

Teaching development practices post-Covid-19: Findings from a literature review, a survey and interviews in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

This article details findings from research to re-design a postgraduate course on development practices in Development Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand, aiming to include the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Reviewing literature, surveying recently graduated students and interviewing senior staff in international development organisations, five topics emerged as forces shaping development practices in a post-covid-19 world. Analysis suggests interviewed staff aligned with views in literature. However, comparing views of the current and next generation of development practitioners reveals quite diverging views as to what would be most important for a course on development practices.

KEYWORDS

Covid-19, development practices, Development Studies, postgraduate course design

1 | INTRODUCTION

As authors, we are all associated with teaching postgraduate courses in Development Studies at Massey University in Aotearoa New Zealand. Development Studies is taught at four of the country's eight universities. The Development Studies programme at Massey University has two compulsory core courses plus an array of elective courses. One of the two core courses zooms in on conceptual aspects, while the other focuses on operational aspects of

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international development policies and professional practices. The curriculum of the latter core course, titled 'development management', has been fully reviewed every 5 years since 2007 to reflect ongoing changes in international development practice. Next to literature review, former students and senior staff in development organisations have been critical sources of information for every course re-design since 2007. After the 2017 review (Leslie et al., 2018), the next review was scheduled for 2022. However, by the end of 2020, it was clear that the Covid-19 pandemic would also significantly affect development policies and practices and so the review was brought forward. This article details the findings from the review carried out in mid-2021.

Across the globe, academic staff in many universities responded to the pandemic by reflecting critically and under acute time pressure, on the pandemic's impact and what it revealed about our existing teaching practices. As more publications on these responses appear, three, possibly enduring, impacts seem to emerge. First, and most prominently, the pandemic's impact has been to accelerate and expand the structural place of online teaching in higher education. In Italy, for example, Bassi et al. (2023, p. 6) find many staff and students in nursing education agreeing that online education is 'a valuable complementary strategy' to the pre-pandemic compulsory in-person education. From a South Korean perspective, but still in medical education, a review concludes that 'COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of online teaching and learning' (Kim, 2022, p. 1). In a more generic fashion, Holloway's review finds a 'shift from in-person to online learning across all tertiary institutions' in Aotearoa New Zealand (Kim, 2022, p. 182). These findings from national reviews align with a collection of reviews on the global impact of Covid-19 on higher education, which also suggests 'the times they are a'changin' after a "forced culture change" in higher education, with mass reliance on education technology and virtual learning environments' (Arday, 2022, p. 367).

Second, critical reviews of impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on tertiary education also point at an increased visibility and a resulting awareness of socio-political inequalities in the institutional structures of higher education. Holloway's (2022, p. 182) conclusion regarding Aotearoa New Zealand's higher education is that the pandemic has 'foregrounded the effect of pre-existing structural inequities ... social-economic and digital access barriers'. Zooming in on institutional racism in higher education in the United Kingdom and the United States, Pennant (2022, p. 534) details how the pandemic highlights or exacerbates inequalities for Black women students: 'a pandemic within a pandemic'. Other reviewers of 'practices of knowledge production' in settler-colonial contexts also find that 'pandemics ... exacerbate and intensify existing conditions of colonial inequality and injustice' (Barber & Naepi, 2020, p. 694).

Perhaps accelerated by this second impact, a third impact of the Covid-19 pandemic may be a growing critical reflection on the content of higher education, particularly in Development Studies. After reiterating that 'COVID-19 has revealed a highly unequal world', Leach et al. (2021, p. 9) argue that crises such as the pandemic 'can open up new forms of relationship and action', which 'must not be the preserve of those intervening in the Global South—of projects and programmes delivered through aid flows—but a much more universal concern ... a further deconstruction of colonial assumptions and power relations that have long beset development studies'. Of course, this call for the decolonisation of Development Studies goes back several years. For example, a collection of articles in 2013 on decolonising the teaching and learning in Development Studies noted that the discipline 'needs to become more conscious of how it frames itself in relation to its current and historic ties to colonial legacies ... enacted in its pedagogical approaches' (Langdon, 2013, p. 384). Nonetheless, most postgraduate students also undertake their studies to find employment in the development sector, which leads Sims' (2018, p. 150) review of 'teaching development studies in times of change' that 'it can be challenging to provide teaching programmes that simultaneously deliver ... critical interrogation of development theory and the provision of instrumental "work-ready" skills'. With this article, we aim in particular to contribute to dealing with this challenge.

