

A critical evaluation of the co-produced online pre-arrival course for international student nurses through a social justice lens

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ABSTRACT

As international student mobility continues to expand within UK higher education, international nursing students face complex transitions shaped not only by cross-cultural movement but also by the demands of academic socialisation into unfamiliar higher education systems. In response, a co-produced online pre-arrival course was developed with international student partners to support this transition. This paper presents a reflexive, theory-informed critical inquiry into the *practice of co-production*, rather than solely the course content, using Nancy Fraser's three dimensions of social justice—redistribution, recognition and representation.

The analysis generates three key conceptual insights. First, co-production partially redistributes informational resources but remains constrained by institutional power structures that limit epistemic and decision-making equity. Second, while student narratives enhance recognition, they risk reinforcing assimilationist norms when positioned as testimonial rather than epistemic contributions. Third, co-production often operates as *bounded representation*, where student participation is enabled but not fully extended to governance and evaluation.

The paper argues that co-production must be understood not as an inherently decolonising practice, but as a *contested praxis* requiring deliberate structural, epistemic, and power-related shifts. It offers a transferable framework for global nursing education to navigate tensions between professional standardisation and social justice agendas, and proposes principles for embedding genuinely transformative coproduced curriculum design.

1. Introduction

Student mobility has become a defining characteristic of higher education and is shaped by the discourses on internationalisation and the global knowledge economy (Castro et al., 2016). While international mobility is closely intertwined with globalisation, student exchanges and international studies across borders are influenced by different factors such as economic, socio-political, and cultural motivations (De Wit and Altbach, 2020; Lo et al., 2023). In fact, the number of international students in UK higher education institutions (HEIs) has had a steady growth in recent years (Advance HE, 2025). As international students transition from their home countries to study abroad, they often face challenges, including academic transition, expectations for clinical placements, and cross-cultural adaptation (Alegado and Fernandez, 2025; Taylor and Ali, 2017). The sudden shift to the UK context, including assessment strategies, academic standards, and student participation, can be unfamiliar and overwhelming for international students. To address this issue and prepare them well, a co-produced online pre-arrival course was developed *for* and *with* international students.

Within this discussion, it is important to emphasise that this paper resists conceptualising international nursing students as a homogeneous group. While cross-cultural transition is often foregrounded in the literature, many undergraduate international students are simultaneously undergoing academic socialisation into higher education for the first time (Dykema, 2024; Pho and Schartner, 2021). The challenges they face are therefore not solely cultural, but also epistemic and institutional, involving learning how to participate within unfamiliar academic conventions, power relations, and professional expectations. Recognising this distinction is essential to avoid essentialising international students and aligns with a decolonising perspective that foregrounds diversity within student experiences.

This paper adopts a reflexive inquiry approach, written from the perspective of an educator involved in the co-produced course. Rather than an informal reflection, the inquiry draws on multiple artefacts generated throughout the course development, including meeting notes, storyboards, draft materials, and personal reflective journals. Reflexive entries were revisited alongside these artefacts to identify patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and decision-making authority across Fraser's dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Through

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the intersecting lenses of social justice and decolonisation, the inquiry considers the extent to which co-production enables or constrains more equitable educational practice.

The analytical process involved iterative reading and comparison of the artefacts, paying particular attention to recurring issues, tensions, and assumptions that emerged throughout the development process. Artefacts, role distribution and corresponding reflexive entries were reviewed across the different stages of the co-production process (Fig. 1). Particular attention was given to how power, knowledge, and participation were negotiated, challenged, or constrained within each stage. These observations were then grouped and interpreted through Fraser's dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation. The recurring patterns identified across the artefacts informed the critical interpretation presented in the paper and enabled a reflexive examination of how social justice was enacted, negotiated, and limited within the co-production process. For example, recurring tensions between student participation and educator decision-making prompted further exploration of redistribution and representation, while patterns relating to whose knowledge was valued and prioritised informed the analysis of recognition.

This approach enhances rigour by making transparent the processes through which interpretations were constructed, while acknowledging that the analysis remains situated within my positionality and does not claim neutrality.

