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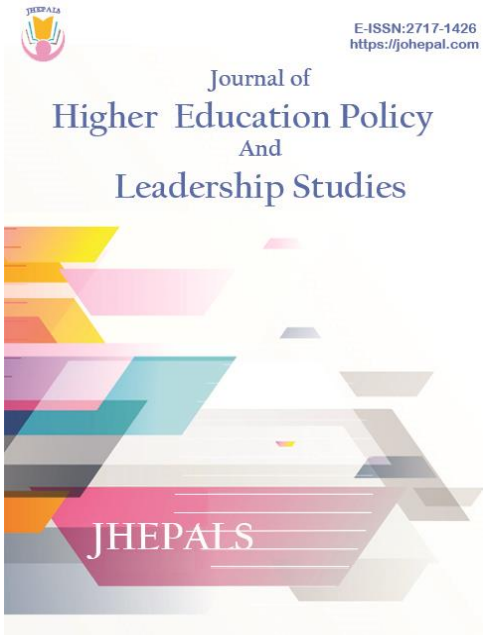

Internationalization from the Perspective of Quality Assurance and Enhancement: A Comprehensive Framework for Internationalization through Novel Lens "Flow of Quality"

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Abstract

The main aim of this research study is to present the current understanding of the concepts, scope, objectives, and approaches related to internationalization as a qualitative review, and explore and discuss the comprehensive framework for internationalization from the perspective of quality assurance and enhancement, seen through novel lens termed the "Flow of Quality", which draws upon concepts and theories from the domain of quality management. This framework emphasizes the dynamic and complex nature of internationalization, encompasses various dimensions including context, policy rationales, flow of quality, and the internationalization-quality axis. The framework proposes a synergetic approach integrating inputs, processes, outcomes, outputs, and impacts, informed by models such as the CIPO model (context, inputs, process, and output). We applied a grounded theory approach and qualitative content analyses. This paper makes an original and valuable contribution because the paper underscores a performance-oriented approach in internationalization efforts and highlights the need for proactive customization of internationalization processes. The framework is positioned to guide higher education institutions in implementing and monitoring internationalization strategies tailored to their specific contexts and needs. The conclusion outlines the implications for research, policy, and practice and recommends avenues for future research, such as outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

Keywords: Internationalization; Quality Assurance; Flow of Quality; Framework of Internationalization

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Introduction

The internationalization process within higher education has emerged as a crucial element for academic institutions worldwide. It serves as an integral component of university performance and accountability to society, representing a noteworthy quality assurance indicator and a key focus of quality evaluation in higher education. The breadth of internationalizing higher education has garnered diverse levels of attention and focal points. These include conventional study abroad initiatives, attending courses at foreign institutions either online or in-person, such as branch campuses or franchises, forging international partnerships, developing academic programs and research endeavours that prioritize enhancing perspectives and skills of international students, advocating for foreign language programs, and facilitating access to cross-cultural comprehension. This trend fosters an international outlook and open-mindedness, proficiency in a second language, adaptable thinking, tolerance, respect for diversity, a sense of accountability, and active participation in civic affairs. Nevertheless, over the span of 70 years, internationalization in higher education has brought about significant transformations, presented challenges, posed dilemmas, and offered various perspectives for consideration (de Wit & Altbach, 2021, p. 119). The primary and ongoing responsibility for all stakeholders in higher education is to consistently analyze and assess the outcomes of internationalization. It is also incumbent upon them to evaluate the societal or community implications of the graduates who emerge from these institutions. The motivations for internationalization range from fostering cultural diversity and global citizenship to preparing students for an interconnected and a rapidly evolving world. There has been a remarkable exponential growth in the global population of international students (Lin, 2020, p. 69).

Internationalization is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, encompassing a wide range of perspectives, strategies, and approaches (de Wit, 2023, pp. 14-15). There is no one-size-fits-all model or approach to internationalization. Internationalization demands greater clarity regarding its definition, underlying rationales, program structures, organizational frameworks, as well as its expected outcomes and impacts.