Sharing in 2023, the findings of a 2021 review to re-design a postgraduate course on international development practices 'post-Covid-19' is appropriate as the WHO in May 2023 officially declared the COVID-19 pandemic to be over (United Nations, 2023). This is a good moment to record how a broad section of people in Aotearoa New Zealand involved in international development perceived the changes that the pandemic was having on the outlook of their professional field, while we were all living the experience of a pandemic whose global impact can

only be compared to the 1918–1920 flu pandemic of a century ago (Prabhu & Gergen, 2021). We open this article with an outline of our research methodology and three data sources: a literature review, a survey of former students and interviews with senior staff in development organisations. We then present the findings from the literature review and a comparative analysis of the views of former students—as the next generation of development practitioners—and the views of senior staff who currently shape the professional practices in international development. In closing, we discuss how the views of these development practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand relate to the findings from the global literature review before we outline the key elements of the new postgraduate course on international development practices.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

We took a mixed methods approach (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2011; Timans et al., 2019) to our review, our central research question being ‘Considering changes in the last three or four years, including the Covid-19 pandemic, what topics and skills would have to be included in a postgraduate course on international development practices?’ We used a mixed methods approach concurring with Turner et al. (2017, p. 244) that ‘using multiple methods produces more valid results as the strengths of one method can offset the limitation of another method’ or, in other words, we sought a ‘judicious combination of QUAL and QUANT methods’ (Bamberger & Mabry, 2020, p. 275). In the same sphere, we also undertook to not only use different methods to address our research question but we also judiciously applied these different methods to different sources of data to achieve ‘data triangulation for correlating findings’ (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1411).

In operational terms, we chose three research methods and applied these methods—a documents analysis, a survey and semi-structured interviews—to three different sources of data to obtain answers to our research question. First, for the document analysis, we reviewed recent and relevant professional literature and other written sources. Second, we surveyed students who had completed a master's degree in the Development Studies programme in the preceding 4 years. These students were approached by the university's course evaluation team using Qualtrics and the university's database. The anonymised analysis of data was passed on to the research team following the university's research ethics guidelines. Third, the research team conducted semi-structured interviews in pairs with a purposively selected number of senior staff working in diverse international development organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand. Only hand-written notes from the interviews were made, and the interviewees were guaranteed personal and organisational anonymity.

2.1 | Reviewing recent literature

In terms of characterising our approach to the document analysis, we believe the descriptor of a ‘mapping review’ is befitting, as we undertook to ‘identify sub-topics that are well covered by the literature’ (Booth et al., 2021, p. 76). With a similar description, others have also defined a ‘mapping review’ as one that ‘usually relates to ... trends’ within ‘a specific timeframe for the literature to be mapped’ (Paré et al., 2015, p. 186). We concentrated on the recurring topics and the frequency of these topics relating to the research question in the identified literature without undertaking an assessment of content. In our approach, we set the date range for the literature scan between January 2018 and June 2021, covering both the immediate pre-pandemic period, as well as the first one and a half years into the pandemic.

As team members, we individually listed literature sources in the widest possible sense—from peer-reviewed journals to personal blogs—that we regularly access as academic staff to keep abreast of development policies and practices. We also added, gratefully, a few sources that we see our students' access for their assignments. Then, in conversation and considering our available time, we curated the long list of written sources into a total of 88 sources,

TABLE 1 The 80 sources for the literature review.

Group	Names, titles	n
Peer-reviewed journals	Asia Pacific Viewpoint, Development and Change, Development in Practice, Development Policy Review, European Journal of Development Research, Forum for Development Studies, Gender and Development, IDS Bulletin, International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, Journal of Developing Societies, Journal of Development Effectiveness, Journal of Development Studies, Journal of Global South Studies, Journal of Globalization and Development, Journal of International Development, Journal of International Relations and Development, Oxford Development Studies, Progress in Development Studies, Third World Quarterly, Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, World Development.	21
Websites of bilateral or multilateral bodies	African Development Bank, Agência Brasileira de Cooperação (ABC), Asian Development Bank, the Australian aid programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), DANIDA (Denmark), DFID/now Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), IMF and Finance & Development, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Finland Development Policy Cooperation (Finland), Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ Germany), the New Zealand aid programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), NORAD (Norway), OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), SIDA (Sweden), State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, United Nations development Programme (UNDP), USAID, World Bank, World Food Programme, World Health Organisation.	23
Research and media websites	AidWatch Australia, Australian Council for International Development, Brookings Institution (USA), Chatham House (UK), Chr Michelsen Institute (Norway), Council for International Development (Aotearoa New Zealand), Development Policy Centre (Australia), DEVEX (USA), European Association of Development Research and Training Institute (EADI), European Centre for Development Policy Management (Netherlands), German Development Institute (DIE), Global Development Institute (UK), Institute of Development Studies Sussex (UK), Institute for Security Studies (South Africa), La Trobe University: Institute for Human Security and Social Change (Australia), Lowy Institute Australia, NZADDs (Aotearoa New Zealand), Overseas Development Institute (UK), The Broker (Netherlands), The Guardian Global Development (UK), Why Development? (Australia).	21
Websites of NGOs, advocacy agencies, blogs	ActionAid, BOND (British Overseas NGOs for Development), CARE International, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand, Doctors without Borders (MSF), Gates Foundation Global Fund for AIDS TB Malaria, HAG (Humanitarian Advisory Group Humanitarian Advisory Group) (Australia), INTRAC (International NGO Training & Research Centre UK), OXFAM International, PIANGO (Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations; Pacific regional), Save The Children International, SNV (Netherlands), VANGO (Vanuatu Association of Non-Government Organisations) (Vanuatu), VSA Aotearoa New Zealand, ZOA (Netherlands). Blogs: Blogs and Comments on ARISE Integrated Industrial Platforms (IIP), Blood & Milk (Allana Shaikh), Chris Blattmann (University of Chicago), DevPolicy Blog (Australia), From Poverty to Power (Oxfam), Global Voices (platform), International Development Blog (German Development Institute), My heart's in Accra (Ethan Zuckermann)	15 8 blogs
Totals		88

