

Thus, each of these overarching frameworks offers suggestions for how the globalization of gerontology and geriatrics might be defined by faculty and students in the field. However, there has been no empirical investigation of the extent of, or perceptions of globalization in higher education about aging. This study aims to document the global focus and increasing globalization of education in the graduate-level gerontology programs in the United States. In addition, we suggest a conceptual model specifically appropriate for GE. The focus is on graduate-level students and programs for two reasons: graduate programs represent some degree of maturity for the field and, as such, are likely to anticipate new horizons for the discipline. Also, individuals who are currently in the graduate-level gerontology programs are the present and future leaders in the field of gerontology in the United States and elsewhere in the world. The agenda and practices in current programs are likely to influence future gerontology leaders and students at higher education institutions. This study explores

two related research questions: a) what does globalization of GE mean? and b) what are the current practices and perceptions of globalization of GE in the United States at the levels of national organizations, graduate-level program directors, and individual students?

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to describe the general understanding of the current practices and perceptions on globalization of GE. We used a qualitative approach for two reasons. First, the comparatively small number of universities offering gerontology programs at master's and doctoral levels in the United States (nine programs at the time of this study necessitates an in-depth exploration of this phenomenon). Graduates from such programs are most likely to become gerontology researchers/educators in higher education. Second, the current conceptualizations of globalizing GE have not been investigated. Our investigation explored perceptions and practices at three different levels: a) national level through AGHE, b) program level through graduate directors, and c) student level through international students' perspectives.

Based on the body of literature and existing theories of globalization of education, two separate sets of interview questions for graduate program directors and graduate students were developed. Interview guides were designed to capture the current practices and perceptions on globalization of GE. For example, program directors were asked questions pertaining to how courses are structured to meet the growing interests of aging in the international context and to explain what globalization of GE means. On the other hand, student respondents were asked questions on what they consider to be inclusion of international aspects of aging in their programs. The interview format was either phone or face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted between 15 to 30 minutes. The data collection was done between May and November, 2010, and therefore, all participants in this study were active members of AGHE and/or gerontology graduate programs at the time of data collection.

Participants and Data Collection

Upon the approval from the Institutional Review Board, we interviewed three of the AGHE executive committee members (referred to as AGHE representatives hereafter), who were identified from the organization's Website, and who agreed to participate in this study. We interviewed five of the nine program graduate directors but were not able to contact the other four during the study period. This number of interviewees was sufficient because it achieved saturation point (discussed in the results section) where no new themes emerged from additional interviews (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The program directors were contacted using information found on the individual program's Websites and the database maintained by AGHE. We sent an invitation e-mail to international students whose names are in the latest contact list (as of May 2010) of the ongoing GE Longitudinal Study Survey (GELS) (Ewen, Watkins, & Bowles, 2006). Two weeks after the first invitation e-mail was sent, we followed up with a reminder e-mail. In addition, the international student respondents were also recruited through snowball sampling techniques where students who were first interviewed recommended their colleagues who are also international students who meet the eligibility criteria in this study. As a result, six international students agreed to participate in this study. Prior to the interview, the detailed description of this study was sent to the participants who agreed to participate. The interviewers obtained the oral consent from the participants during the interview. Additionally, each participant was asked to sign and send the consent form following the completion of each interview. Only international graduate students were interviewed because we felt their views reflect educational

experiences both in sight and outside of the United States. They could also identify the gap between the needs of GE in the international community and current practices in existing U.S. programs. U.S. students, on the other hand, might see globalization of GE as one of the optional means to learn about aging. Focusing on international students, then, enabled the study to document many diverse opinions.

Qualitatively trained interviewers conducted the interview. Their training consisted of graduate-level qualitative methods courses and participation in on-campus qualitative researcher forums. The interviewers consisted of U.S. and non-U.S. researchers. This approach provides the researcher with a firsthand account and point of reference when interviewing international students about GE. The interviews were partially or entirely audio-recorded, and the interviewers recorded detailed field notes. The interview recordings and notes were transcribed into case summaries of the responses, ensuring that all the details and key information were included for qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis Strategy

The grounded theory approach was employed to analyze the narrative data from the interview because of the exploratory nature of the project. This approach investigates the contents of the data for the common themes or patterns that emerge from the narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in this case, the current practices and the meanings and perceptions of globalizing GE. The themes and patterns were either observations or concepts that are repeatedly reported by respondents and eventually are repeated to the point of saturation. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained that grounded theory is an approach that uses a systematic set of procedures either to develop an inductively derived emergent theory about a phenomenon or to refine concepts for theory building.