As this is an ongoing project, no formal evaluation has yet taken place and no participant data have been collected; therefore, ethical approval was not required at this stage. However, this theoretical and critical analysis will inform the future development and evaluation of the course once it is widely implemented as part of the induction process for international student nurses.

2. Coloniality, student mobility, and social justice in international nursing education

International student mobility is often framed within discourses of globalisation and opportunity (Dandi et al., 2024; Lo et al., 2023); however, it is also deeply embedded within historical and ongoing structures of coloniality. Higher education systems in the Global North, including the UK, continue to privilege Western epistemologies and pedagogies (Wheeldon and Sahay, 2025), which then shape both what is taught and how knowledge is legitimised. Within this context, international students, particularly those from the Global South, are frequently positioned as needing to adapt to dominant academic and cultural norms, reinforcing an assimilationist orientation to education.

Preparatory mechanisms for international students, such as pre-arrival courses, can inadvertently reproduce these dynamics by framing transition as a one-directional process of adaptation. This risks

obscuring the structural inequalities embedded within global student mobility and may contribute to forms of epistemic injustice, where students' prior knowledge, educational experiences, and cultural perspectives are marginalised or devalued. Such dynamics highlight that challenges faced by international nursing students are not solely individual or cultural, but are shaped by broader socio-political and historical conditions.

From a social justice perspective, this necessitates moving beyond deficit-oriented models of transition towards approaches that recognise international students as epistemic contributors rather than recipients of knowledge. Nancy Fraser's (2009) three-dimensional framework provides a useful lens for examining these dynamics, as it foregrounds the need to address not only economic inequalities but also cultural misrecognition and political exclusion.

Within this framework, co-production can be understood as a potentially decolonial praxis. By involving students as partners in curriculum design, co-production offers opportunities to redistribute power, recognise diverse knowledge systems, and enhance representation in decision-making processes. However, such outcomes are not guaranteed. Without deliberate attention to structural power relations, co-production risks becoming a superficial or symbolic practice that leaves underlying hierarchies intact. As such, co-production is conceptualised in this paper not as inherently transformative, but as a contested praxis, shaped by competing structural, epistemic, and institutional forces.

This paper therefore situates the co-produced pre-arrival course within this broader context of coloniality and social justice, examining not only what the intervention seeks to achieve, but how its design and development processes may reproduce or disrupt existing inequities in international nursing education.

2.1. Positionality

Positionality refers to the standpoint a researcher occupies in relation to their study, shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013; Yip, 2023). It highly influences what is studied, how findings are interpreted, and how discourses are presented based on characteristics such as race, gender, power, and lived experience (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Padgett, 2008). My positionality, as both an insider vs. outsider and privileged vs. oppressed, is important because this impacts my access, assumptions, and the meaning I draw from this inquiry.

In this project, I position myself as an internationally educated nurse and academic from the Global South now working within the UK higher education setting. From an insider perspective, I bring my lived experience as an international postgraduate student in different HEIs abroad and draw on those realities and meanings in designing and reflecting on

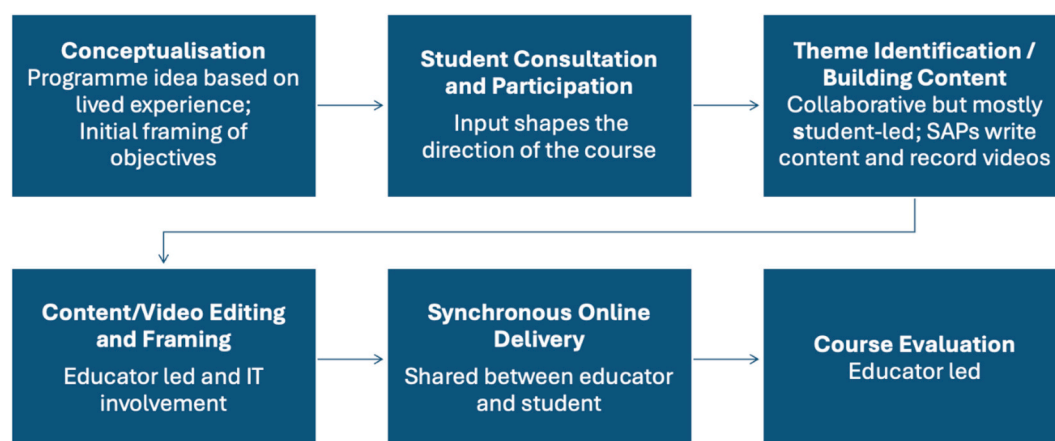


Fig. 1. Co-production process.