clustered in four categories: peer-reviewed journals; websites of bilateral or multilateral development bodies; websites of research organisations and media; and, lastly, websites of NGOs, advocacy agencies and blogs (Table 1). We acknowledge that a vast majority of these sources are in the Global North, as much as a lot of the policymaking and resource allocation for international development practices originates in the Global North—notwithstanding growing debates and efforts regarding the decolonisation of thinking and funding regarding international development programmes (Appiah & Mireku, 2020; Pailey, 2020; Patel, 2020). We distributed the 88 sources among us and scoured them for answers to the research question, with a specific attention to what the sources suggested regarding current and changing international development policies, delivery modalities, development analyses and principal actors.

2.2 | Surveying development studies graduates

Our second important source for insights in what a postgraduate course on development practices should include was a short survey in May and June 2021 among graduated students in Development Studies: the new generation of international development practitioners. Surveying graduated students, many of whom have moved into the professional field, as a means to inform the curriculum for future students is quite a common approach (e.g., North et al., 2022; Tiessen et al., 2018). Arguably, graduated students of our programme are more likely than those from other universities to be working professionally in this field as about 40% of them are aged 25 years and over, in contrast with the national average of 25% (Massey University, 2019, p. 6). We surveyed students who had completed their postgraduate degree in Development Studies in the 4 years preceding the survey: 2017–2020. Table 2 details the distributions of sex and numbers over these 4 years: a total of 145 students, averaging around 36 students per year of whom nearly 80% identified themselves as women. All 145 graduated students were invited to access an online survey and 32% (46) responded positively. This seems to be a response rate that is quite common among electronic surveys among graduated students (Saleh & Bista, 2017).

For the purposes of this article, respondents' answers to the question as to their current work are important. About 63% of the survey respondents were currently working in an international development organisation at the time of the survey. This underscores that the respondents' suggestions for topics and skills to be included in the new development management course were mostly based on direct, personal experience as professional practitioners. Moreover, about 39% of the students were already working in development organisations before they started the course. This is another reflection of the fact that our students are on average older and already on a career path and their responses would be based on several years of experience. Interestingly, this increase from 39% to 63% also suggests that completing a postgraduate degree in Development Studies increases the employability of students or engagement with development organisations (Table 3).

The survey asked former students in open questions to consider their current professional environment and comment on what they considered topical knowledge as well as personal skills necessary to thrive in their positions.

TABLE 2 Sex and number of students completing postgraduate course Development Management at Massey University (2017–2020) (course records, $n = 145$).

Year	Number and proportion of men		Number and proportion of women		Total (n)
2017	4	12%	(30)	88%	34
2018	6	17%	(29)	83%	35
2019	13	34%	(25)	66%	38
2020	7	18%	(31)	82%	38
Totals	30	21%	(115)	79%	145

TABLE 3 Graduated students working in development sector before/after development studies degree at Massey University (2017–2020) (Survey, $n = 46/145$).

	Before taking postgrad degree in Development Studies		After taking postgrad degree in Development Studies	
Not working in a development organisation	28	(61%)	17	(37%)
Working in a development organisation	18	(39%)	29	(63%)
Totals	46	(100%)	46	(100%)

TABLE 4 Number of staff and type of international development organisations interviewed.

Type of organisation	Organisations interviewed		Staff interviewed	
Official agency	2	(17%)	6	(22%)
NGO	7	(58%)	14	(52%)
Commercial consulting	2	(17%)	6	(22%)
Research institute	1	(8%)	1	(4%)
Totals	12	(100%)	27	(100%)

We looked for recurring themes in the respondents' answers: an approach often described as an inductive content analysis (Graneheim et al., 2017; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). While setting a threshold for what constitutes a recurring pattern is a somewhat arbitrary matter, we decided that when at least 10% (i.e., 5) of the 46 respondents made a similar comment, then that comment was a recurring theme likely to have relevance beyond the personal opinions of a few individuals.

