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## A Bibliometric Literature Review on Trends in the Internationalization of Higher Education

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**Abstract.** In recent years, the internationalization of higher education has become a critical theme, reflecting global interconnectedness and the increasing mobility of students and academics. This study aims to identify and analyze trends in internationalization research from 2015 to 2024. Utilizing a bibliometric analysis of 9,180 articles and 44,000 keywords from Web of Science and Scopus databases, the research synthesizes developments in nine key fields over the past decade. Methods include data cleaning, keyword determination, and the use of Excel for data processing and analysis. The results reveal significant progress in understanding the complexities of internationalization, such as student mobility, societal and cultural integration, educational methods, and quality assurance. The study highlights the accelerated role of digital technology due to the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging national security issues. Conclusions offer new theoretical and practical insights into the role of internationalization in higher education outcomes and predict future trends. The findings have significant implications for policy-making, institutional strategies, and future research directions. This research contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of past trends and suggesting directions for future studies, emphasizing the need for coordinated efforts from educational institutions, governments, and international organizations. Emphasis is placed on inclusivity and sustainability, with a call for innovative strategies to address emerging challenges and leverage new opportunities in the field of higher education internationalization.

**Keywords:** globalization of education; higher education; internationalization of education

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## 1. Introduction

As an extensive and widespread economic, social and cultural phenomenon, globalization has had a profound impact on the social structures, cultural exchanges and economic development of countries around the world. However, globalization has also brought about many challenges that require countries to adapt and respond to in multiple fields (World Bank, 2020). In response to the challenges of globalization, the internationalization of education has fostered talent with a global perspective and competitiveness for various countries. This has been achieved by promoting international student mobility, cultural exchanges, environmental education, and skills training (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The internationalization of education not only helps to address the challenges incurred by globalization, but also provides strong support for achieving sustainable development and common global prosperity.

The history of the concept of the internationalization of education spans more than 40 years, beginning in the 1980s. Knight (2021) defines internationalization as *“the process of integrating international, intercultural and global dimensions into the purpose, function and delivery of higher education”*. She posited that internationalization is not merely a trend or phenomenon, but a systematic and strategic process aimed at responding to the challenges of globalization by improving educational quality, research capabilities and global competitiveness. Educational internationalization is a multi-dimensional and multi-level process; its research covers many aspects such as academic mobility, curriculum internationalization, transnational educational cooperation and international education policy (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach et al., 2019; Healey, 2008; Kim, 2009; Leask, 2009). However, the internationalization of higher education has become a major focus of research due to its prominent role in student mobility, academic collaboration, policy drivers and cultural influences. Therefore, this article takes the internationalization of higher education as the research background.

In a systematic review of more than 7,000 publications related to the internationalization of higher education, Yemini and Sagie (2016) analyzed four aspects as variables: relevance, geographical area of focus, main theme, and academic discipline. Their analysis revealed the development trends in higher education internationalization research from 1980 to 2014. Furthermore, they found that research during this period mainly focused on student mobility, institutional strategies, curriculum internationalization, and cross-border education. However, the internationalization of higher education involves the fields of education, sociology, economics, and political science. This interdisciplinary approach enriches the understanding of higher education internationalization by integrating various perspectives and analytical frameworks.

Although the internationalization of higher education is gradually attracting global attention, research to date has been mainly concentrated in Europe and the United States. Such uneven regional distribution is a significant obstacle to the comprehensive interpretation of higher education internationalization. In order

to address the gap of insufficient global research and to better understand the internationalization of higher education, current research needs to focus on more regions and countries, including various geographical and cultural perspectives.

Therefore, this study is based on previous research, collecting global studies on the internationalization of higher education since 2015. An objective approach was adopted based on relevance, geographical focus, main theme, and academic discipline. The principal aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the internationalization of higher education. Consequently, the research questions that guide this study are as follows:

- RQ1. What are the main journals that have contributed to the literature on the internationalization of higher education?
- RQ2. What is the trend in publications on the internationalization of higher education?
- RQ3. Who are the most influential authors in the field of the internationalization of higher education?
- RQ4. What is the best conceptual framework by which to understand the core theme of the internationalization of higher education?
- RQ5. What is the relevance of the articles to the subject of this study?
- RQ6. What geographical areas are covered by the articles?
- RQ7. What are the main themes of these articles?
- RQ8. What are the future directions of this topic?

By analyzing these questions, this study will guide us in strengthening our understanding of the concept of higher education internationalization, the relevance of the articles to the subject, the main terms related to higher education internationalization, the distribution of geographical trends, new dimensions, and important new concepts.

The research objectives of this study are to determine the relevance of articles to the subject of the internationalization of higher education, to identify the distribution of countries contributing to internationalized higher education research over the past decade, and to clarify the differences in research across various countries. Additionally, this study aims to identify the key themes and most influential authors in the field, highlighting the contributions of leading journals, explaining the development trends of internationalization in higher education, developing a conceptual framework by which to understand these concepts, and providing prospective associations and future research directions.

According to the abovementioned research objectives, the main objective of the paper is to propose and develop an understanding of the internationalization of higher education research and to identify its future direction by collecting global literature on the subject since 2015. In this context, this study uses bibliometric analysis, which is an effective method for conducting an in-depth analysis of current research trends to gain an understanding of emerging new research. This will contribute to enabling scholars, policymakers, educational institution managers, and individuals to understand the trends in educational

internationalization and will provide constructive contributions to future research.

## **2. Methodology**

Bibliometric analysis is a research method based on bibliometrics, which reveals the development trends and knowledge structure of a specific research field by quantitatively analyzing academic publication data, such as the number of papers, number of citations, author collaboration network and keyword frequency (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). On the basis of the research questions and objective of this article, the author believes that a bibliometric analysis can reveal research trends and main themes through quantitative analysis, providing macro perspectives and data-driven predictions; therefore, it is most suitable for the research of this article (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

All the collected data was cleaned and organized to ensure that there were no duplicates or errors. Excel was primarily used for data processing and analysis in this study. With its intuitive interface and powerful data management capabilities, Excel is an ideal tool for data organization, computation, and visualization. The processed data was analyzed using indicators such as publication count, citation count, h-index, impact factor, keyword analysis, and regional distribution analysis.

### **2.1 Search Strategy**

To comprehensively analyze the development trends in the internationalization of higher education, it is essential to select authoritative, internationally recognized, and high-quality literature databases. Identifying the most authoritative databases for social sciences on a global scale is challenging because the criteria for authority can vary based on the research field, disciplinary characteristics, and research objectives. Web of Science, Scopus, and JSTOR are highly reputable literature databases in academic and research institutions, with their authority being reflected in several key aspects (Jacso, 2005). Firstly, they contain extensive literature resources and powerful retrieval functions, meeting researchers' diverse academic needs. Secondly, they provide comprehensive citation analysis capabilities, helping researchers to understand citation patterns and the impact of the literature. Finally, their data quality and reliability are widely recognized among the academic community, providing authoritative academic support for researchers (Yeung, 2019). Therefore, to enhance the breadth of this research, data screening will be conducted using these three databases.