The primary objective of our research is to expand upon what is known regarding the globalization of GE. We did this by identifying key elements of this phenomenon and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to the social context out of which they are derived, using the systematic process of constructivism accordingly (LaRossa, 2005). In other words, we used a grounded theory approach to explore the rich details provided by our informants regarding the globalization of GE. These themes and patterns pertaining to our questions of interest were organized into coherent categories. After performing an initial, manual open code on the interview data, salient concepts were identified, and created codes allowed us to move from the general to the specific focus, enabling more engaged analysis of the text data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated “the first step in theory building is conceptualizing,” indicating that open coding is that part of the analysis describing the phenomenon found within the text (p. 2). Essentially, we coded each line, sentence, and paragraph in search of the answer to the repeated responses to questions, for instance, what is this about, what is being referenced here?

Key words, concepts, or codes emerged from the data. We then performed axial coding to relate the codes (categories and their properties) to each other. To maintain a level of clarity and organization, we looked for causal references and attempted to fit things into a basic frame of generic relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Once the categories were related, we then began to group them into larger themes. This process is known as selective coding, where codes from the axial stage are refined and further developed. At that point, we continued to analyze data using an inductive approach with an intercoder reliability strategy to ensure contextual validity (Kurasaki, 2000; Warren & Karner, 2005). Consistent with the constant comparative method for identifying themes and patterns in qualitative data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), the two qualitative analysts were involved in concurrent coding of interviews to assess the reliability and trustworthiness of the data. The level of agreement of

the categories and themes identified by the two coders was high, close to 9 of 10 times (i.e., approximately 90% interrater reliability rate).

During the initial coding process, two qualitative analysts independently employed an open coding technique with each interview in its entirety, noting perceptions of common themes that appear in multiple interviews, and cognizant of the interview questions. The coding process yielded several themes, which were then narrowed down to two overarching themes or findings: meanings and current practices and perceptions of globalizing GE. Then all researchers in this study met to discuss collectively these two themes and came to an agreement about the initial codes. This process included looking for consensus about the subthemes identified in the two sets of initial codes.

FINDINGS

Meanings of Globalization of Gerontology Education

Although there was agreement on the need to globalize gerontological education, there was a wide range of meanings and variability in how this broad goal is implemented at the national and program levels. In addition, students had varying perspectives on the goals and programmatic components of GE. Table 1 shows the themes of meaning of globalization of GE that emerged from the interviews with AGHE representatives, program directors, and international students.

Our respondents at all three levels had ideas of what it means to globalize GE. Our key finding was that globalizing GE means crossing national and cultural boundaries to understand aging experiences. This finding was consistent across all three levels of participants. One AGHE representative (who was also a faculty member in a gerontology program) reported:

The importance of teaching American students about aging issues in other countries and helping foreign students in the U.S. gerontology programs to adapt to American ways of learning is and should be an important part of what it means to globalize gerontology education.

Such an approach enhances exchanges of knowledge between U.S. students and international students and has mutual benefits, which in turn leads to increasingly globalized knowledge about aging.

The fact that U.S. institutions support gerontology education in other countries is another indication of globalization of GE. This kind of international support is crucial in the evolution of gerontology programs in other nations because “they are not as developed as those in the United States,” as one respondent indicated. International students studying gerontology in the United States are also vital to the advancement of gerontology programs across the globe. One program director agreed: “The benefit we receive from their experiences and interests is enormous.” Also, several international students confided that they have ultimate goals of helping their home countries establish GE. For example, one international student stated that, “My current research interest is mental health and health care policy for elders in the U.S. Such knowledge can inform health care policy in my home country.”

Even though there was a shared basic definition of globalizing GE and a universal recognition of the need for such efforts, there were considerable differences in how respondents perceived a national agenda for the United States. For example, one program director explained, “Some programs are not aware of this [AGHE’s] initiative to globalize GE but other programs are particularly involved in AGHE’s global aging committee.”