2.3 | Interviewing professional staff in international development agencies

The third and final source of suggestions for the content of the new 'post-covid' international development management course was a series of semi-structured interviews with senior staff in international development organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand. We identified 15 organisations, seeking diversity in their profiles. Our list ranged from the country's largest development organisation in terms of budget and staff to organisations with much smaller budgets and only a handful of staff. We included official agencies (the aid programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as another public sector agency delivering aid programmes in the Pacific), NGOs, commercial consulting firms and one research institute. Some of the organisations' interest spheres covered development as well as humanitarian aid. We emailed these organisations with an explanation of the purpose of our research and asked for a face-to-face interview with one or a couple of staff. Twelve organisations responded positively; the remaining three cited time pressure as a reason to decline. In pairs of two researchers, we interviewed a total of 27 staff in May and June 2021 (Table 4).

For this research, we sought views from a broad and diverse group of experienced professionals to provide suggestions, making sure the content of the new course would respond to needs and expectations of most professional environments where students are already employed or may be employed after graduation. Arguably, we succeeded in interviewing a pool of interviewees that was broad and diverse. In what were often meandering conversations, we asked these professionals the same questions presented in the survey of graduated students: what topical knowledge and, next, which personal skills did they consider necessary to thrive in their positions? We also asked them to be future-looking when considering valuable skills. When interviewing two or

three staff members, we considered one individual's comments as valid for their organisation, unless it was contradicted by colleagues. As with our analysis of students' responses to open questions in the survey, we applied an inductive content analysis to the notes of the interview made by the two interviewers. Considering we worked on views of 12 responding organisations, we set the threshold for a relevant, recurring, pattern at four out of 12 (25%).

2.4 | Limitations of the research

The outlined mixed methods approach used three distinct methods; each method led the four members of the research team to contribute individual data or data analysis to a common pool. We undertook to mitigate the limitations and biases of each method by carefully comparing each member's contribution to the other members' contributions. Outliers in data were then looked at and considered by the full team. In addition, each method has its own limitations. The mapping review of the identified literature sources produced short summaries for each source, and while these summaries were compared across the team, the actual analysis of a source was done by a single individual, risking biases and omissions by that individual researcher. The same risk applies to analysis of the notes from the interviews by the pairs of interviewers, although to a lesser extent as working in pairs reduced the risk of individual bias. Lastly, a limitation of the survey is that this was an opt-in survey. And while about a third of the former students responded, we have no insights in the views of the two-thirds who declined to engage and who may have profiles that differentiate them markedly from those who did opt-in, which obviously carries risks of selection bias.

3 | FINDINGS

3.1 | Findings from reviewing recent literature

Covering the 2018–2021 period, our review and our mapping of the literature—divided in equal parts over academic journals, websites of bilateral and multilateral international development bodies, research and media organisations, and websites of NGOs and blogs (Table 1)—suggests there were five topics that kept recurring as a response to the question ‘What topics should be included in a postgraduate course on international development practices?’ We list these topics in no particular order, without any implied weighting in terms of frequency of occurrence or overall relevance. In addition, and where appropriate, we will also share comments from the interviews held with senior staff to show the extent to which the topics emerging from the literature review have (already) become part of the thinking and discourse in development organisations.

The first topic to be included in a course on international development would be one exploring how the Covid-19 pandemic will significantly change and shape global development cooperation in the 2020s. The precise contours of a new practice of international development cooperation are not quite clear yet, but there is a broadly supported view that the pandemic has changed everything. A few quotes from diverse sources illustrate this:

Global cooperation must adapt to meet biggest threat since Second World War, Secretary-General says ... as Covid-19 transcends borders. (United Nations, 2020)

COVID-19, overlaid on existing global challenges, is the biggest stress test that international development cooperation has ever faced. (Gavas & Pleeck, 2021, p. 1)

The Covid-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented shock to all parts of the globe ... Has the pandemic fundamentally altered development flows and the relationships between development actors? (Brazys et al., 2021, p. 949)

The second topic emerging from our literature review would begin with a reiteration that key principles of international development cooperation—i.e., the reduction of global poverty as part of wider international cooperation in bilateral and multilateral frameworks—appear to retain broad support in societies in the Global North. The target to dedicate 0.7% of the richer UN member states' Gross National Income (GNI) to Official Development Assistance (ODA) to poorer nation states has been unchallenged since its adoption in the early 1970s by the United Nations and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The pandemic does not seem to have affected this broad support among our interviewees and respondents. And while achieving the target remains elusive, ODA volumes have steadily grown and multilateral agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000–2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015–2030) have become increasingly comprehensive (Hook & Rumsey, 2016). Moreover, when it comes to 'global development [and] climate change ... the discussion suggests that reality is more likely to be a combination of both perspectives' (Schipper et al., 2020, p. 4). The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change and the 2015 Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, as well as the Green Climate Fund, all integrate action to remedy global inequalities.