Many studies explore the meaning of the internationalization, policies and practices of internationalization to achieve national, institutional and global goals, and to establish a foundation for comprehending the present state of internationalization in higher education (Chachkhiani & Tabatadze, 2023; Khare, 2021; Marangell & D'Orazzi, 2023; Markovic et al., 2021; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022; Ota, 2018; Ryu & Nguyen, 2021; Sok & Bunry, 2021). Some studies explore the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Duarte et al., 2023; Finnveden at al., 2020; Jon & Yoo, 2021). In 2020, Lin examined the initiatives undertaken by Asian countries, offering insights into national and regional approaches (p. 87). According to Can and Hou (2021) the future of internationalization in higher education lies in trans-regional cooperation, which involves enhancing collaboration and exchanges, broadening communication channels, deepening mutual understanding, optimizing respective strengths, and fostering win-win partnerships (p. 35). According to Grecic (2024), the conventional model of transnational education, relying on postcolonial west-east, donor-host, provider-receiver relationships, is outdated due to the contemporary global shifts in economic, political, and academic power in the twenty-first century (p. 12). The scholars de

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Internationalization & Quality Assurance

Wit and Wang (2024) provide a comprehensive historical overview for international higher education, and study of 50 years of European policies, actions, and challenges (pp. 13-14).

According to Gessa et al. (2022) quality assurance has emerged as a critical concern for higher education systems serving two main functions: it validates the credibility of an institution and its academic programs, and communicates program objectives, outcomes, and compliance with expected quality standards to the institution's stakeholders. (p. 572).

The findings indicate that both internal and external quality assurance have become highly significant and pertinent topics in stimulating the overall quality of educational offerings. However, there is currently a lack of a comprehensive review of existing literature. Additionally, for quality assurance to be effective, it must rely on cooperation and mutual trust between countries involved in international education, including their quality assurance agencies (Carvalho et al., 2023, p. 695). Quality management systems are still too focused only to teaching and learning (Adot et.al., 2023, p. 1520), whereas quality assurance system is mainly focused on assuring students' academic competence at graduation (Lucander & Christersson, 2020, p. 137). The study of Vaugh et al. (2022) develops the concept of strategic design in education on the level of teaching and learning (p. 127). However, there is no agreement on a universally recognized model for quality management in higher education (Dwaikat, 2021, p. 842). Empirical research on the relationship between the internationalization of quality assurance and the quality of higher education (Chien, 2023, p. 115), as well as research that connects sustainable development, higher education and quality assurance (Janssens et al., 2022, p. 158) are lacking. While internationalization underlies numerous practices in higher education, the approaches adopted can vary among institutions, leading to ambiguous conceptualizations of how it is implemented in practice (Lomer et al., 2023, p. 1042).

Re-conceptualisation of international education can be in diverence ways and variesed extents. According to Mittelmeier and Yang (2022), research on internationalization demands continuous self-reflection, needs to be critical, nuanced, and reflective of imbalances over time (pp. 85, 88). To advance a unified educational agenda that is comprehensive, ambitious, and inspiring, it is essential to expand the concept to encompass inputs, processes, as well as outputs and outcomes, with a global vision while maintaining a local essence (Khare, 2021, p. 147).

The study of Lomer et al. (2023) delineated how institutions tailor their internationalization strategies to align with the prevailing global elitism paradigm, rather than emphasizing novel and innovative approaches to internationalization (p. 1042). However, internationalization has remained a key factor with strategic relevance for universities (van den Hende, Riezebos, et al., 2023, p. 14). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of internationalization for and in higher education, there remains a gap in understanding the practical implications, challenges, and opportunities. Furthermore, there is a noticeable absence of a thorough proposal regarding the internationalization process from the standpoint of quality assurance and enhancement as a procedural approach. Therefore, this study aims to offer an overview of the existing literature on internationalization and to formulate a comprehensive framework for the internationalization process in higher education, focusing on quality assurance and enhancement through the concept of "Flow of Quality". This framework intends to

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contribute to discussions on the most effective methods to establish the internationalization process, thereby enhancing the quality of education, research, and societal service.