Another illustrated, “AGHE has not effectively communicated its mission to the programs.” These statements suggest that though AGHE clearly advocates for the globalizing of GE, and the graduate program directors in the gerontology programs express support for this mission, problems arise when putting the philosophy into practice. Lack of communication about or responsiveness to globalization of GE between AGHE and the programs may delay implementation of desirable changes.

Current Practices and Perceptions of Globalization of GE

This lack of a shared agenda among national and program levels regarding the implementation of globalized GE may be a result of several factors: local program-level pressures and competing priorities, unclear role for national and international organizations in setting a globalization agenda, lack of stakeholder involvement in setting a national agenda, and lack of effective communication strategies. The last three factors are related to the “top-down” communication and suggest the value of the interactive process discussed above (also see Figure 1). The interview findings suggest that AGHE’s leadership role in the efforts to globalize GE is not clearly understood at the national and program level. However, the respondents, at all three levels, remain enthusiastic and positive about their experiences within programs. The summary of our findings about the practices and perceptions are reported in Table 2.

AGHE has made it clear that globalizing GE is among its important goals. However, this goal is left to individual member institutions or programs to implement. For example, AGHE has a global aging committee that is responsible for organizing initiatives to promote the advancement of global GE, but one participant explains:

It is really up to the individual members at their respective institutions to put these goals into practice, and based on what is happening around the globe individual members are doing this. For example, you have programs in Guatemala and Thailand, and the Inter-GERO exchange program. AGHE serves as merely a networking forum to share what is already going on in our universities and in the programs, but it does little to actually support or foster these initiatives, at least from a mandated or financial perspective.

Because implementation of global GE goals happen primarily at the individual program level, it is difficult for AGHE to accomplish its global mission on behalf of the gerontology community.

The practices of globalizing GE vary across gerontology programs in the United States. When program directors were asked about current practices in their programs and what is being done to promote global GE, their responses included offering a few courses covering global issues such as social welfare, family caregiving, and demography of aging; offering opportunities supporting students in their international aging endeavors such as research projects with international data; and developing formal exchange programs with institutions outside the United States.

International students’ views on globalization of GE illuminate the current practices within programs. In agreement with the program directors’ views, international students reported that the support they receive to explore their academic endeavors as international scholars helps globalize GE. This support includes providing more opportunities for in-class discussion, collaborative international research projects, and other basic academic support (e.g., referral to a writing center, providing feedback on research papers). One international student noted, “The faculty members try to provide useful information and resources to me. For example, one faculty member directed me to the university writing center. I can feel that many faculty members care about and try to understand international students.”

As a consequence, U.S. faculty and international students interact and exchange information that leads to shared knowledge of aging in other countries. International students also value having research networks abroad (if they happen to have some) and having foreign faculty in their programs to enrich the global perspectives of aging. This view is also supported by the report of programs' efforts to hire international faculty to augment globalization of GE.

Our respondents pointed out that AGHE has provided a forum where information is shared through AGHE's resources and at annual meetings; however, the organization has not been proactively involved in promoting or supporting the growth of GE in other parts of the world. In addition, the AGHE representatives felt that the current guidelines used in GE in the United States have been ethnocentric and thus impede effective collaborations that can result in globalization of GE. However, they also believed that the small-scale collaborations observed in the individual programs have had positive effects. Similarly, the program directors shared views on ethnocentricity of GE in the United States and the need to incorporate non-Western content in gerontology courses. International students also spoke about ethnocentrism in U.S. gerontology programs. Even though they discussed the extent to which gerontology programs are far advanced in U.S. universities as opposed to those in their home countries, the strong U.S. bias is currently an impediment to globalization. Taken together, the interviews describe a shared commitment to broad goals of enhancing knowledge about aging through globalization of curriculum content and development of gerontology programs around the world; however, they note a wide difference in the types of globalization efforts at the program level. A potential expansion of the role of national and international organizations in advancing a globalization agenda was often discussed; and indeed, those directly involved with AGHE are clear about its mission related to globalization of GE. At the same time, this agenda is not well-understood at all levels within higher education in gerontology. Ultimately, the impetus for globalization of GE seems to be variable and program specific at this.