However, notwithstanding this support for these multilateral frameworks, our literature review also found sources arguing that a significant proportion of development aid in OECD countries has been subtly shifting in the 2010s, away from approaches that seek a reduction of global poverty and towards national geo-political objectives and 'explicit self-interest designed to bolster private sector trade and investment [in donor countries]' (Mawdsley et al., 2018, p. 25). In this light, development aid from OECD countries begins to resemble the One-Belt-One-Road development cooperation approach promoted by China. On the other hand, as countries in the Global South such as China or Brazil take a growing and more active role in international development cooperation—referred to as 'South-South Cooperation'—their professional practices, if not their development policies, begin to converge with practices and policies long-established by OECD countries and UN frameworks, losing their 'operational distinction from so-called established donors' (Mawdsley, 2019, p. 259). Arguably, in shaping international development policies and practices, OECD countries and large countries in the Global South are all moving towards each other. The two quotes below illustrate how China now explicitly links its international development cooperation to the SDGs and how Brazil embraces the aid design standards that have guided OECD development programmes for decades:

While the Belt and Road Initiative and the 2030 Agenda are different ... they share in many respects a similar vision and a set of basic principles ... the five priority areas as defined in the Belt and Road Initiative ... are extensively and intrinsically linked with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. (Liu, 2018)

The project document is the core reference in implementing ... of paramount importance ... with the logical framework or theory of change to address the designated issue. (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, ABC, 2019, p. 25)

The third topic emerging from our literature review may be connected to the previous convergence—in an optimistic fashion—and suggests that the next few years will show increased multilateral collaboration across all countries and communities to address global, collective, challenges. Covid-19 underscores the need for such global collaboration, abandoning the geographical anchoring of development programmes in the Global South, as expressed succinctly by one European journalist:

In a pandemic you are only as safe as the most vulnerable. (Jones in: The Guardian, 2020)

In careful reflections, several sources in the literature review argue that the term ‘international development’—associated in post-colonial and post-development thinking with the binary of the Global North and Global South and international development cooperation and ODA as a matter of supportive or active intervention by donor countries in the North in recipient countries in the South—may need replacing by the concept of ‘global development’. This was already illustrated by one of the principal shifts between the MDGs and the SDGs in 2015: the latter, unlike the former, set development objectives for all UN member states, irrespective of their place in the hierarchy or dichotomy of Global South and Global North. Writing just before the outbreak of Covid-19, Horner (2020) considers our interconnectedness through globalised capitalism, the global effects of climate change and the blurred distinctions between poverty in the Global North and Global South before advocating:

The potential of an emerging paradigm of global development as applicable to the whole world. (Horner, 2020, p. 415)

The emphasis on collective challenges and shared responses on a global scale as critical contours of an international development cooperation in the 2020s seems to zoom in on two particular issues. One of these issues is the emergence of the concept of ‘global public goods’. For example:

COVID-19 accentuates the case for a global, rather than an international, development paradigm. The novel disease is a prime example of a development challenge for all countries, through the failure of public health as a global public good. (Oldekop et al., 2020, p. 1)

The other issue coming out of ‘global development’ debates in the context of the pandemic is that the role of scientists and their research in public policymaking appears to have increased significantly. Arguably, this larger role for research extends beyond the sphere of policymaking in public health. Virtually all governments responded to the pandemic crisis with dramatic interventions, believing to be acting in the basis of research and in the public interest. Research on managing infection-risks for Covid-19 not only underpinned directive and yet widely accepted regulations on citizens' mobility (from full lockdown to app-based tracking) and behaviour (be vaccinated and wear masks) but also led many governments to massive economic interventions such as across-the-board wage subsidies that prioritised labour and people, rather than capital and markets. Such public policies were largely unimaginable before the outbreak. It leads some analysts to believe that the door has been opened for more imaginative public policymaking, perhaps in response to climate change. For example:

... scientific advice and evidence be used in policy for disease outbreaks and indeed wider development issues ... project and programme styles that emphasise learning ... and equitable relationships amongst diverse actors need to move from the margins to centre-stage. (Leach et al., 2021, pp. 5–6)

The fourth topic for reflection in our postgraduate course that surfaced in our review of the literature was more pessimistic and in dark contrast to the preceding optimism of increased multilateral collaboration of governments and widespread support in nation states for research-based directive policymaking. This fourth emerging topic found rather diverging sources share a concern that societal support for collective and collaborative action (and arguably an associated international cooperation) may be waning as societies in the Global North and the Global South seem to be fragmenting. What we found most remarkable is how much mainstream analysts and more critical academic analysts seem to concur and how some novelists agree too. For example, Nigerian Nobel Prize-winning novelist Wole Soyinka comments:

I don't want to sound pessimistic, but this is one of the most pessimistic years I have known in this nation and it wasn't just because of COVID-19. (Vanguard News Nigeria, 2020)