The results of this study will be divided into two sections. The first section will present a quantitative overview of the systematic review findings, while the second section will present a comprehensive framework based on the paper's focus.

Research Methodology

We addressed our research questions through qualitative analysis, using qualitative data. A systematic review of literature was done through electronic search. The review was done with most articles from online databases, namely Taylor & Francis, Sage, Emerald, and Elsevier. The search approach concentrates on the keywords chosen such "internationalization", "quality assurance", and "transnational education". The search locations were titles, abstracts, and keywords. After reviewing the 438 articles published between 2012 and 2024 in the systematic literature mapping, a deeper analysis was conducted for each of the 92 articles included in this review study. The inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed publications written in the English language. The collected and classified information and knowledge was then interpreted. This theoretical review used a grounded theory approach and a thematic exploratory content analysis approach as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. A thematic exploratory content analysis approach

Theoretical Review

The advancement of digital technologies, sustainability, ethical development of international education and student wellbeing has influenced the internationalization of higher education (Tran et al., 2023, p. 1033). In recent years, two major streams has emerged in education. The first stream, labeled "sustainable futures", is linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The second stream, termed "techno-solutionism" is

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distinguished by its advocacy for digitization, neurosciences, and the cultivation of "twenty-first century skills" (Elfert, 2023, pp. 401-402).

The adoption of digital technology in teaching, learning, management, and communication systems has transformed data accessibility, opening up new avenues for Big data (Beerkens, 2022, p. 41), and design, development, and evaluation of a digital quality assurance application intended to enhance the quality of assessment programs in higher education (Schellekens et al., 2023, p. 346).

Over the past two decades, there has been a substantial and expanding body of research on the integration of education for sustainable development (ESD) aligned with Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change within higher education (Finnveden et al., 2020, p. 695). Internationalization is now mandated to be carbon-neutral (Chasi & Heleta, 2023, p. 616; de Wit & Deca, 2020, p. 7). According to study of Duarte et al. (2023), higher education institutions bear a significant responsibility in ESD, as they equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to a more sustainable future (p. 300). Attempts to assess the contribution of public universities in Spain to social sustainable development are presented in the stydy of Ayuso et al. (2022) (p. 443). A unique study in which all HEIs in Sweden are evaluated with focus on sustainability is the study of Finnveden at al. (2020) (p. 685). Education sustainability development and global citizenship education in the Arabian Gulf region showed similariies with the other countries, particularly with Europe (Amin et al., 2023, p. 14). Particularly, further research and discussion is required on how the connection between the internationalization of higher education and the SDGs could be elaborated and practiced for the future development of internationalization (Jon & Yoo, 2021, p. 131). In the research of Komatsu et al. (2023) the authors identified three predominant approaches concerning the sustainability of educational practices and policies: the technological approach, which views modern individuals as intelligent and creative; the cognitive approach, which sees modern individuals as intelligent, rational, and autonomous; and the behaviourist approach, which suggests that human behaviour is oriented toward self-preservation (p. 109).

Universities have become increasingly interested in student well-being. The transformative power of nurturing care emerges as a guiding principle in reshaping global education (Deuchar & Gorur, 2023, p. 1206). The study of Cheng and Yu (2023) reveals a cultural aversion present in students' intercultural engagements, emphasizing the necessity for strategies that foster cultural diversity, equality, and mutual respect (pp. 16-17). Humanizing the internationalization of higher education demands a moral and ethical stance (Soong & Maheepala, 2023, p. 1226).

The adoption of a more strategic approach to internationalization in higher education was characterized by the European Programs, the Bologna Process, the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the International Association of Universities and the European Universities Association (de Wit & Deca, 2020, p. 4). The research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina revealed that the initial framework for internationalization was structured in a manner that facilitated the successful implementation of activities aligned with the European higher education area (Markovic et al., 2021, p. 1263). Higher education was pushed ahead into

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internationalization by the strategic policy guidance by the national governments, as presented in many studies. As an example, systemic-level government initiatives in India (Khare, 2021), Japan (Ota, 2018), Korea (Jeon et al., 2023; Jon & Yoo, 2021), and Cambodga (Sok & Bunry, 2021).