the co-produced online pre-arrival course. Although the goal was to support the transition of international nursing students, I recognise the privilege I had as the educator amongst the students because I had more authority and power in the process.

I also employed my perspective as an individual who has lived through and experienced structural disadvantage. As someone from the Global South, my knowledge and the ways of learning and teaching have been informed by systemic inequities entrenched in the international education systems, which often privilege Western norms. Thus, my positionality sits at the intersection of the oppressed and the privileged, and I am aware that my analysis may be influenced by this tension, as well as by the cultural lens and values I carry into this work.

2.2. Co-production in the pre-arrival course

The co-produced online pre-arrival course was developed to provide international nursing students with a more equitable foundation for their transition into UK higher education and healthcare practice. Positioned as an early intervention, the course aims to prepare students not only for cross-cultural adaptation but also for the academic and professional expectations they will encounter upon arrival. According to Alegado and Fernandez (2025), preparation for international students should not commence only when they start their studies at university; support and resources must become available prior to their arrival to enable them to engage with key information at a pace that supports meaningful understanding.

The co-production team consisted of two educators and three international students recruited as Student Academic Partners (SAPs). While pedagogical responsibilities were primarily held by educators, institutional IT support played a key role in translating the co-developed content into an accessible digital format. Co-production in this context is understood as a collaborative process in which students and staff work together to shape curricular content and learning experiences (Bovill, 2020; Dollinger and Lodge, 2019; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018). This approach seeks to move beyond positioning students as passive recipients of knowledge by engaging their lived experiences as a central resource in curriculum design.

The course was structured around three core themes: living, studying, and nursing in the UK, delivered over a four-week period (Table 1). Each theme was scaffolded to progressively support students' understanding of the academic, socio-cultural, and professional contexts they would enter.

Across the development process, student partners were primarily responsible for generating written and video-based content grounded in their lived experiences of transitioning into UK higher education and nursing practice. Educators, in turn, curated, edited, and aligned this material with the learning objectives and institutional requirements. This division of labour reflects a co-productive model; however, it also

reveals the uneven distribution of pedagogical authority, where final decisions regarding content framing, epistemic legitimacy, and curricular coherence remained educator-led.

The stages of co-production and the distribution of roles across the development process are illustrated in Fig. 1.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, co-production was enacted across multiple stages of development, involving varying degrees of student and educator participation. Student involvement was particularly prominent during content creation and aspects of delivery, while activities such as conceptualisation, pedagogical framing, and evaluation were primarily led by educators. This highlights the structured nature of participation within the co-production process.

The course also incorporated a range of interactive elements, including quizzes, polls, and scenario-based activities, designed to encourage active engagement which was mostly educator-led. In addition, weekly synchronous sessions on Microsoft Teams provided opportunities for dialogue, peer interaction, and clarification of key concepts. These sessions were co-facilitated by educators and student partners, further embedding participatory practices within the delivery of the course.

The intended learning outcomes of the course were threefold: (1) to familiarise international students with the expectations of UK higher education and clinical practice; (2) to support the development of academic language and confidence; and (3) to facilitate a smoother transition into the social and cultural context of studying in the UK. While these aims reflect a commitment to student support, the co-production process underpinning the course also raises important questions about how knowledge is constructed, validated, and governed; issues that are further interrogated through a social justice lens in the sections that follow.

3. Theoretical framework and analytical approach

This paper employs Nancy Fraser's three dimensions of justice framework (Fraser, 2009) to critically examine the co-production process in the context of the pre-arrival course, drawing on my own reflexivity as an educator involved in the development of this project. This analysis does not draw on student data; instead, it centres on examining the processes and dynamics of co-production rather than assessing the course content in isolation.