The USA's National Intelligence Council presents a long-term forecast to each new president, and in the words of the New York Times Editorial Board, the 2021 report is clear: 'The future looks bleak ... Experts ... do not recall a gloomier one' (Editorial Board New York Times, 2021). Unusually, a report by leading analysts edited by Taylor and McCarthy from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex arrives a very similar conclusion, both voicing their concern about the deepening cracks in society:

Populations are increasingly pessimistic and distrustful ... exposing fault lines within communities and states. (National Intelligence Council USA, 2021, p. 4)

Reactions [to Covid-19] are exposing, and potentially deepening, foundational cracks in society. (Taylor & McCarthy, 2021, p. 2)

Most likely, such fault lines and foundational cracks within societies eventually contribute to a decline in societal support for international development cooperation and for maintaining an agreed level of ODA. Moreover, several sources appear to arrive at the same downbeat conclusions regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on overall global development. Again, rather diverging sources such as the US National Intelligence Council and, on the other hand, the Africa-based Institute for Security Studies concur:

COVID-19 is ... reversing some longstanding trends in human development, especially the reduction of poverty ... and closing gender inequality gaps. (National Intelligence Council USA, 2021, p. 12)

[the] Pandemic is set to erase much of the progress made in the fight against poverty. (Institute for Security Studies, 2020, p. 25)

And in addition to a resurgence of extreme poverty, diverging sources also conclude that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic may reduce multilateralism and international collaboration among nation states, or lead to more violent conflicts:

[USA, EU, and China show an] increasing jockeying over norms, rules, and institutions ... heightening the risk of interstate conflict. (National Intelligence Council USA, 2021, p. 5)

Implications of COVID-19 for conflict in Africa ... the consequences of the pandemic are very likely to accelerate violent conflict in the medium to long term. (German Development Institute, 2021, p. 1)

The fifth topic that we see arising in our literature review for consideration in our postgraduate course are the debates around the decolonisation of international development and questions about institutionalised racism in international development organisations. Debates about the extent and ways in which colonial era administrations in the Global North morphed into the administrations of international development cooperation have, of course, been around for decades. However, it is noteworthy that such debates do not seem to decrease after decades. In fact, they remain constant and sometimes expand, as the following quote illustrates:

Switzerland continued [after decolonisation] applying its formula that combines business with aid ... colonialism with humanitarianism. [...] Crypto-colonialism by Africans as well as by the Swiss themselves rather ... inconspicuous. (Appiah & Mireku, 2020, pp. 41–42)

More forceful than the debate about ongoing colonialism, however, is the surging debate about racism in the institutions and practices of international development. Building on the Black Lives Matter movements that erupted

in the mid-2010, as well as building on well-established ideas in Critical Race Theory that underscore to role of institutions and institutional practices in sustaining racism in the Global North, the role of racism in international development organisations has only gained significant attention since the late 2010s. One researcher reviewing the 2018 edition of the 'Essential Guide to Critical Development Studies' finds that this guide has a clear focus on 'intersections of class, gender, and empire' but

... a profound silence on race ... where race is concerned, it falls flat. (Pailey, 2020, pp. 738–739)

Importantly, the sharp increase in attention on racism in international development organisations is not limited to academic spheres; it plays out in politics, media and internal discussions in international development organisations. For example:

MPs on the House of Commons International Development Committee are to scrutinise racism in the foreign aid sector. (Ricketts in: Third Sector, 2021)

Médecins Sans Frontières is 'institutionally racist', say 1,000 insiders. (McVeigh in: The Guardian, 2020)

Floyd's murder has also spurred a reckoning in global development, a sector long accused of harbouring colonial tendencies and white saviour attitudes. (Welsh in: DEVEX Newswire, 2021)

3.2 | Findings from surveying former students and interviewing staff in development organisations

Tables 5 and 6 detail the results of our inductive content analysis of the responses by graduated students and by senior staff in international development organisations to the question what topics they advised to be included in

TABLE 5 Graduated students' suggestions on topics for new development management course.

Suggested topics (number of suggestions)	Proportion of participants
Aid in context of disaster/conflict versus structural negotiated aid (13/46)	28%
Techniques for remote, digital, collaboration (9/46)	20%
Localisation of aid management and local community resilience (6/46)	13%
Indigenous and local development management views and practices (5/46)	11%

Source: Survey ($n = 46$), open question, multiple suggestions allowed.

TABLE 6 Senior staff's suggestions on topics for new development management course.

Suggested topics (number of suggestions)	Proportion of participants
International politics, multilateral bodies (11/12)	92%
Localisation of aid management and local community resilience (10/12)	83%
Political and technical aspects of various aid policies and modalities (9/12)	75%
Indigenous and local development management views and practices (8/12)	67%
Aid in context of disaster/conflict versus structural negotiated aid (8/12)	67%

Source: Semi-structured interview ($n = 12$ organisations, 27 people), multiple suggestions allowed.

the new postgraduate course. The two tables not only reveal recurring themes as to topics for each group but a comparative analysis of the two sources provides valuable insights in the converging and the diverging views between the 'new generation of development practitioners' and the 'established generation of development practitioners'. The comparative analysis leads to three central findings.