The analysis of the main topics is conducted based on authors, sources, years, types of documents, countries, disciplines, and affiliations. In our study, the bibliometric indicators used for classification include the number of publications related to the topic, citation counts, h-index, and impact factor. By employing these bibliometric indicators, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the current research landscape of higher education internationalization. This analysis will highlight the most influential journals, authors, and publications, as well as identifying trends and gaps in the existing literature. Furthermore, the research questions will be explored using descriptive

statistical analysis, citation analysis, co-word analysis, journal analysis, topic trend analysis, and bibliometric mapping. By employing a variety of bibliometric techniques, this study can systematically and thoroughly analyze the research status of higher education internationalization, revealing research hotspots, development trends, and major contributors.

## **2.2 Keyword Determination**

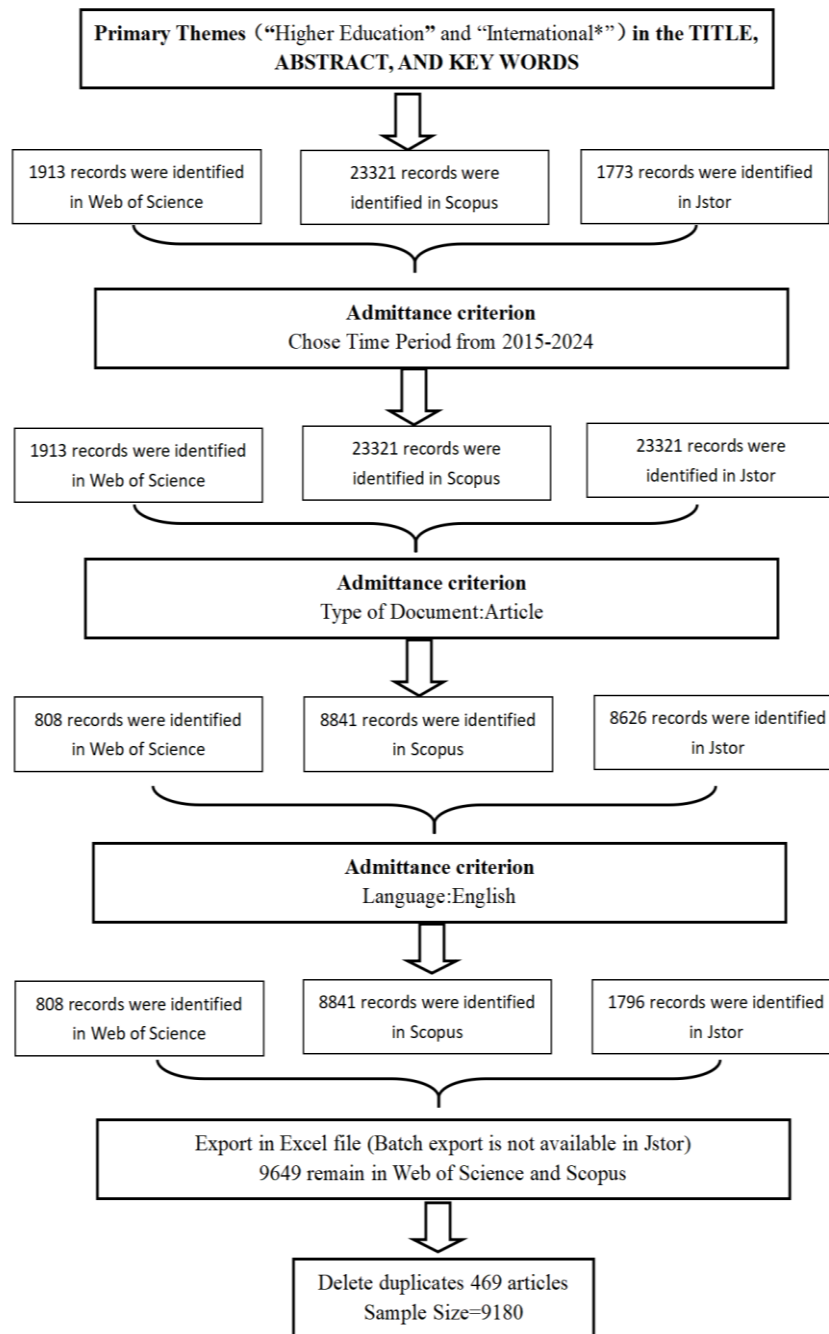
Along with database selection, selecting appropriate keywords is equally important as keywords directly affect the retrieval and screening process and significantly impact the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the research results (Cooper, 1988). Thus, keywords should accurately reflect the research topic and encompass relevant literature resources to ensure the comprehensiveness and credibility of the systematic literature review. First, the accuracy of keywords is crucial for clarifying the research goals and scope. By precisely selecting keywords related to the research topic, the research scope can be effectively narrowed, avoiding unrelated literature and maintaining the focus and consistency of the systematic literature review. Second, the breadth and diversity of keywords help to ensure the comprehensiveness and multi-perspective nature of the systematic literature review. By selecting keywords covering different aspects and viewpoints, more relevant literature can be included, making the review more representative and comprehensive. Lastly, the authority and popularity of keywords are also key considerations. Choosing keywords that are widely recognized and used in the academic community can enhance the credibility and impact of the research and can facilitate other researchers' citations and extension of the study.

Primarily, this research analyzes the development of the internationalization of higher education over the past decade. Based on the research objectives and scope, the research topics will focus on higher education and internationalization. To ensure the comprehensiveness, accuracy, and credibility of the research, keywords will be determined innovatively through two dimensions. In the first step, we will conduct an initial screening by inputting "higher education" and "internationalization" and their synonymous terms into the databases. Using wildcard characters " " in the search bar for fuzzy searches will help to expand the search results. For example, entering "educat" will match all words starting with "educat", such as "education", "educational", "educator", and so on, thus finding more relevant literature without being limited to specific spellings. In the second step, we will use Excel's Pivot Table tool to analyze the search data, extracting the most frequently occurring words as keywords for this literature review.

## **2.3 Sample Determination**

According to the criteria set for keyword, publication date, type, and language, we identified 12,215 target documents in Web of Science, Scopus, and JSTOR. Due to JSTOR's inability to batch export screening results, which severely impacts data collection and processing, we decided to exclude JSTOR, opting instead for Web of Science and Scopus, which yielded a total sample size of 9,649 documents. By processing the data using Excel's pivot tool, we found that only 469 of the 9,649

documents appeared simultaneously in both databases. This indicates that there is relative independence between these literature databases, thus making it necessary to select as many high-quality and authoritative databases as possible, which will help to understand the research content more comprehensively. After removing duplicates, the total sample size was 9,180 documents, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the target literature list in the figure below (Figure 1). The data were exported on 22 May 2024 and the database accounts for Scopus and Web of Science were provided by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