By critically interrogating how the course was developed, specifically who was involved, how decisions were made, and which forms of knowledge were prioritised, issues of justice become more visible. Applying this framework enables an assessment of the extent to which co-production (dis)enables structural equity for incoming international nursing students.

Fraser's framework inspires a rethinking of social justice by interrogating three key dimensions: (1) redistribution, (2) recognition, and (3) representation. This principle suggests that for justice to be realised, individuals must be able to participate in social life as equals, with equitable access to resources, cultural respect, and political voice. Fraser also introduces the 'all-subjected principle', which postulates that all individuals affected by a governance structure should have the right to participate in decisions about it. In this context, these ideas are critically applied to the online co-produced pre-arrival course as a form of participatory educational practice, which analyses the extent students were able to influence its design and development as equal contributors.

The analysis is also grounded in a decolonising the curriculum perspective, which highlights the importance of student voice, especially that of international students and challenges the hierarchical models of knowledge production (Dollinger and Lodge, 2019; Makey et al., 2023; Takhar, 2023). Engaging with international students and their lived experiences enriches the curriculum by challenging Western-centric knowledge and the inclusion of diverse global perspectives. Collaborative projects between students and educators highlight the importance of culturally-relevant materials and shared responsibility in

Table 1
Course themes and content.

Themes	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Living in the UK	Housing and travelling	Cost of living and financial planning	Pre-departure planning, climate and packing guide	Culture and customs
Studying in the UK	Higher education system, support and expectations	Studying at the University, course and module overview	Teaching and learning in the UK academia	Building cultural and language knowledge
Nursing in the UK	Introduction to Healthcare system in the UK	Nursing practice in the UK	Nursing course at the University	Practice placement

knowledge creation.

Decolonisation in higher education involves not only diversifying content but also transforming the structures through which knowledge is created and shared (Rangan, 2022; Tamimi et al., 2024). Co-production offers an innovative yet often overlooked strategy for advancing equity in curriculum design because it centres on the power of student voice (Matthews and Dollinger, 2023). Student voices are profoundly meaningful in decolonising the curriculum, as they provide direct and authentic insight into how current pedagogies and content impact diverse learners. Utilising these perspectives helps create a more inclusive decision-making in pedagogy and curriculum design (De Costa et al., 2023; Müller et al., 2018). In this project, I approached it as both a pedagogical strategy and a social justice practice, which is aimed at fostering dialogue, addressing global knowledge discourses, and using student voice and lived experience in the pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Given the limitations of this paper, my discussion will be organised around Fraser's three dimensions of justice. First, I will examine redistribution which focuses on equity of access and resources. Second, I will explore recognition, considering how identity and knowledge are valued and represented within the online course. Finally, I will address representation, with a particular focus on participation, voice, and governance in the co-production process. In this sense, co-production is examined here as a contested praxis, where its potential to advance social justice is shaped by how power, knowledge, and participation are negotiated.

3.1. Redistribution

Redistribution, as the economic dimension of Fraser's framework, concerns the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and access (Fraser, 2007, 2009; Kim, 2024). Within the context of co-production, this extends beyond material resources to include the distribution of time, labour, and institutional authority. In this project, redistribution operated at two levels: the provision of preparatory knowledge to international nursing students and the allocation of decision-making power within the co-production process itself.

At the level of access, the pre-arrival course sought to redistribute informational resources by providing early exposure to academic expectations, nursing context, cultural norms, and practical aspects of life in the UK. This included guidance on navigating accommodation, financial planning, academic systems, and everyday cultural practices. These practical elements demonstrate a clear intention to redistribute informational resources to those historically disadvantaged in UK higher education.

However, this form of redistribution remains limited when viewed against broader structural inequalities. While the course enhances access to knowledge, it does not fully engage with issues of systemic inequalities such as financial hardships, inclusive support services, barriers to academic success and the racial and discriminatory experiences students from the Global South may face. Redistribution, in this sense, operates at the level of preparation rather than structural transformation.