The first, and perhaps most striking, finding is that the graduated students showed much more diversity in their suggestions for course topics than senior staff. Altogether, the graduated students suggested a long list of topics, but in our inductive analysis, only four topics passed the threshold of being shared by at least 10% of the students, and none of these four topics was suggested by a majority. In contrast, the senior staff produced a shorter list of potential topics with five topics being suggested by clear majorities of the staff, ranging from 67% to 92% of the interviewed staff. It could be argued that the graduated students made suggestions more based on their individual views, whereas the senior staff made suggestions based on what they professionally knew to be widely shared views in their organisations.

A second finding from the comparative analysis is that graduated students and senior staff diverge when it comes to what are the most widely shared suggestions for course topics in their respective groups. Almost all senior staff (92%) suggested that the topic of 'international politics, multilateral bodies' be a topic. In contrast, this topic was barely suggested by the graduated students; it did not pass the 10% threshold. On the other hand, one of the few topics that did pass the threshold among students—i.e., 'Techniques for remote, digital, collaboration'—did not get a mention in the interviews with staff. This divergence might be a point of concern if this finding indeed suggests that the new and the established generation of international development practitioners do not agree in what are critically important topics to underpin professional performance.

A final finding is that graduated students and senior staff also converge in their suggestions for three course topics: 'aid in context of disaster/conflict versus structural negotiated aid'; 'localisation of aid management and local community resilience'; and 'Indigenous and local development management views and practices'. Obviously, as detailed in the first finding, staff were more agreed among each other on the relevance of these topic, but these three topics resonated among a noticeable group of students too.

Tables 7 and 8 show the results from the analysis of responses by graduated students and senior staff on the question of what more personal skills and abilities should be addressed in the new postgraduate course. The overall findings from a comparative analysis are quite similar to the preceding analysis of interviewees' responses. First, compared to graduated students, senior staff were more in agreement among themselves as to suggestions for skills and abilities. Second, staff and students, again, diverged in what was the most widely shared suggestion. About a

TABLE 7 Graduated students' suggestions on skills and abilities in new development management course.

Suggested skills/abilities (number of suggestions)	Proportion of participants
Personal adaptability, flexibility (14/46)	30%
Cross-cultural competencies in international networking (12/46)	26%
Analytical skills to understand local and global development issues (6/46)	13%

Source: Survey ($n = 46$), open question, multiple suggestions allowed.

TABLE 8 Senior staff's suggestions on skills and abilities in new development management course.

Suggested skills/abilities (number of suggestions)	Proportion of participants
Operational management (Design, MERL, risk, etc.) (9/12)	75%
Cross-cultural competencies in international networking (9/12)	75%
Analytical skills to understand global development issues (7/12)	58%

Source: Semi-structured interview ($n = 12$ organisations, 27 people), multiple suggestions allowed.

third of the graduated students suggested attention for ‘personal adaptability, flexibility’—the most widely shared view in the entire survey—whereas this was not a skill suggested by a noticeable proportion of the senior staff. A clear majority of the staff (75%), on the other hand, suggested ‘operational management skills’ such as programme design, risk analysis and skills in Monitoring Evaluation Research and Learning (MERL) should be included in the course, but this was not mentioned by enough students to pass the 10% threshold. The third, and final, finding is that both groups of interviewees converged in recommending inclusion of two other skill sets: cross-cultural competencies in international networking and analytical skills to understand specific development issues at local and global level.

4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The review of international literature led us to identify five topics for inclusion in the postgraduate course on international development management at Massey University in Aotearoa New Zealand. To discuss the extent to which these topics resonate in the country’s professional environment, we present a comparative analysis between these five topics and, on the other hand, the topics emerging from the survey of former students as the next generation of international development practitioners, and from the interviews with the country’s established generation of practitioners across various development agencies.

First, just as the review of literature finds a broad consensus that the pandemic was having fundamental impact on professional practices of international development bodies and organisations, virtually all staff in development agencies shared similar views when interviewed. We paraphrase some comments from staff in different organisations: ‘Covid has been a watershed moment for development organisations’, and ‘Covid triggers existential questions’, and ‘Covid fundamentally changed the international development profession. Things will not go back to what they were in 2019’. In line with the literature, both students and staff commented that the structural implications for the professional practice going forward seemed to lie in two, related, recommendations for the course: included as key topics ‘localisation of aid management’ and ‘Indigenous and local development management views and practices’.

The second topic emerging from the literature review was that the principles of ODA retain fairly broad support in the Global North, even though ODA appears to be tied increasingly to donor countries’ geo-political and commercial interests. Connected to this topic was the third topic from the literature review: more upbeat authors finding growing multilateral collaboration to address global challenges. Students and staff seem to concur with this, as notable sections in both groups comment that ‘analytical skills to understand (local and) global development issues’ should be part of the skills to be taught new postgraduate course. However, it merits reiterating that virtually all interviewed staff (92%) recommended that ‘international politics and multilateral bodies’ be a topic in the course, while almost none of the students did so.