Universities employ various methods to internationalize, including enrolling international students and faculty, facilitating study abroad opportunities and foreign language instruction, forging partnerships and joint research initiatives, establishing offshore campuses, and adapting their curricula to a internationalization context (ElKaleh, 2021, p. 72). International education forms the cornerstone of global student movement, as a significant instrument of "soft power" denoting a nation's ability to shape the collective attitudes and behaviors of another country (Khare, 2021, p. 137). Research in the Finnish higher education highlighted that integration and internationalization at home is not a one-way process (Mendoza et al., 2023, p. 1162). Students envisioned institutional policies highlighting the primary responsibility of staff in fostering mutual integration and domestic internationalization among both "international" and "local" students (Bergman et al., 2024, p. 3). According to the study of Yafei et al. (2023) students at a British transnational higher education in Qatar conceptualize their learning and educational experiences within through three domains: fostering academic proficiency, cultivating self-directed learning abilities, and enhancing employability skills (p. 408). According to the experiences of students in Sweden, when international and intercultural knowledge and competencies are integrated into their studies, students can serve as both catalysts for change and recipients of the benefits of domestic internationalization (Alexiadou et al., 2024, p. 15). The study of Di Pietro (2022) focuses on Italian universities and has provided empirical evidence that those students studying in a more international academic environment are more inclined to be strongly motivated to pursue overseas experiences during their education (p. 13). The study of Markovic et al. (2021) contends that the logical progression in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be focused on internationalization at home (p. 1274). In the long run, Vietnam should strive for a more equitable approach that balances both inbound and outbound internationalization efforts (Ryu & Nguyen, 2021, p. 238). According to the study of Tight (2024) a modern conception of the university has emerged from three main components: increased utilization of technology for online and blended learning, ongoing advancement of higher education beyond traditional university settings, and a focus on the widespread availability of undergraduate education (p. 10).

In recent years, there has been a growing fascination with the internationalization of higher education. Tight (2022) suggests that expecting the current trends in international higher education to remain static would be shortsighted (p. 253). Embracing and fostering diversity of experiences is in the best interest of higher education.

Globalization is having a major impact on higher education with a focus on Global Citizenship Education, that needs to be seamlessly incorporated into the schools' curricula, programmes and practices (Hameed & Lingard, 2023, p. 12), for fostering "global graduates" and "global citizenship" or "global mindset" (Dauber & Spencer-Oatey, 2023, p. 1083). The formation of global higher education is influenced by worldwide communication networks and social behaviors of individuals, groups, institutions, nations, and transnational organizations (Marginson, 2022, p. 511). The global economy increasingly demands international competencies. Intercultural competencies encompas aspects such as

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knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes. Digital learning platforms, massive open online courses, e-learning, and distance education facilitate extensive virtual mobility, fostering internationalization (Markovic et al., 2021, p. 1274). In 2023, Sercu indicates that factors such as openness, extraversion, and agreeableness, proficiency and frequency of foreign language usage, level of education, participation in study abroad programs, and engagement in internationalization activities within the home environment influence students' intercultural competence (p. 551). The empirical study of Dauber and Spencer-Oatey (2023) identified four primary factors contributing to the cultivation of global communication skills, highly sought after by employers: skill enhancement, community integration, involvement in foreign language acquisition, and institutional support (pp. 1083 -1084). Students and scholars can interact and collaborate globally through various communication channels (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023, p. 12). Digital competence and digital literacy are concepts employed in higher education research to highlight the utilization of technology in fostering knowledge-based cognitive, critical, and responsible perspectives (Spante, et al., 2018, p. 18). Skantz-Åberg et al. (2022) outline seven dimensions of teachers' professional digital competence: 1) technological, 2) subject matter expertise, 3) attitudes toward technology utilization, 4) pedagogical, 5) cultural awareness, 6) critical thinking, and 7) professional involvement (p. 6).