More critically, redistribution within the co-production process itself was uneven. As illustrated in Fig. 1, student partners played a central role in generating content, particularly through written narratives and video testimonies. However, key sites of authority, including the framing of learning outcomes, pedagogical structuring, and final content curation, remained largely educator-led. This reflects a partial redistribution of labour without a corresponding redistribution of decision-making power.

From a reflexive standpoint as an educator, I acknowledge the institutional and positional privilege I held in steering the project. Though my intent was to create space for equitable collaboration, structural constraints such as academic gatekeeping, power dynamics, workload, and time availability influenced me from redistributing

decision-making power to the full extent with SAPs. Although I value student contributions, questions remain around whether they were equally recognised beyond tokenistic inclusion. Persistent power imbalances in participatory activities impede meaningful inclusion and can perpetuate tokenism (Glimmerveen et al., 2021; Kamruzzaman, 2020).

While the purpose was clear, the redistribution of power and decision-making fell short. Thus, redistribution must be understood as both an ethical and material concern in co-production. Materially, it relates to how time, labour, and decision-making are distributed among staff and students. The students contributed significantly to content creation, but the structural power to shape the curriculum, including access to paid time, institutional capital, or strategic influence, remained with educators. Ethically, it raises the question of the underlying power imbalances and institutional norms that often privilege academic authority. This entails academics to reflect critically and challenge how institutional practices may reinforce inequality, even within collaborative processes.

From a decolonising the curriculum perspective, redistribution draws attention to how power and resources are often unequally structured within academic settings. The course redistributed what knowledge is considered valuable because it heavily relies on the SAPs' lived experience and their academic and cultural capital. However, the knowledge being shared was hugely dependent and fitted within the framework of UK higher education. True decolonial redistribution should not just focus on what knowledge is shared, but whose systems it is grounded in.

While the course created a platform for student voices, these contributions focused primarily on their experiences of adapting to life and study in the UK. There was little opportunity for students to draw on their own academic or cultural backgrounds, and there was no space for comparative perspectives between home and host contexts. This risks implying that prior knowledge and systems from their countries of origin are irrelevant or inferior; something that needs to be unlearned rather than utilised. A decolonising approach should empower students to contribute their own educational frameworks, cultural values, and ways of knowing, as a starting point and use these to navigate UK higher education (English and Heilbronn, 2024).

Without such shifts, redistribution remains partial, enhancing access to knowledge while leaving underlying power relations and dominant knowledge structures unchallenged. Thus, redistribution in this context should also include a redistribution of epistemic authority, which recognises and validates the diverse knowledge systems international nursing students bring with them.

3.2. Recognition

Recognition is the cultural dimension of Fraser's framework (Fraser, 2009). This involves diverse identities and knowledge systems and argues that cultural injustices happen when misrecognition occurs. People from marginalised cultures are discouraged from participating fully in society when their cultures are not recognised because the powerful culture is considered to be the norm. In the context of international nursing education, this raises critical questions about whose knowledge is centred and how student voices are positioned within the curriculum.

Within the pre-arrival course, recognition was facilitated through the inclusion of student-generated content, particularly video narratives reflecting lived experiences of transitioning into the UK context. These contributions highlighted issues such as culture shock, linguistic adaptation, and differences in teaching and assessment practices. While these narratives were valuable in making visible the realities of transition, they were largely positioned as illustrative or testimonial, rather than as sources of epistemic authority.

This distinction is significant. Although student voices were present, they were not consistently engaged as contributors to knowledge production. Instead, their experiences functioned primarily to support existing understandings of transition, rather than to challenge or

redefine them. From a social justice perspective, recognition requires more than visibility; it necessitates the legitimisation of diverse ways of knowing as equally valid in shaping curriculum as these perspectives offer different understandings of what teaching, learning and transition mean to students.

Furthermore, the course largely framed UK academic and nursing practices as the normative standard. While this provided necessary orientation, it also risked reinforcing an assimilationist disposition (Lewis, 2021), where students are expected to adapt to pre-existing norms rather than engage in reciprocal knowledge exchange. In doing so, the course inadvertently positioned knowledge from the Global South as secondary or transitional, rather than as a resource for rethinking dominant practices.