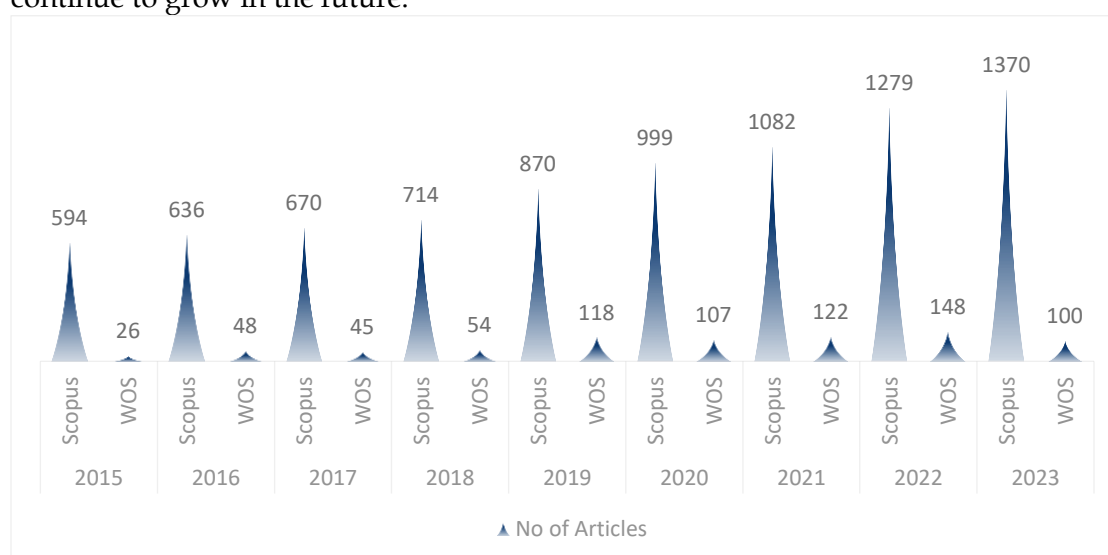


**Figure 1: Flowchart illustrating data collection from publications according to inclusion and exclusion criteria**

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Publication Output and Subject Distribution

To ensure the comparability of data, this study excluded 198 articles from 2024 due to the literature cutoff date being May 22, 2024, which does not encompass the entire year. From 2015 to 2023 there were 8982 research articles on internationalization in higher education from Web of Science and Scopus (Figure 2). As can be seen in Figure 2, the number of published articles on the internationalization of higher education has been increasing continuously over the past nine years. The peak years for publication on this topic were 2019 and 2020, with publication growth rates of 28.6% and 11.9%, respectively. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the growth rate of published papers declined, but it returned to a peak in 2022, when the growth rate of published papers reached 18.5%. In the first 141 days of 2024 alone, 668 papers were published on this topic, and 2024 is predicted to represent a new peak in publication growth. Therefore, the amount of research on this topic is expected to continue to grow in the future.



**Figure 2: Number of articles on the internationalization of higher education in the past ten years published by Web of Science and Scopus**

The observation data show that the subject categories of Web of Science and Scopus are different. Thus, to observe the subject categories of the articles more accurately, we analyzed the data from Web of Science and Scopus separately. Firstly, we organized the data from Web of Science and Scopus papers on the internationalization of higher education according to their respective subject area categories. To classify and combine the subject distribution of the data in the two databases, we analyzed the articles according to the nature of the subject, the field of study, and the similarity. First, we removed any overlapping categories of disciplines and then merged those disciplines that were similar in nature and research. Consequently, we could better organize and manage these disciplines and promote research and collaboration across disciplines. Finally, we classified the disciplines of both databases according to the same criteria. For example, we categorized Educational Research, Education Science, Special Education, and Educational Psychology as Education because these disciplines are concerned

with the study and application of education. The data in Tables 1 and 2 reflect the discipline categories of articles on the internationalization of higher education from Web of Science and Scopus, respectively. As a result of the data analysis, the discipline distribution of internationalization in higher education over the past decade is as follows: Social Science (7311), Management & Business (1443), Medicine & Health (1204), Arts and Humanities (1113), Environment & Sustainability (876), Multidisciplinary Sciences (840), Education (621), Computer Science (598), Psychology (470), and Engineering (442). The analysis shows that most published articles are associated with the Social Sciences, Management & Business, Medicine & Health, Arts and Humanities, and Sustainability.

**Table 1: Discipline categories of articles on the internationalization of higher education from Web of Science (including interdisciplinary research)**

Discipline Categories	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Education	23	41	38	47	99	82	84	101	77	29	621
Social Sciences	3	12	9	18	15	25	25	18	17	10	152
Environment & Sustainability	0	1	3	2	5	5	16	44	8	9	93
Humanities	5	5	0	8	15	11	20	20	7	0	91
Management & Business	2	1	2	1	9	10	11	9	5	3	53
Medicine & Health	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	2	2	1	11
Multidisciplinary Sciences	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	4	1	9
Computer Science	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	2	7
Engineering	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	1	0	7
The number of disciplines covered by the literature	33	60	52	77	150	137	164	206	124	56	1059
Number of articles	26	48	45	54	118	107	122	148	100	41	809
Number of interdisciplinary articles	7	12	7	23	32	30	42	58	24	15	250

In addition, we found that the 9,181 articles involved a total of 14,918 disciplines because 5,737 of these were interdisciplinary research articles. This means that many articles spanned multiple disciplines, resulting in a higher total number of disciplines than the number of articles. By combining theoretical methods of different disciplines, interdisciplinary research can provide a more comprehensive and diversified perspective, which is undoubtedly beneficial to the development of a research topic (Teichler, 2004). Not only does this approach enrich the theoretical framework, but it also improves practice, thus promoting the overall development of higher education. Certainly, the internationalization of higher education involves complex issues such as cultural adaptation, policy coordination and economic impact. Interdisciplinary research can comprehensively utilize the knowledge and methods of different disciplines to solve these complex problems in a more comprehensive manner (de Vit, 2020). As illustrated by the data in tables 1 and 2, the number of interdisciplinary research articles has increased significantly in both Web of Science and Scopus. The number of Web of Science interdisciplinary articles increased more than three times in 2023 compared to 2015, and more than



eight times in 2022. In terms of Scopus data, the number of interdisciplinary articles in 2022 and 2023 is approximately equivalent, with both reaching almost three times the number published in 2015. Scopus is consistent with the subject distribution of the overall data, while Web of Science pays more attention to the research content in the field of education in terms of the internationalization of higher education. However, there is no research on education among Scopus data, mainly due to the insufficient detail of Scopus' subject division.