Development of a Conceptual Model

Guided by existing theoretical frameworks of globalization of education, relevant literature, and the key themes identified from the qualitative data (reported earlier in the Findings section), we developed a conceptual model that integrates the levels, meanings, and current practices of globalization of GE into a broader context. This research focused on national, program-level, and student-level perceptions and practices related to globalizing GE. However, these findings are best understood as one component of a system of forces that are helping to shape gerontology education. Figure 1 places the results of this study in the center of a model that outlines the demographic, economic, social, and cultural forces that are influencing the global need for, and potential outcomes of, education and research related to aging. The need to globalize GE is driven by two major forces: a) global forces, shaped by international economic, political, and cultural exchanges as national boundaries have become less relevant and b) demographic forces of population aging and international migration, which diversify individuals' aging experiences all over the world. Thus, the interplay between global and demographic forces necessitates that GE address the current needs and demands of an emerging global community.

Globalization of GE comprises two important components. First, internationalization of academic inquiry of education and research relevant to aging is necessary. Incorporating cross-national comparisons of aging process/experiences into existing graduate-level curriculum and exchanging human resources (e.g., international scholars, educators, students) are important parts of internationalization. Second, the link between interdisciplinary and global perspectives needs to be emphasized in GE. One of the aspects that makes gerontology unique is its inter-/multidisciplinary approach (Ferraro, 2007). Indeed, an interdisciplinary approach is an essential means to achieve a multifaceted or a

global perspective to better learn about aging. Equally important are the interconnectedness, interdependence, and recognition of one world that are hallmarks of globalization in general. In short, we propose that globalizing GE requires two main activities: internationalization of academic inquiry, and building an interdisciplinary global community committed to educating students about the interconnected lives of older people around the world.

Aging processes diverge depending on demographic and socioeconomic differences within individuals and across societies (e.g., Bass, 2009; Riley, 1971). Whereas the globalization of GE may imply homogenization of the education program (e.g., consensus in the course contents and the curricula), actual practices and outcomes are likely to differ across educational institutions. Thus, rather than a commonly observed unidirectional (top-down) approach, the globalization of GE needs to be a bidirectional iterative process to disseminate the shared goals from the leaders (e.g., AGHE, Gerontological Society of America [GSA]) to local institutions, as well as to reflect feedback from diverse local institutions and their students (bottom-up). Strong leadership initiated by AGHE and close collaborative networks among individual institutions advance globalization of GE, which, in turn, advance GE and gerontology research as well as influence national agendas. This interrelationship between top-down and bottom-up initiatives is shown in the center box of Figure 1.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Interview data from groups of individuals from AGHE and gerontology graduate programs were analyzed using the grounded theory approach to understand current definitions and practices related to globalization of GE. Based on the interview data and existing literature on the theoretical frameworks of globalization of education, a globalization of GE conceptual model emerged.

In general, literature on globalization of education employs a conventional approach that reflects the impact of large-scale global forces (political, economic, social, and cultural) on processes of globalization. Our conceptual model acknowledges these factors but builds greater depth by including the multilevel structures of the U.S. graduate GE and their hierarchical associations and roles in shaping GE. This novel presentation is further enriched by the two broader themes (meanings and current perceptions/practices) that arose from the qualitative analysis of interview data. Our conceptual model also suggests the baseline understanding about what it means to globalize GE from a wide range of perspectives by individuals from the AGHE to gerontology graduate programs. Having the same baseline understanding is critical because it enables actors to contribute efforts toward a common goal as a gerontology community whereas actual strategies and/or actions are allowed to be unique across the individual gerontology programs.

Interpreting Findings in the Context of Theoretical Frameworks of Globalization

In relation to the theoretical frameworks for globalization of education, the qualitative findings support the culturalist perspective and human capital world theory. Culturalists argue for different ways of seeing and knowing the world in various cultural settings; this position would suggest that globalization of education involves an exchange of educational ideas (Spring, 2009). The AGHE representatives and program directors noted that there have been successful exchanges of gerontological knowledge and pedagogical approaches between the U.S. universities and foreign higher educational institutions. Indeed, AGHE has made efforts to encourage international research collaborations (e.g., establishing a Global Aging Committee) to promote learning about cross-cultural knowledge of aging experiences. The gerontology program directors' and international students' views were consistent with culturalists' perspectives. The program directors agreed that the gerontology faculty members in their programs find it useful to engage international students in class

discussions to learn about diverse aging process in other cultural settings. This exchange also occurs at the student level where international students share aging experiences in their cultures with U.S. students, thus building a comparative perspective and a more globalized knowledge base for the field.