Transnational education is one of the strategies of internationalisation. Findings from the study of Lamers-Reeuwijk et al. (2020), conducted in Oman, suggest that to foster a more enriched transnational teaching and learning atmosphere, both the providing and hosting institutions must consistently invest in face-to-face professional development to address the challenges faced by expatriate academics (p. 733). The research of Laundon et al. (2023) scrutinizes and outlines the teaching evaluation methods and protocols employed by universities in Australia and New Zeland. Assessment of learning and teaching is integrated into the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education (p. 512). Nichol et al. (2023) highlight research regarding the significance of fostering collaborative partnerships between students and staff in enhancing pedagogical approaches (p. 1285). Their results indicate that the advantages of engaging in such partnerships for curriculum development to foster student involvement were diverse: implications for student and staff partners, implications for the wider student body, and broader implications for univeristy processes and systems. To ready students for an ever more interconnected world, utilizing intercultural group work is seen as a valuable pedagogical approach, as it has the potential to cultivate both intercultural competence and proficiency in second languages.

International research is defined as encompassing several aspects, including framing one's primary research with international scope or orientation, collaborating with colleagues from around the world in research endeavors, predominantly using English as a second language in research activities, and securing funding for research from international organizations (Chachkhiani & Tabatadze, 2023, p. 2).

The concept of international collaboration is increasingly recognized as a fundamental characteristic of "global" universities. The process of internationalization through research collaboration is commonly perceived as a mechanism for the exchange of knowledge, values, and ideas across geographical boundaries. The above is presented in the study of Haley et al. (2024), that provides an example that illustrates this dynamic by detailing the

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process of relationship-building between academics from Swedish and Ethiopian universities in the context of developing a research partnership (p. 2). Various forms of international cooperation include the establishment of international university alliances, particularly focusing on research-intensive institutions, consortia facilitating international student exchanges, the conduct of cutting-edge scientific and technological research by global networks of scholars, as well as the proliferation of joint, double, and dual degree programs (Ota, 2018, p. 92). Kolm et al. (2024) give consensus on the definition of International Online Collaboration (IOC):

> IOC is a social structure in which two or more persons cross national, ethnical, linguistic and/or cultural borders collaborate interactively to achieve shared goals. Collaboration involves mutual interaction and is not a matter of division of tasks. At least one of the team members works at a different location, organisation, or at a different time zone, so that communication and coordination is predominantly based on electronic communication media. (pp. 3-4).

The study of Shenderova (2023) emphasizes the importance of variances in stakeholders that impact the sustainability of collaborative degrees in Finland and Russia (pp. 210-211). Littleton et al. (2023) presented practical insights into shaping the formation of university-industry partnerships to enrich the student learning experience and potentially influence post-graduation employability (p. 492).

Throughout its evolution, internationalization has been influenced by numerous factors, motivations, aspects, and measures. In the research conducted by Lomer et al. (2023), three dimensions were identified to characterize the predominant emotional tone of strategic approaches to internationalization in United Kingdom universities: reputation, mission, and attitude (p. 1046).

In scholarly literature, five primary discourses for the internationalization of higher education have been identified: economic, political, socio-cultural, academic, and humanistic discourses (ElKaleh, 2021, p. 71; Jeon et al., 2023, p. 124; Xu, 2023, p. 377). The study of Soong and Maheepala (2023) suggests that embracing humanistic discourse is essential for enhancing the overall well-being of students. This involves providing secure accommodation, reducing psychological stress and social isolation, increasing respect and recognition, improving standards of living, fostering spiritual connections, and creating socially supportive learning environments. However, the adoption of such a comprehensive approach to promoting well-being is still in its nascent stages (p. 1226)

The international dimensions of higher education primarily manifest in three core functions: education, encompassing teaching and learning; research; and service to society (de Wit & Deca, 2020, p. 3). Over the past three decades, attitudes towards internationalization have shifted from reactive to proactive, evolving from mere rhetoric to tangible initiatives guided by institutional missions and embraced on an institution-wide scale (Ota, 2018, p. 93). There has been a significant emphasis on inbound student mobility, faculty engagement, and program-focused activities such as in Korea (Jon & Yoo, 2021, p. 122).