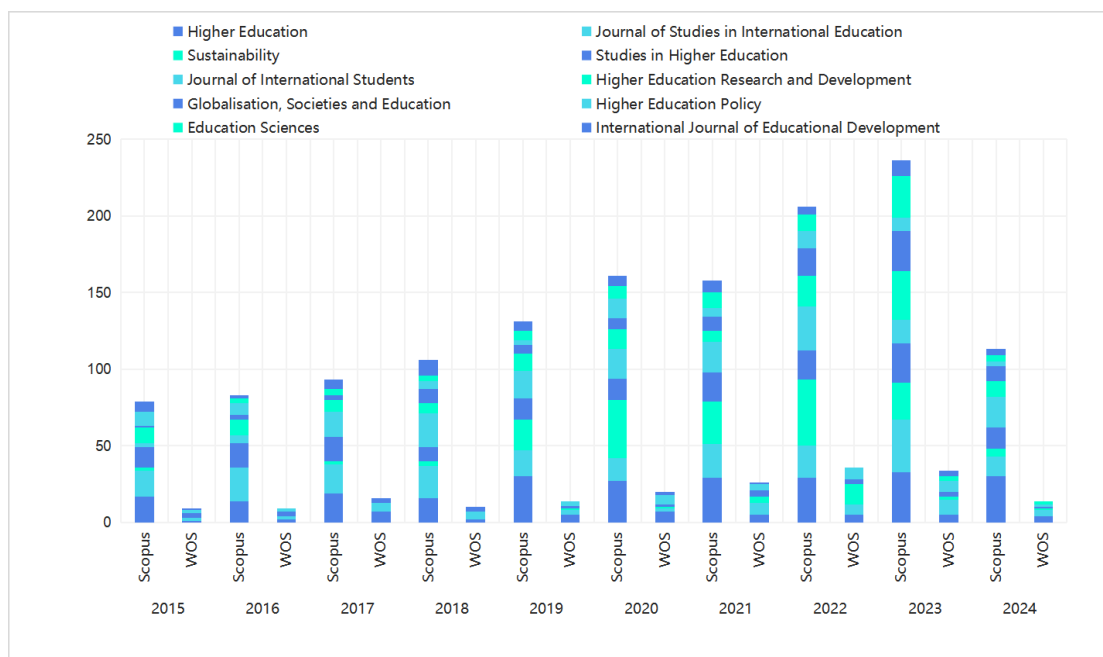
**Table 2: Discipline categories of articles on the internationalization of higher education from Scopus**

Discipline Categories	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Social Sciences	485	491	531	572	684	823	871	1028	1139	535	7159
Management & Business	113	142	133	126	173	150	168	158	156	71	1390
Medicine & Health	57	73	82	91	131	131	152	195	211	70	1193
Arts and Humanities	70	59	79	58	101	115	147	142	174	76	1022
Multidisciplinary Sciences	34	47	67	65	61	90	98	135	170	65	832
Environment & Sustainability	44	37	43	61	89	120	115	144	93	37	783
Computer Science	24	29	46	30	57	73	66	119	114	39	598
Psychology	16	18	26	34	31	53	72	82	108	30	470
Engineering	25	34	43	47	62	53	37	64	41	28	435
The number of disciplines covered by the literature	852	912	1024	1050	1358	1555	1654	1985	2098	924	13412
Number of articles	594	636	670	714	870	999	1082	1279	1370	627	8841
Number of interdisciplinary articles	258	276	354	336	488	556	572	706	728	297	4568

### 3.2 Journal Contribution

The results indicate the top ten journals in terms of publication volume on the internationalization of higher education over the past decade. Figure 3 illustrates the number of articles on higher education internationalization published by the ten topmost journals and indexed by both Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus. Over the past decade, WOS has indexed 218 papers published by these journals on the topic of higher education internationalization, while Scopus has indexed 1,366 articles. Among them, higher education has been the topic of the highest number of indexed articles in both databases, with 287 papers indexed over the ten-year period.

Ranked second is the Journal of Studies in International Education, with 250 papers indexed by the two databases. The journals, Studies in Higher Education, Sustainability, Journal of International Students, Globalization, Societies and Education, and Higher Education Policy, have also shown excellent performance, with 187, 185, 185, 144, and 106 articles indexed respectively, ranking them third to seventh.



**Figure 3: Contributions to journals over the past 10 years**

In contrast, Higher Education Policy and the International Journal of Educational Development had fewer articles indexed by Scopus, which negatively impacted their overall ranking, placing them eighth and tenth, with 83 and 75 papers indexed in both databases respectively. Conversely, Education Sciences, ranked ninth, has fewer papers indexed by WOS. Over the past decade, only five articles on higher education internationalization published in Education Sciences in 2023 and 2024 were indexed by WOS.

Both WOS and Scopus are greatly respected and widely used multidisciplinary literature databases, especially WOS, which has extremely strict inclusion standards for journals, ensuring the quality and academic influence of journals in its database (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). In order to be included, journals are subject to rigorous peer review and editorial quality control. Therefore, the more articles included in WOS and Scopus, the higher the academic quality and influence of the journal. As a result, this study takes the number of articles included in the WOS and Scopus as one of the criteria by which to measure the contribution value of a journal to the field of the internationalization of higher education. Moreover, the journal metrics are also the main indicator of the contribution value of a journal. Table 3 presents the metrics of the top 10 most productive journals on the internationalization of higher education. Journal metrics comprise a series of statistical data and analytical tools used to evaluate and measure the quality and impact of academic journals.

Impact factor (IF) is a measure of the average number of citations to recent articles published in a journal. This measure is provided by the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) from Clarivate Analytics. The impact factor of higher education is the highest among the top 10 journals, being the same as the article index number. Studies in Higher Education are approaching 4.2 in the second position.

Sustainability also performed very well on this metric, reaching third place with an impact factor of 3.9. The Journal Citation Indicator is a measure of the average Category Normalized Citation Impact (CNCI) of citable items (articles and reviews) published by a journal over a recent three-year period. It is used to help evaluate journals based on other metrics besides the Journal Impact Factor (JIF). According to this indicator, the best performing journal was Higher Education, with 2.06 in JCI. In second place was Studies in Higher Education, with 2.04 in JCI. The JCI of Journal of International Students and Sustainability was less than 1, with the remaining journals having approximately 1 each.

Seven of the 10 journals were indexed in the SSCI, with two partitions as Q1, four as Q2, and one as Q4. SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) provides the SJR indicator, allowing for journal influence and ranking analysis. Ranked first in this index is Sustainability with a SJR of 169; this may be related to the larger number of articles published. Higher Education is in third position with a SJR of 127. OAR refers to the percentage of open access articles. Open access articles refers to those academic articles that are free to access and download without any subscription or payment of fees. However, in general, the higher the proportion of open access articles, the greater the amount of page fees the author has to pay (Björk & Solomon, 2015). In this index, the open access to Sustainability and Education Science accounts for the largest proportion, while the open access rates of the Journal of International Students and Higher Education account for a medium-sized proportion and the open source rates of other journals account for a relatively small proportion.

### 3.3 Author Contribution

The frequency and number of citations of a research article can indicate the extent of its impact on the field of knowledge (Hirsch, 2005). Therefore, the number of citations can be used as an indicator to assess the impact of research. Table 4 reveals the 10 authors contributing most to the research area of the internationalization of higher education from 2015 to 2024. These 10 authors come from different countries and organizations. First, Ka Ho Mok from Hong Kong, China, published 18 articles on the internationalization of higher education in 10 years, with a total of 768 citations. The most-cited of his 18 published articles is from 2021, focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on international student mobility, with 365 citations (Mok et al., 2021). Mok is from Lingnan University and has published a total of 98 articles; these have been cited 5,798 times in total, with an Research Interest Score (RIS) score of 3,109 and an H-index of 41. In terms of other metrics, he does not rank the highest among these 10 authors, indicating that his high productivity is the main reason for the large number of citations. The RIS is a measure of an academic author's contribution to a particular field of research, which can be assessed based on several factors, including the visibility of academic impact, research quality and innovation, practical impact and application, and continued contribution and activity. A high RIS usually means that the author has a strong reputation and significant influence in academia and a particular field of research, and that the contribution of his research results to the field is more prominent.