At the same time, some challenges to the culturalists' perspectives are identified in GE settings. For example, the respondents suggested caution regarding the quality and availability of international data for research projects. Some of the available international data may not include enough information to fully understand aging in different countries, or to make meaningful comparisons across countries. Such comparisons would be essential for a culturalist approach to globalization. However, the culturalist perspectives on globalization of education have been criticized for imposing dominant educational practices on other cultures. For instance, the approaches used for GE in economically developed nations cannot be simply imposed in developing nations because of the differences in demographic characteristics, cultural values, and aging systems (e.g., retirement, long-term care). Additionally, different countries and regions of the world are diverse in terms of the maturity, scope, and basis for research on aging, and for policies and programs to serve an aging population. Hence there are limitations to collaborative and comparative research opportunities (e.g., differences in quality and quantity of data and differences in resources available for such endeavors). The weaknesses identified with culturalists' perspectives need to be addressed by considering the particular local culture (Spring, 2009).

The findings in this study support some of the basic premises of the human capital world theory that posits that the primary goal of education is to produce workers who can compete in the global economy. All the respondents in this study suggest that globalization of GE means training professionals (e.g., researchers, public policy advocates, direct service workers in the field of aging) to address aging issues in the global context. In the same vein, the respondents support the idea that advanced degrees in gerontology from U.S. universities enhance employment opportunities not only in the United States but also in other countries. As such, U.S. gerontology programs should enrich their curriculum in a way that students obtain timely and practically relevant knowledge regarding aging issues in the global context. Nevertheless, one of the limitations of the human capital model is that it assumes homogenous curricula and standardized tests for comparable skills. In other words, schools around the globe are to follow similar curricula and offer similar tests to produce the same skills at graduation. However, this approach is impractical for graduate programs to adopt a similar curriculum because there are variations in their focuses and the courses offered. For instance, graduate-level gerontology programs have a wide range of emphases (e.g., policy, behavioral science, clinical), which can dictate against the desirability and feasibility of a homogeneous curriculum across the programs. In contrast, before discussing core curriculum for international gerontology education, there is no consensus among the faculty of GE within the United States. Although there are significant cultural, economic, and social differences throughout the world, scholars who want to reach a consensus on the "core" issues confronting aging adults face a daunting task.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. First, our student data include only international students in gerontology programs. International students have greater potential for to provide a broader range of opinions and thoughts with respect to the U.S. domestic students as they have experienced education in the United States and their home countries and have a vested interest in the development of GE in other nations. Thus, our findings may not capture the U.S. domestic students' perspectives in terms of globalization of GE. In addition, though our study covers only existing gerontology graduate programs, other academic disciplines/programs focusing on aging should be taken into account in future research.

Second, the findings on the programs in this study are limited to the programs that offer master's and doctoral gerontology programs. Other gerontology programs offering only a master's program may provide additional insights about globalizing GE. Third, the findings and conceptual model need to be applied in different contexts qualitatively and quantitatively for further refinement.

Future Directions

The U.S. gerontology community has made major strides: establishing national professional associations (e.g., GSA), instituting an educational forum in gerontology (e.g., AGHE), and playing a critical role in the global arena (through membership in the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics & International Council of Gerontology Student Organizations) to shape GE and research. As we described earlier in the findings, the United States is taking the lead among the international community in developing gerontology education. We suggest that the existing gerontology organizations, academic programs, and graduate students in the field of aging should strengthen current networks and establish collaborative relationships in such a way that each level of the U.S. gerontology community can freely and openly exchange opinions and feedback for advancing global GE. The same is recommended by Burbules and Torres (2000). For example, they recommend developing an environment in which the top-down (i.e., AGHE to programs and students) communication and the bottom-up (i.e., student and programs to AGHE) communications act as a feedback loop to promote globalizing GE. As such, our conceptual model is useful to provide a common understanding about what the globalization of GE means and what needs to be done to globalize GE across all levels of the U.S. gerontology community.

Building upon our conceptual model and qualitative findings, future research should conduct a larger scale data collection from the multiple levels of the gerontology community and quantitatively examine the meanings, perceptions, and practices in terms of globalizing GE within and beyond the U.S. graduate programs. Such future inquiries may include cross-national comparative studies of globalization of GE, quantitative investigation, and outcome evaluation of globalized gerontology programs in the long run. These efforts will provide innovative suggestions and ideas for future curriculum development in gerontology education.

