Teacher education is a nationally entrenched sub-sector of education. It has the strategic role of educating the future citizens of a nation and is often used to attain larger nationalistic goals, especially political, economic and socio-cultural ones. Despite its strong national inclinations, international influences are making their way into teacher education. The current interest in international assessments has nudged governments and institutions to pay more attention to cross-national cues as to what make high performing school systems. “Quality of teaching and teacher education is a key element being considered” (Weidman, Jacob & Casebeer, 2014, p. 116) and this has led to a resurgence of interest in teacher education. In addition, as a subsidiary of higher education, international partnerships, strategic alliances and knowledge networks, à la internationalization of higher education, are no longer uncommon in teacher education.

Against this backdrop of increased international influences, this study examines the extent to which internationalization can benefit (or potentially harm) Singapore’s national education system, in particular its teacher education. It investigates the integration of national and international elements by asking the following pertinent questions:

RQ1. What are the imperatives (i.e. urgent rationales) driving the internationalization of teacher education in Singapore, in the past and at present?

RQ1a. How can the internationalization of teacher education support the development of twenty-first century competencies?

RQ2. How are the imperatives to internationalize shaping the forms that constitute internationalization of teacher education in Singapore today?

RQ2a. Given teacher education’s national obligations, what could be internationalized and how?

RQ3. How are the risks and challenges of internationalizing teacher education in Singapore restraining the forms of internationalization? What has to remain nationalized?

RQ3a. What is the vision for internationalizing teacher education and how can managing the risks and challenges support the actualization of this vision?

Analyses of the findings strongly suggest the emergence of three primary propositions – firstly, it is imperative that Singapore’s teacher education incorporates internationalized perspectives for the nation, the institution and its people to progress in the twenty-first century; secondly, the internationalization of teacher education is important and beneficial but only to some extent; and finally, the internationalization of teacher education is a means to an end and local teachers play a central (but often neglected) role in actualizing this vision.

The people of Singapore are acutely aware that the nation state is fundamentally fragile. Despite its glittering economic success, Singapore is a small immigrant, multi-ethnic republic surrounded by Southeast Asia’s giants and has almost no natural resources that can sustain its needs. It relies very heavily on its human capital. This sparks pedagogical, socio-cultural, economic and political imperatives, giving Singapore little choice but to incorporate internationalization in its teacher education (and education) system.

Despite strong imperatives to internationalize teacher education, findings also reveal that the internationalization of teacher education has been kept at a deliberate balance of localization-internationalization, guided by national priorities. This is primarily because teacher education remains a very nation-centric sub-sector of education. It is thus, not in the interest of the institution and the nation state to limitless pursue internationalization.

Interestingly then, the goal of internationalization is not to attain a fully internationalized teacher education institution. Analyses of data point to the vision of internationalizing teacher education as having individuals (i.e. students) with an international worldview and an understanding of international relations, able to participate in the nation state’s social, economic and political communities. To attain this vision, schoolteachers are seen as being the most important actors, where they perceive themselves to play the primary role of nurturers, with intrinsic and altruistic motives to nurture the future generation for the twenty-first century.

Local Schoolteachers with International Roles

As such, this puts teacher education as the enabler that nurtures pre-service teachers with these characteristics. The internationalization of teacher education is fundamental in developing these pre-service teachers with the critical knowledge, values and skills that will equip them to teach in schools, while keeping in mind the larger vision. It is only when student teachers are themselves local actors with international awareness, that they are able to nurture the students in schools to be national and global contributors.

There is growing evidence showing that the quality of teacher education has a significant impact on the quality of teachers and thus the quality of students’ learning (Qvortrup, 2008). The way forward is to systemically and purposefully incorporate internationalized perspectives (i.e. depth of enhanced international worldviews and understanding of international relations) in the existing frameworks of twenty-first century competencies of both teacher education and education. The journey ahead is only possible with the collaborative effort of various stakeholders, working together in a supportive and effective framework.

References