**Table 3: The journals metrics of topmost productive journals on the internationalization of higher education**

Name of Journal	Volume of publication			database	2022IF	2022JCI	Quartile	2022 OAR	SJR	Publisher	Contry/Region	Journal website
	Total	Scopus	WOS									
Higher Education	2.97%	2.76%	5.32%	SSCI	5.0	2.06	Q1	42.28%	127	SPRINGER	NETHERLAND	<a href="https://link.springer.com/journal/10734/">https://link.springer.com/journal/10734/</a>
Journal of Studies in International Education	2.59%	2.27%	6.06%	SSCI	2.4	1.24	Q2	15.75%	77	SAGE PUBLICATIONS INC	UNITED STATES	<a href="http://jsi.sagepub.com">http://jsi.sagepub.com</a>
Sustainability	1.94%	1.87%	2.72%	SSCI	3.9	0.67		99.36%	169	MDPI	SWITZERLAND	<a href="http://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability">http://www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability</a>
Studies in Higher Education	1.92%	1.81%	3.09%	SSCI	4.2	2.04	Q1	16.39%	129	ROUTLEDGE JOURNALS,TAYLOR & FRANCIS LTD	ENGLAND	<a href="http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csh20">http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csh20</a>
Journal of International Students	1.92%	1.89%	2.23%	ESSCI	2.0	0.82	-	68.37%	30	UNIV LOUISIANA MONROE	UNITED STATES	<a href="https://www.ojed.org/index.php/jis/index">https://www.ojed.org/index.php/jis/index</a>
Higher Education Research and Development	1.33%	1.45%	0.00%	SSCI	3.2	1.50	Q2	11.09%	91	Taylor and Francis Ltd.	AUSTRALIA	<a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cher20">https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cher20</a>
Globalisation,Societies and Education	0.95%	1.04%	0.00%	ESSCI	2.2	1.24	-	21.37%	41	ROUTLEDGE JOURNALS,TAYLOR & FRANCIS LTD	ENGLAND	<a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgs20#.VMaPu_IdVPM">https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgs20#.VMaPu_IdVPM</a>
Higher Education Policy	0.86%	0.76%	1.98%	SSCI	1.6	1.00	Q4		51	PALGRAVE MACMILLAN LTD	ENGLAND	<a href="https://link.springer.com/journal/41307/">https://link.springer.com/journal/41307/</a>
Education Sciences	0.85%	0.87%	0.62%	ESSCI	3.0	1.46	-	99.57%	53	MDPI	SWITZERLAND	<a href="https://www.mdpi.com/journal/education">https://www.mdpi.com/journal/education</a>
International Journal of Educational Development	0.78%	0.74%	1.24%	SSCI	2.5	1.26	Q2	21.20%	73	PERGAMON-ELSEVIER SCIENCE LTD	ENGLAND	<a href="https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/international-journal-of-educational-development">https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/international-journal-of-educational-development</a>

Table 4: The 10 authors contributing most to internationalization of higher education research areas

Author Name (First)	Organization	Country/Region	Disciplines	Total Article	Total Citations	RIS	H-index	Article Number	Citations	Information from the articles of internationalization of higher education		
										leading article (Citations)	Key word	Year
Ka Ho Mok	Lingnan University	Hong Kong (China)	Education; Political Economy; International Relations	98	5795	3109	41	18	768	Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international higher education and student mobility: Student perspectives from mainland China and Hong Kong (365)	Studying abroad; Transnational higher education; COVID-19 pandemic; Quality education; Student mobility	2021
Stephen Wilkins	British University in Dubai	United Kingdom	Educator	98	6099	-	42	21	578	Factors affecting university image formation among prospective higher education students: the case of international branch campuses (187)	higher education marketing; information sources; international branch campuses; organisational image; student choice	2015
Hans de Wit	Boston College	United States	International Education; International Relations	115	7528	5932	47	9	518	Internationalization in higher education: global trends and recommendations for its future (443)	internationalization; tertiary education; academic mobility; internationalization at home; COVID-19 pandemic	2021
Sharon Stein	University of British Columbia	Canada	Educational Theory; Higher Education; International Education	57	2713	2517	28	8	497	Cash, competition, or charity: international students and the global imaginary (170)	Colonialism; International students; Internationalization; Racism	2016
Tang Heng	National Institute of Education (NIE)	Singapore	Teacher Education; Secondary Education	20	575	362	10	5	469	Different is not deficient: contradicting stereotypes of Chinese international students in US higher education (320)	Chinese students; higher education; intercultural; international students; stereotypes	2018
Emma Dafous	Complutense University of Madrid	Spain	Education; Discourse Analysis; Pragmatics; Sociolinguistics	48	3032	2549	25	8	439	Towards a dynamic conceptual framework for english-medium education in multilingual university settings (212)		2016
Walter Leal Filho	Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (Germany) & Manchester Metropolitan University	Germany	Higher Education; Environmental Science;	574	22544	#####	72	4	323	The future we want key issues on sustainable development in higher education after rio and the un decade of education for sustainable development (196)	Education for sustainable development; Higher education;; Sustainability; Sustainable development	2015
Emilio Abad-Segura	Universidad de Almería	Spain	Business Economics; Accounting Scholarship; Financial Economics	59	1924	1270	22	2	296	Sustainable management of digital transformation in higher education: Global research trends (237)	Digital transformation; Higher education; Sustainable management; Worldwide research	2020
Nicola Galloway	University of Glasgow	United Kingdom	Sociolinguistics; Curriculum Theory; Language Education	25	2519	2652	22	5	270	The 'internationalisation' , or 'Englishisation' , of higher education in East Asia (103)	Attitudes; EMI; Higher education; Internationalisation; Language policy	2022
Ana Marta Aleixo	Instituto Politécnico de Leiria	Portugal	Human Development; Technology and Environmental Politics; Social Policy	7	837	487	7	1	264	Conceptualization of sustainable higher education institutions, roles, barriers, and challenges for sustainability: An exploratory study in Portugal	Barriers; Challenges; Higher education; Higher education for sustainability development; Portugal; Sustainability	2018