In conclusion, globalizing GE is one of the necessary and promising future directions for the field of gerontology. Active economic, political, and cultural exchanges are taking place within the international community. We suggest that internationalizing current education programs and reemphasizing a global and interdisciplinary approach in gerontology are appropriate strategies to promote globalization of GE. However, our qualitative study finds diverse understanding and practices for globalizing GE at different levels of the U.S. gerontology community. Establishing baseline understanding and common goals and strengthening the multi-directional interactive communication networks in the U.S. gerontology community should be a priority for advancing GE and research.

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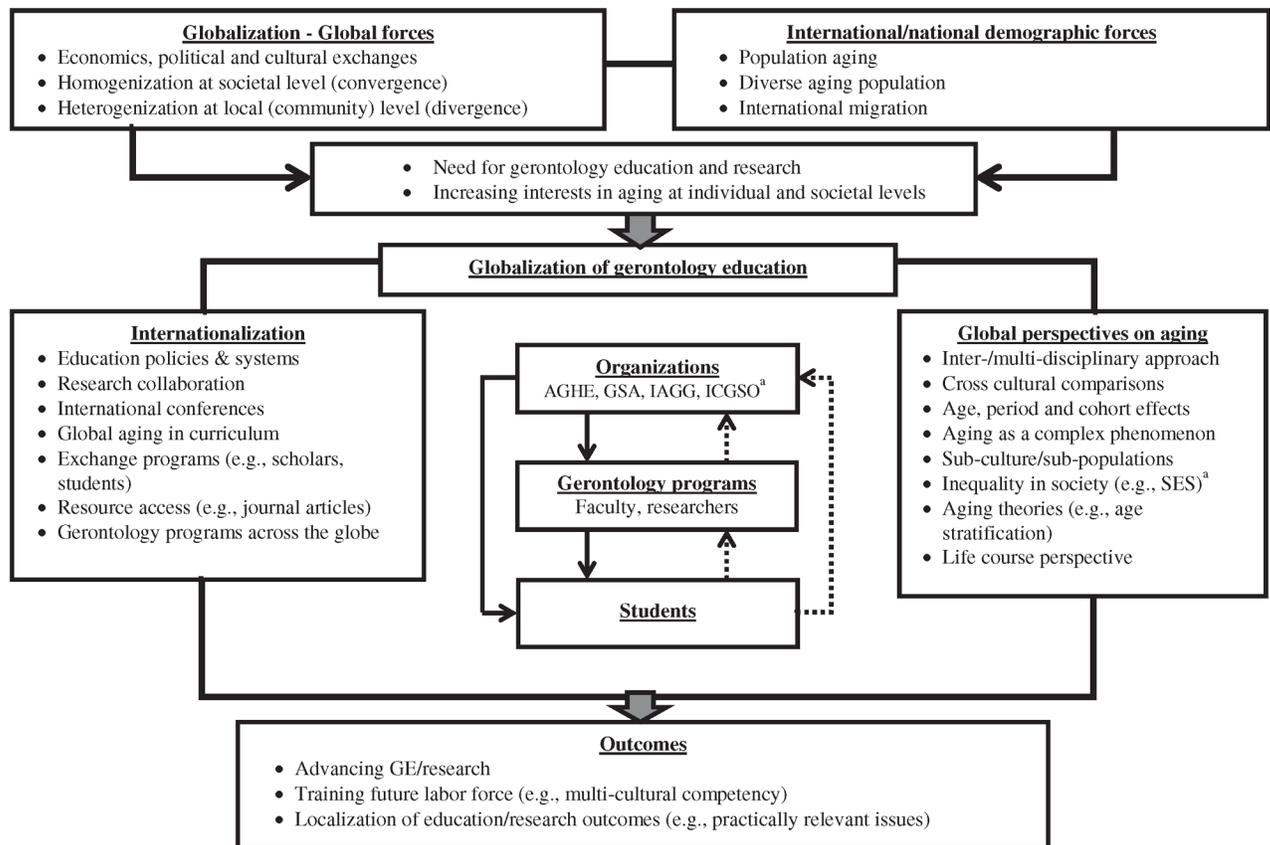


FIGURE 1. The conceptual model of globalization of gerontology education in the United States. AGHE = Association of Gerontology in Higher Education; GSA = Gerontological Society of America; IAGG = International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics; ICGSO = International Council of Gerontology Student Organizations; SES = socioeconomic status; GE = gerontology education.