In its current form, recognition remains constrained, foregrounding student voice while leaving dominant cultural and epistemic norms largely intact. A decolonising approach to recognition would extend beyond incorporating student stories to actively engaging their epistemic frameworks. This would involve creating space for comparative perspectives, critical dialogue, and mutual learning between different educational and healthcare systems. Such an approach aligns with the principle of recognising students not only as participants, but as knowledge holders whose perspectives can reshape understandings of teaching, learning, and professional practice.

3.3. Representation

Representation, as the political dimension of Fraser's framework, concerns who is included in decision-making and whose voices shape institutional processes (Fraser, 2009). It foregrounds issues of participation, governance, and the extent to which individuals are able to influence the structures that affect them. In the context of co-production, this raises critical questions about whether students are merely involved in activities or are able to exercise meaningful authority over curricular and pedagogical decisions.

Within this project, student partners were actively involved in shaping aspects of the course, including contributing to themes, topics, the development of content and delivery of the synchronous lectures. Their participation provided important insights into the needs and experiences of international nursing students, enabling the inclusion of perspectives that may otherwise have been overlooked. However, this involvement did not extend to key areas of decision-making. Authority over module design, pedagogical framing, assessment strategies and evaluation remained largely with educators.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, representation was therefore uneven across stages of the co-production process. While students participated in content creation and aspects of delivery, foundational decisions including the definition of learning objectives, editing content and framing were predominantly educator led. Students were effectively excluded from the evaluation phase. This reflects a form of participation that is structured and bounded, rather than one that enables shared governance.

The synchronous sessions, planned as co-facilitated and dialogic spaces, offered opportunities for more balanced interaction. However, the broader governance of the course remained situated within institutional hierarchies that prioritised academic authority. Students were not systematically involved in shaping the terms of participation, which meant that their contributions were often aligned with pre-defined objectives rather than co-defining them. In this sense, representation risks becoming procedural rather than transformative.

From a reflexive perspective, this highlights how institutional norms and role hierarchies constrain the extent to which co-production can disrupt existing power relations. While student involvement was meaningful in certain areas, the absence of shared decision-making and co-evaluation limits the extent to which representation can be considered substantive. This aligns with critiques of participatory practices that caution against tokenistic inclusion when power remains

centralised (Bovill et al., 2011; McCulloch, 2009).

A decolonising approach to representation would move beyond participation towards co-ownership, where students are engaged not only as contributors but as co-decision-makers in curriculum design, delivery, and evaluation. This would involve embedding mechanisms for ongoing student leadership, enabling international student nurses to influence not only course content but the structures and processes that shape their educational experience. Such an approach challenges hierarchical relationships between students and institutions, as well as broader global dynamics between the Global South and North, fostering a more horizontal model of collaborative knowledge production and governance.

4. Key outcomes of the course

Although a formal evaluation is pending, several key distinctions from previous approaches can be identified through this critical inquiry. First, the course shifts from a traditional information-delivery model to a more interactive, dialogic structure that integrates peer-led content and synchronous engagement. Second, it positions lived experience as a central pedagogical resource, drawing on students' insights to inform what would meaningfully support their transition. Third, it extends engagement to the pre-arrival phase, broadening the temporal boundaries of support for international student nurses.

However, the central insight of this analysis is that these innovations alone do not guarantee socially just outcomes. Without the structural redistribution of decision-making power and epistemic authority, such interventions risk becoming superficially inclusive while leaving underlying inequities intact.

5. Limitations and implications for nursing education and practice

A key limitation of this inquiry is the absence of systematically captured student voices within the evaluative phase, which has not yet been implemented. While this reflects the developmental stage of the project, it also reveals a structural issue within co-production practices. Student partners who contributed to the course design often transition out of the institution or return to their home countries, limiting their capacity to participate in subsequent evaluation processes. As a result, although students were actively involved in development, power-sharing in evaluation remains largely educator-led. This highlights a critical tension: co-production was enacted in the design phase but is not structurally sustained into governance and critique. A more just approach would involve embedding mechanisms for ongoing student participation as co-evaluators, thereby operationalising Fraser's 'all-subjected principle' beyond design into continued accountability.