In contrast to the above two topics, the fourth topic for the new course on international development coming out of the literature review was the much darker perspective of increasing fragmentation and conflict within societies and across the globe. In the survey and the interviews of development practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand, the topic of ‘conflict’ and international cooperation in an operational environment of conflict also came to the fore, noted by the largest cluster of the surveyed students (28%) and a majority of professional staff (67%). However, all the comments made in the survey and interviews referred to conflicts beyond the borders of Aotearoa New Zealand and none made a reference to fragmentation within the country. In fact, we did not find a noticeable number of people suggesting that there was a significant increase of the number or intensity of conflicts in which international development practitioners operate. In this regard, the comments from the elsewhere that ‘the future looks bleak’ (Editorial Board New York Times, 2021) does not appear to resonate loudly in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Lastly, the literature review suggests that matters of decolonisation and institutionalised racism within international development practices be considered in a postgraduate course. The interviews with staff revealed that these

international debates had become part of their internal discussions too. Some paraphrased comments illustrate this: 'Interrogating our workplaces about racism and unconscious bias is essential' and 'The focus should not be so much on COVID-19, but more on structural matters such as racism, BLM', and 'Does it matter if staff is white? No. But what does matter is the individual's attitude and their soft skills'. The survey of students revealed few such explicit references to decolonisation and racism, but the politically less confronting 'cross-cultural competencies' were skills that were suggested by a noticeable cluster of students (26%), as well as a majority of interviewed staff (75%).

Coming to a close, we see three conclusions from our research into the question what topics should be included in a postgraduate course on international development practices in Aotearoa New Zealand, drawing on a comparative analysis from a literature review, a survey of postgraduate students and interviews with senior staff in development organisations. First, and in overall terms, we note that the next generation of development professionals and the established senior practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand appear to share the principal suggestions for what needs to be taught as we have seen emerge in the literature between 2018 and 2021, covering the pre- and post-pandemic periods. Specifically, this means the following five topics: (1) exploring the impact of the pandemic on international development practices in terms of localisation and Indigenous approaches; (2) the continued support for ODA in the Global North albeit with an increased orientation towards donors' interests; (3) the optimistic perspective that the pandemic expanded support for multilateralism, as well as (4) a darker view in many places of increasing conflict and societal fragmentation; and (5) an increased attention for racism and decolonisation in international development organisations.

However, at a more granular level, our analysis leads to a second conclusion that there are several areas where the established generation and the next generation of development practitioners of Aotearoa New Zealand hold sharply diverging, as well as converging, views. As for the former, almost all senior staff recommend the course content focus on international politics and multilateral bodies, while no noticeable portion of recently graduated students suggest this as an important topic. On the other hand, a noticeable proportion of these former students recommend an exploration of the potential and implication of remote and digital collaboration, while none of the staff mentioned this. Students and staff also diverged when talking about skills to be developed in the new course. The largest group of students concurred on the suggestion that 'personal adaptability and flexibility' should be a course topic, while that was not mentioned by staff. In contrast, a large majority of staff suggested operational management skills such as programme design and MERL techniques should be taught; virtually none of the students suggested this. In counterbalance, the recently graduated students and senior staff converged on suggestions that topics and skills for the new course should include attention for contexts of conflict or disaster; the localisation of aid management; Indigenous perspectives on development management, cross-cultural competencies and analytical skills to understand global issues. In the new redesigned postgraduate course, we include attention for all topics suggested, but we decided to emphasise the topics raised by senior staff as we deemed them more reflective of needs and expectations in the professional field.

As a third and final conclusion, we found ourselves wondering about the extent to which our academic environment—with its emphasis on critical, analytical or conceptual abilities—has room for suggestions from graduated students and senior staff in international development that we teach, and assess, personal and interpersonal skills too. In particular, we will take up the suggestions to include in the new postgraduate course attention for personal adaptability and flexibility, as well as competencies in cross-cultural communication. Others have found a similar need to connect 'skills and criticality' in postgraduate courses for international development (North et al., 2022, p. 257). In the new course, we explore the concept of 'care-full' relationships, emphasising not only skills in cross-cultural relationships but also acknowledging that under certain circumstances, professionals trained in cross-cultural communication 'might take advantage of others with the help of their cross-cultural knowledge' (Fang et al., 2018, p. 166). Ultimately, it seems that the connection between skills and a critical, personal and intersectional reflection on those skills, needs to be a central element in a postgraduate course on international development practices in the post-Covid-19 2020s.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declared no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Detailed data will be made available upon request to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

All data used were from the Massey University New Zealand anonymised database, following the university's research ethics guidelines.

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