TABLE 1

Meanings of Globalizing GE for the AGHE Representatives, Program Directors, and International Students^a

National level (4 AGHE representatives)	Program level (five program directors)	Student level (six international students)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International recognition of diversity in aging experiences • Understanding the diversity of systems that world societies have to deal with old age • Institutional and culture changes on perception of aging in non-Western cultures • Teaching American students about aging in other countries • Helping international students adapt and understand American ways of learning and speaking • Supporting GE in other countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training individuals and professionals to deal with aging issues in global contexts • Increasing the understanding of aging of the world's population and the systems that deal with aging issues • It's an extension of education about aging around the world • Raising awareness of international immigrants within the United States and understanding how different cultural practices may affect their ability to age in American society • Making gerontology more interdisciplinary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program emphasize cultural differences within the United States, i.e., based on racial/ethnic cultural (also, immigrants) differences are very large in the United States • Using current international students to establish partnerships with universities at their home counties • Incorporating graduate-level global aging courses focusing on human aging experience in other cultures • Encouraging U.S. students to do practicum and internships in other countries

GE = gerontology education; AGHE = Association of Gerontology in Higher Education.

^aTo capture international students' understanding of globalization of GE, we asked them the aspects in their current programs that integrate global perspectives on aging. Their responses partly addressed the meaning of globalization and also offered some insights for globalization of GE to be used by their programs (i.e., recommendations).

TABLE 2

The Identified Themes of Current Practice and Perceptions of Globalization of GE for the AGHE Representatives, Program Directors and International Students

National level (4 AGHE ^a representatives)	Program level (five program directors)	Student level (six international students)
Current practice		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AGHE has constituted a Global Aging Committee which meets at AGHE and GSA annual meetings. International members serve on this committee The committee is set to survey education and aging services in other countries. AGHE Newsletter (Exchange) lists international activities AGHE provides materials and learning resources to poor countries (e.g., GSA journals, textbooks, monographs) Encouraging international collaboration for research and other academic opportunities with both non-Western and Western cultures under the current leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No active recruitment of international students. Uses an "open-door" policy for all applicants and foreign students do apply Our curriculum has an undergraduate course and a graduate course on global aging Engaging international students in classes to provide comparative aspects or examples when teaching and in other activities to learn about aging in other cultures Hiring international or culturally diverse faculty to teach global aging courses Study abroad programs/internships or practicum abroad for students and sabbaticals, scholarships and fellowships to research in other countries/cultures for faculty U.S. faculty work with students (international and United States) on international research and use international or comparative data Students write their theses and dissertations based on research focused on other countries and regions (only a few international students have this focus) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global aging course offered at undergraduate level only. Other courses have international focus (e.g., demography of aging, social welfare in other countries) An opportunity to contribute in class discussions about aging in my country Faculty and students participate on "aging around the world" forums and panel discussions Faculty and some international students have networks abroad for research and postgraduation opportunities Foreign faculty members take their sabbaticals in our program and works closely with people interested in international aging
Perceptions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AGHE is a forum for exchange of information but does not encourage or sponsor U.S. universities to collaborate with foreign institutions (i.e., AGHE has not actively provided leadership on this front) Current AGHE guidelines to be revised (because they're ethnocentric) to create more opportunities for U.S. students and faculty (exchanges and study abroad) There is positive effect with exchange of ideas on cultural experiences of aging (infuse cross-cultural knowledge) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing number of foreign students means diversity and thus raises awareness of global perspectives Need to move away from Western-based gerontology courses and enrich them with views from other cultures Not all gerontology programs are aware of AGHE's globalization of aging education initiative. AGHE has not effectively communicated this Some programs are particularly involved in AGHE's global aging committee and seek AGHE's support for international initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty supportive to international students' needs (e.g., referral to resources like writing centers) U.S. faculty knowledgeable of facts and numbers on other countries but are not always experts in these areas Realizes that gerontology is widely developed in United States and Europe but underdeveloped in other parts of the world We learn a lot of about aging in U.S. and other high-income nations that is different from aging in other regions

AGHE = Association of Gerontology in Higher Education; GSA = Gerontological Society of America.