This limitation has important implications for the future development of the pre-arrival course and its evaluation. This critical inquiry will inform the formal evaluation following the course's pilot delivery, ensuring that future approaches move beyond measuring satisfaction towards assessing the extent to which students feel represented, valued, and empowered. The application of Fraser's framework has highlighted the need to embed more equitable practices across redistribution, recognition, and representation, particularly in relation to decision-making power and epistemic inclusion.

As the course evolves, evaluation methods must extend beyond traditional surveys or feedback mechanisms. Co-production, as a decolonial praxis (Saxena et al., 2024), requires participatory and dialogic approaches to evaluation. This may include reflective dialogue, student-led critique, and collaborative evaluation processes that examine not only technical aspects of the course but also relational and structural dynamics.

More broadly, this inquiry underscores the importance of examining not only what is taught, but how knowledge is produced, whose contributions are valued, and how power is distributed in curriculum

design. The insights from this project offer a framework for meaningful co-production that can be applied across programmes and institutions, particularly in supporting increasingly diverse student populations. Institutional commitment is essential to enable the structural conditions required for co-production, including time, resources, and support for sustained student partnership.

Beyond this specific intervention, the findings offer transferable insights for global nursing education. Institutions must navigate the tension between standardised regulatory requirements, such as NMC competencies, and commitments to social justice and decolonisation. Fraser's framework provides a practical tool to guide this work by prompting critical questions: who controls resources and curriculum authority, whose knowledge systems are legitimised, and who participates in decision-making and evaluation. Addressing these questions enables a shift from performative inclusion towards structurally embedded equity, where professional standards are critically engaged with through plural epistemologies and shared governance.

6. Conclusion

Student mobility in higher education is shaped not only by global discourses of internationalisation but also by the institutional structures that govern participation, inclusion, and knowledge production. Within this context, co-production offers a potentially transformative alternative to traditional curriculum design by positioning students not as passive recipients, but as co-creators of knowledge. However, as this analysis has shown, its transformative potential cannot be assumed.

Drawing on Fraser's three-dimensional framework of redistribution, recognition, and representation, this paper has generated three key conceptual insights into the practice of co-production in international nursing education. First, while co-production enabled the redistribution of informational resources and early access to knowledge, this remained partial, as institutional structures continued to constrain the redistribution of decision-making power and epistemic authority. Second, although student narratives enhanced recognition by making visible the lived experiences of transition, they were often positioned as testimonial rather than epistemic contributions, limiting their capacity to challenge dominant knowledge frameworks. Third, co-production operated as a form of bounded representation, where student participation was enabled in content creation and delivery but not fully extended to governance and evaluation.

Taken together, these findings suggest that co-production should not be understood as an inherently decolonising practice. Rather, it operates as a contested praxis, shaped by structural, epistemic, and institutional constraints that can both enable and limit social justice outcomes. While co-production creates opportunities for participation and inclusion, it can also reproduce hierarchical relations when power is not meaningfully redistributed.

My positionality as an internationally educated academic from the Global South was central to this analysis. While I share aspects of identity and experience with international students, I also occupy a position of institutional power, shaping both the design and interpretation of the course. This dual positioning highlighted the tensions between intent and structure—between aspirations for equity and the realities of academic systems that continue to privilege established norms of knowledge and authority.

Ultimately, this paper contributes to ongoing debates in global nursing education by offering a transferable framework for critically evaluating co-production in relation to social justice. It highlights the need for deliberate structural, epistemic, and political shifts to move beyond performative inclusion towards genuinely transformative practice. This includes rethinking how curricula are designed, who is involved in decision-making, and how diverse knowledge systems are recognised and mobilised. In doing so, co-production has the potential not only to support student transition, but to reconfigure the terms on which knowledge is created, shared, and valued within higher

education.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Paul John Alegado: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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