Data from ResearchGate and Google Scholar on May 26, 2024

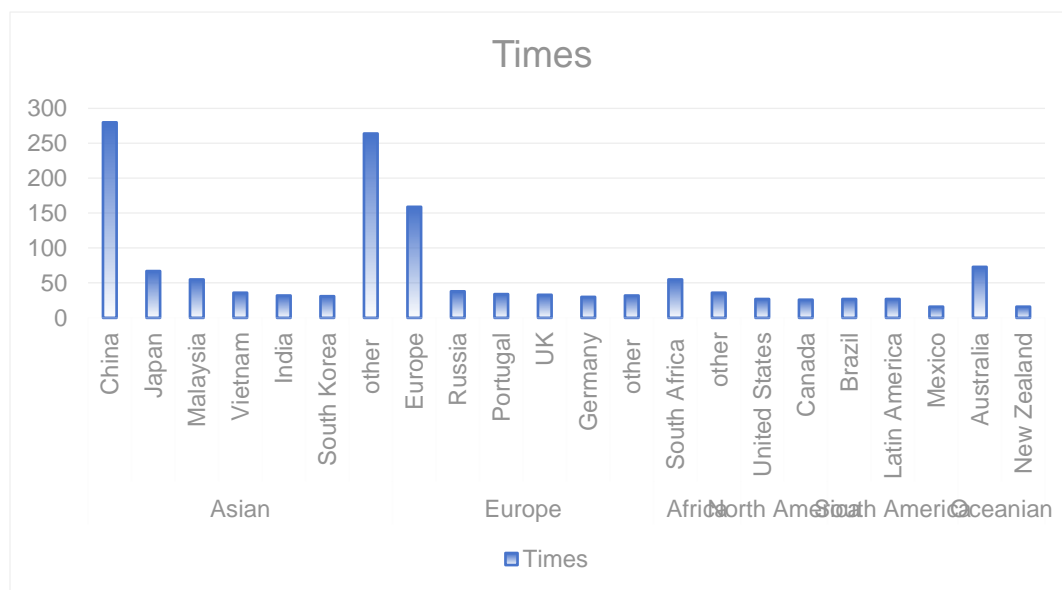
<http://ijlter.org/index.php/ijlter>

The 10 highest contributors over the decade come from 10 different universities or institutions around the world, with two from the UK, two from Spain and the rest from Hong Kong (China), Canada, Singapore, Germany and Portugal. These authors published 82 articles on the topic of the internationalization of higher education, which were cited 4,422 times in 10 years. The 10 most-cited articles published by these authors were analyzed, images of institutions constructed by students, Chinese international students, global imaginaries, students' mobility, English-medium instruction and sustainability in higher education received the most attention and were cited the most. Stephen Wilkinson from the British University in Dubai is also a very prolific author; his team published a total of 21 papers on the internationalization of higher education in 10 years, receiving 578 citations and ranking second (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). Professor Hans de Wit and Professor Walter Leal Filho, ranked third and sixth in terms of citations, are very prestigious scholars. Professor Hans de Wit, from Boston College in the United States, has been dedicated to the field of the internationalization of higher education research, publishing nine articles related to the subject in the past 10 years that have garnered 518 citations. Professor Walter Leal Filho is employed both at Hamburg University (Germany) and Manchester Metropolitan University (UK); he specializes in matters related to sustainable development and climate change management. In the past 10 years, he has published four articles on the internationalization of higher education, gaining a total of 323 citations.

Professor Sharon Stein, from the University of British Columbia, Canada, focuses on higher education; her eight articles on the internationalization of higher education have received 497 citations. Dr Tang Heng has published five articles on the internationalization of higher education since 2018, with a total of 439 citations. She mainly focuses on the overseas study experiences of Chinese students (Heng, 2018). Emma Dafous and Emilio Abad-Segura rank in 7th and 9th places respectively; both focus on English-medium instruction. The remaining two focused on the sustainable development of higher education (Aleixo et al., 2018; Dafouz & Smit, 2016; Galloway et al., 2020; Leal Filho et al., 2015).

### **3.4 Regional Distribution**

In terms of regional distribution, we found that the market for higher education services has expanded globally over the past decade, moving beyond its traditional Western dominance. We identified 1,143 articles that focused on regional internationalization, with 765 mentions of Asian countries, 306 of Europe, 91 of Africa, 53 of North America, 70 of South America, and 89 of Oceania (Figure 4). The center of higher education internationalization has shifted from Europe and North America to Asia, reflecting a global expansion. The most frequently mentioned countries were China (280 times), Australia (76 times), Japan (67 times), and Malaysia (55 times). This global data collection and analysis highlight key countries in international higher education research and provide valuable references and data support for future studies. The research also reflects attention to the educational systems of different countries and regions. Keywords such as "China", "Australia", and "Europe" indicate discussions on national education models, policies, and international cooperation, helping to understand the diversity and specificity of higher education development worldwide.



**Figure 4. Regional distribution of higher education internationalization research**

### 3.5 Keyword Analysis

Using Excel's COUNTIF function, we extracted 44,000 keywords from 9180 articles. After processing the data by removing duplicates, standardizing text format, replacing uppercase and lowercase variations, and eliminating extraneous symbols, we found 19,000 unique keywords with significant repetition. The 10 most frequently occurring keywords are "higher education", "international student", "internationaliz(s)ation", "internationalization of higher education", "education", "China", "higher education institutions", "COVID-19", "international student mobility", and "sustainability". These keywords cover important themes in higher education, such as globalization, innovation, language policy, mental health, multilingualism, career development, identity, employability, leadership, motivation, curriculum, the Bologna Process, institutions, intercultural communication, qualitative research, STEM, English-medium instruction, medical education, and nursing education. By analyzing the 14,405 keywords that appeared more than 10 times, we identified several major research areas in the field of the internationalization of higher education over the past decade. These included internationalization and international students, higher education and education policy, students and student experiences, quality and assessment, educational methods and learning models, social and cultural aspects, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and sustainability.

Category	Percentage of appearance
Internationalization and Students Mobility	33.11%
Higher Education and Education Policy	25.57%
Society and culture	9.54%
Geographic	7.62%
Students and Student Experience	6.23%
Educational methods and learning models	4.89%
Quality and Assessment	4.19%
Other	8.84%

**Figure 5: Keyword classification of higher education internationalization**

The authors categorized 14,405 keywords into the following categories based on the core theme and research focus of each keyword: Internationalization and Student Mobility, Higher Education and Education Policy, Society and Culture, Geographic Student and Student Experience, Educational Methods and Learning Models, Quality and Assessment and Other important topics. Figure 5 shows the proportion of these nine categories, reflecting the main concerns and issues of internationalization on higher education.

### 3.5.1 *Internationalization and international students*

In the context of globalization, the internationalization of higher education has become a significant issue. Keywords such as “international students”, “internationalization”, and “transnational education” indicate scholars’ extensive focus on cross-border student mobility, transnational education programs, and the internationalization process. These studies explore international students’ learning experiences, cross-cultural adaptation, and the impact of internationalization on higher education institutions and students.

### 3.5.2 *Higher education and education policy*

The field of higher education research emphasizes education quality, institutional assessment, and policy formulation. Keywords such as “higher education”, “education policy”, and “university rankings” reflect the importance of managing and evaluating education systems and the focus on university rankings. These studies address both the internal governance of educational systems and analyses of the external policy environment.

### 3.5.3 *Students and student experiences*

Student learning experiences and satisfaction are crucial aspects of higher education research. Keywords such as “student engagement”, “student satisfaction”, and “student mobility” demonstrate a focus on student



participation, satisfaction, and the effects of cross-border mobility within academic environments. These studies aim to improve education quality and enhance the overall learning experience for students.

#### 3.5.4 *Quality and assessment*

Quality assurance and assessment methods are critical topics in higher education research. Keywords including “quality assurance”, “assessment”, and “evaluation” reflect a concern for maintaining and enhancing education quality. These studies investigate the effectiveness of various assessment tools and methods to ensure high standards and continuous improvement in higher education.

#### 3.5.5 *Educational methods and learning models*

Innovative educational methods and learning models are key to improving teaching quality. Keywords such as “online learning”, “blended learning”, and “experiential learning” highlight discussions on various teaching methods and technologies. These studies aim to enhance student learning outcomes and educational quality through innovative teaching models.

#### 3.5.6 *Social and cultural aspects*

Social and cultural factors in higher education are also significant research directions. Keywords such as “sustainability”, “diversity”, and “social justice” reveal a focus on educational equity, social responsibility, and diversity. These studies explore ways in which education can address social changes, promote cultural understanding, and foster social inclusion.

#### 3.5.7 *COVID-19 pandemic*

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education has sparked widespread research. Thus, keywords such as “COVID-19” and “pandemic” indicate studies on changes in educational models, online teaching, and student adaptation during the pandemic. Such studies help educational institutions to respond to public health crises, ensuring continuity and quality of education.

#### 3.5.8 *Other important themes*

Higher education research also encompasses various other themes, including “globalization”, “leadership”, and “technology”. These keywords indicate an interest in educational globalization trends, leadership development, and the application of technology in education, research areas that enrich theoretical and practical perspectives in higher education.

Analysis of these keywords for internationalization of higher education reveals that they are closely related to the economy. The internationalization of higher education promotes global talent mobility, enhancing economic cooperation and competitiveness between countries. Research on education quality and policy helps to improve the efficiency and output of education systems, contributing to economic development. Innovations in student experiences and educational methods improve educational outcomes, training high-quality talent who meet economic needs. Research on social and cultural factors supports the construction

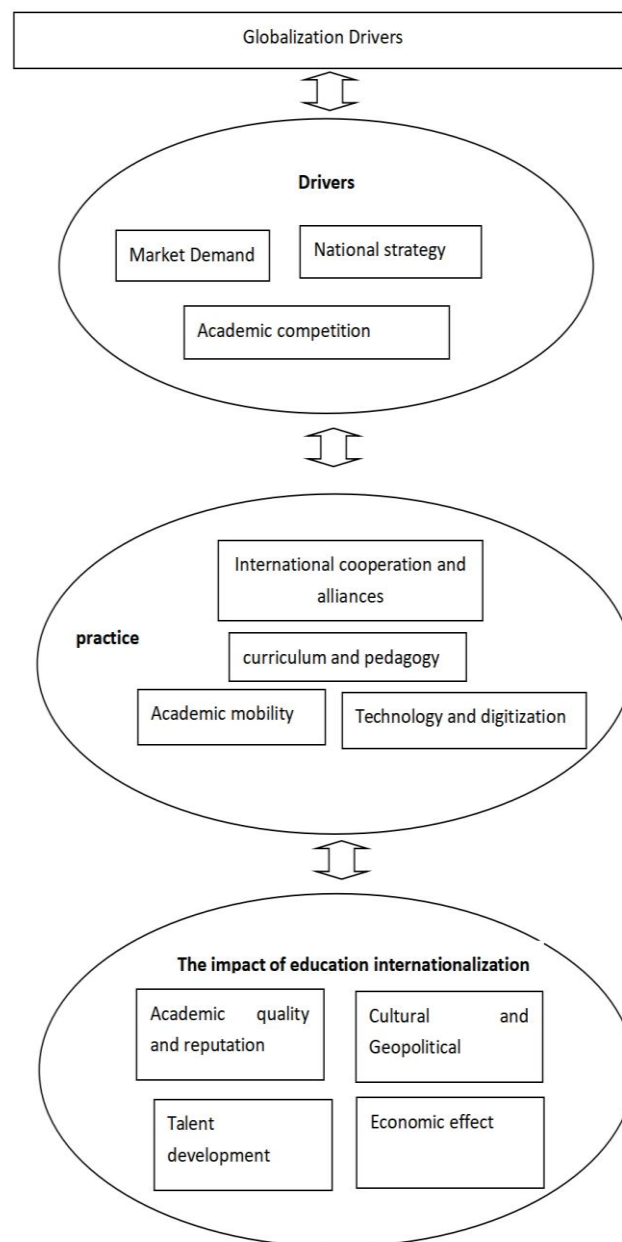
of an inclusive economy. Similarly, studies on the COVID-19 pandemic provide educational strategies for coping with economic crises, ensuring the continuity of economic activities. In summary, higher education research not only impacts the internal education system but also has far-reaching effects on various aspects of the macroeconomy.

### **3.6 The Development and Conceptual Framework**

Beginning in the 1980s, the internationalization of education first manifested itself in the transnational mobility of a small number of elite learners. After more than four decades of development, it has evolved into a complex process that is influenced by multiple drivers and, through diverse modes of practice, ultimately produces far-reaching impacts in terms of academic quality, student development, cultural exchange and economic benefits. By systematically understanding and analyzing the development process and the impact of the internationalization of education, we can better plan and implement internationalization strategies to enhance the overall level and global competitiveness of higher education. After analyzing the articles on the internationalization of higher education in WOS and Scopus over the last decade, we summarized the conceptual framework of this topic through quantitative analysis (Figure 6). Firstly, we summarized the data from the two databases into one folder, and by sorting the citation counts, we identified 82 articles that had been cited more than 100 times. Having examined the abstracts of those articles, we removed nine articles that were not related to the topic, achieving a final total of 73 articles. The review is based on the following three factors: (1) Drivers of internationalization of education; (2) The practice of internationalization of education; (3) Impact dimensions of internationalization of education.

#### *3.6.1 Drivers of internationalization of education*

Among the many drivers of the internationalization of education, the analysis of the literature has revealed that there are four main drivers, driven by the trends of globalization, national policies, market demand, and academic competition. Indeed, the internationalization of education is driven by the economic, cultural and political effects of globalization. Through globalization, transnational flows of knowledge, technology and talent have become more frequent and important (Mok, 2021). National policy drivers are mainly manifested in the ways in which governments promote the internationalization of higher education institutions through the development of policies and regulations that support internationalization (Lane, 2014). Market demand is driven by the increased demand for professionals with international perspectives and cross-cultural competencies in the global labor market, which pushes students to seek international education opportunities. Academic competition is driven by the fact that academic competition among higher education institutions prompts institutions to actively engage in internationalization activities to enhance their international reputation and academic impact (Kapfudzaruwa, 2024).



**Figure 6: Conceptual framework of the study**

### 3.6.2 Practice of internationalization of higher education

In the context of the drivers, the internationalization of higher education can be seen through increased dynamism of student and academic mobility as a result of the drivers of internationalization of education. International student and academic mobility is an important aspect of the internationalization of education. Research has shown that the international mobility of students and academics contributes to the transnational dissemination of knowledge and culture (Zhai & Razali, 2022). The increased dynamism of student and academic mobility has led, in turn, to the internationalization of curricula and pedagogy, with the development of internationalized curricula and the adoption of globally-inspired

pedagogies becoming core practices in the internationalization of higher education. International faculty members play an important role in enhancing the internationalization of curricula (Minocha et al., 2019). International collaborations and alliances driven by a combination of market and academic competition have similarly played a practical role, with research showing that international collaborative projects and alliances between HEIs, such as joint degree programs and transnational research collaborations, have significantly contributed to the internationalization of education (Knight, 2021). Furthermore, the internationalization of education has been accelerated by advances in information technology and digitization, spurred on by the global pandemic. Geographical constraints are broken down by the application of digital technologies and online learning platforms, offering new possibilities and avenues for internationalized education (Wimpenny et al., 2022).

### *3.6.3 Impact of the internationalization of higher education*

The practice of the internationalization of education has had a positive impact on the academic quality and reputation of higher education institutions. Research has shown that highly internationalized HEIs perform better in global rankings (de Wit, 2021). Additionally, it has benefited student development and cultural exchange and understanding at the national level. Internationalized education provides students with rich cross-cultural experiences that enhance their global perspective and employability (Pearson et al., 2022; Zhai & Razali, 2022). Furthermore, the internationalization of education promotes intercultural exchange and understanding, helping to eliminate cultural prejudices and misunderstandings and enhancing global cooperation (Grosch et al., 2023).

The tuition income and consumer spending generated by international students also make an important contribution to the economies of host countries. It can also be argued that the internationalization of education enhances a country's international influence by increasing its soft power (Knight, 2021).

## **4. Discussion**

During the past decade, the internationalization of higher education has broken through regional development barriers, extending beyond Europe and North America to become a global phenomenon. The concept of internationalization has gradually crystallized, encompassing nine subject categories and having a significant positive effect on areas such as student mobility, societal and cultural integration, educational methods, and learning quality (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 accelerated digital technology development, acting as a catalyst for the rapid advancement of internationalization in higher education (de Wit & Altbach, 2021a). However, while digitalization has increased global education integration, it has also introduced certain national security concerns that must be addressed (Mok et al., 2021).

Although the previous literature has focused on the development of internationalization and the role of digitalization under the influence of COVID-19 (Knight, 2018), there remains a gap in addressing national security issues

within this process. The validity and reliability of these findings are supported by the extensive bibliometric analysis of 9,180 articles, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of research trends. Additionally, cross-referencing with existing literature confirms the robustness of these findings, adding credibility to the identified trends and implications (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

Another critical aspect that requires further exploration is the relationship between the internationalization of higher education and the curricula of primary and secondary education. As higher education becomes more globalized, it is essential to consider how primary and secondary education can better prepare students for these new opportunities and challenges. Research suggests that early exposure to global competencies – including language skills, cultural awareness, and critical thinking – can significantly impact students' ability to thrive in an internationalized higher education environment (Hayden et al., 2015). Therefore, aligning primary and secondary curricula with the demands of an internationalized higher education environment will be crucial in fostering these competencies from an early age (Savva & Stanfield, 2018).

In addition to the alignment of educational stages, it is essential to recognize the differences and variations in local and cultural methods of internationalizing higher education. Distinct approaches to internationalization are adopted by different regions and cultures, which can impact the effectiveness and outcomes of these efforts (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). For instance, Western countries often focus on attracting international students and promoting English as the lingua franca, while countries in Asia might emphasize regional cooperation and cultural preservation in their internationalization strategies. A critical examination of these variations is necessary to provide insights into the way in which local contexts influence the process and success of internationalization and to identify best practices that can be adapted across different settings (Altbach & de Wit, 2015).

Future trends in the internationalization of education will likely revolve around the new opportunities presented by digitalization and the necessary countermeasures to address national security (Knight, 2021). Despite these advances, challenges remain, and coordinated efforts from educational institutions, governments, and international organizations are essential to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of internationalization efforts. The reliability of these projections is reinforced by the systematic methodology employed in this study, which allows for a thorough analysis and confident predictions regarding the future direction of higher education internationalization (Jacso, 2005).

## **5. Conclusion and Future Directions**

It is evident from the research that the future of educational internationalization will continue to evolve with technological advancements, global changes, and an increasing emphasis on inclusivity and sustainability (de Wit & Altbach, 2021b). Digital transformation and hybrid learning models, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, are expected to become mainstream, offering new paths for the internationalization of education. Moreover, the application of technologies such

as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) will enable the creation of global classrooms, facilitating real-time interaction across geographical boundaries.

In the future, educational internationalization will place greater emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility, with scholarships and funding mechanisms aimed at increasing participation from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups (Campbell & Neff, 2020). Aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this approach will foster greater levels of global citizenship and social responsibility (United Nations, 2015). Additionally, environmentally friendly student mobility projects, such as virtual exchanges and regional learning programs, will become more prevalent.

As internationalization in higher education advances, there is also a need to reconsider the role of primary and secondary education in this context. The curricula of these foundational education stages should be aligned with the goals of higher education internationalization, ensuring that students are equipped with the necessary global competencies, such as language skills, cultural awareness, and critical thinking, from an early age (Hayden et al., 2015). Studies have shown that students who are introduced to these competencies from an early age are ultimately better prepared to engage with international education systems and to succeed in a globalized world (Savva & Stanfield, 2018).

Moreover, recognizing the variations in local and cultural methods of internationalizing higher education is essential for developing strategies that are both effective and contextually appropriate. For instance, while some regions may prioritize international student recruitment, others may focus on cross-border collaborative research or the development of joint degree programs (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). Understanding these differences can help policymakers and educational leaders to tailor their internationalization strategies to meet the needs of their specific cultural and regional contexts, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and sustainability.

Higher education institutions will likely enhance international cooperation in order to improve research capabilities and resource sharing, addressing global challenges such as climate change, health crises, and inequality. Key strategies will include the establishment of regional education hubs and the expansion of global influence (Knight, 2021). Governments will play a critical role in promoting international cooperation and student mobility by implementing supportive policies, simplifying visa procedures, providing funding for international programs, and facilitating the international recognition of academic qualifications (de Wit & Altbach, 2021b).

The reliability of these conclusions is bolstered by the comprehensive and systematic approach used in this study, which involved analyzing large datasets and cross-referencing findings with existing research (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The application of artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics in curriculum design will further personalize learning experiences and improve educational

outcomes, while blockchain technology will be used for the secure verification of academic certificates, simplifying the global qualification recognition process.

It seems certain that the future of educational internationalization is poised to progress toward technological innovation, inclusivity, and sustainable development. However, continuous cooperation and strategic planning are essential to address emerging challenges and leverage new opportunities effectively. Moreover, integrating internationalization principles into primary and secondary education will ensure that students are well-prepared for the globalized higher education environment (Hayden et al., 2015). Additionally, critically examining internationalization strategies and adapting them to suit local and cultural contexts will be key to their success. The strategies proposed are not only based on current trends but are also validated through rigorous analysis, ensuring that they are both reliable and applicable in the evolving landscape of higher education.

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