Making curricula and learning objectives more international has become essential for enhancing the quality of educational offerings (Markovic et al., 2021, p. 1274). There's a growing emphasis on the social aspects of internationalization (Marangell & D'Orazzi, 2023,

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p. 1243) and humanisation of international education and collective understanding of internationalization and moblities (Tran et.al., 2023, p. 1038). Wilińska et al. (2022) outline three distinct perspectives on internationalization: personal development, enriching the learning experience, and integrating international elements into social work practice (p. 658). Presently, internationalization is viewed within a broader framework that encompasses both "internationalization abroad" (cross-border higher education) and "internationalization at home" (Khare, 2021, p. 137).

Despite the broad and inclusive scope of definitions of internationalization in higher education (Breaden et al., 2023, p. 1182), a consensus on its definition has yet to be reached (Xu, 2023, p. 364). For the needs of this theoretical review, we will present the following definitions: "process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution" (Knigt, 1994, as cited in Ota, 2018, p. 92); "internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education" (Knigt, 2008, as cited in Ota, 2018, p. 92); "is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all academic service and support units" (Hudzuk, 2011, as cited in Ota, 2018, pp. 92-93); and "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society." (de Wit et al., 2015, as cited in Can & Hou, 2021, p. 50).

On the other side, the definitions of internationalization have been contested and require contextualization. In 2023, Marginson offers a critical assessment of the commonly accepted definition of internationalization of higher education which has been influenced by Knight and colleagues since 1993 (p. 2). The paper proposes an alternative perspective that considers terminology, geographical factors, relational dynamics, and power structures in cross-border education. The study of Xu (2023) suggests that Chinese scholars in effort to define the internationalization are focused more on openness, equal exchanges, and cooperation (p. 371), while in the study of Ota (2018), the definition encompasses international relevance and adaptability, openness, flexibility, connectivity, mobility, and diversity (p. 103). In 2022, de Wit and Jones advocated for a socially responsible approach, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing internationalization at home, and they suggested shifting the perspective of internationalization from a competitive to a cooperative paradigm (p. 148).

Internationalization at home, or inward-facing internationalization, encompasses both intercultural and international dimensions within the teaching, learning, and research processes. It involves a variety of activities designed to foster students' intercultural skills and international understanding without requiring them to leave campus. The goal is to equip students with international knowledge, cross-cultural understanding, and intercultural competencies, enabling them to become conscientious, ethical, and reflective professionals and citizens capable of thinking and acting from both local and global viewpoints (ElKaleh, 2021, p. 71). Internationalization abroad, also referred to as cross-border higher education or outward-facing internationalization, pertains to educational activities conducted abroad, commonly known as transnational education, including student

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mobility, program mobility, and institutional mobility, establishing branch campuses, franchising, and distance learning (Carvalho et al., 2023, p. 696). Laoghaire (2023) suggests that to better address global challenges, a strategy of "inward internationalization" should be pursued (p. 22). Scientific literature argues that transitioning from a focus on "internationalization abroad", which primarily benefits a small elite of mobile students, faculty, administrators, and programs, to "internationalization at home" involving all students, faculty, and administrators, is now more pressing than ever (de Wit & Deca, 2020, p. 6; Khare, 2021, p. 148).

The study of ElKaleh (2021) suggested that internationalizing the curriculum could effectively prepare students to work not only within their home countries but also on the global stage (p. 72). Mendoza et al. (2023) present the integration of internationalization into the curriculum, which involves allowing students to engage with various languages in their readings and assignments (p. 1162). Alexiadou et al. (2021) underscore the importance of properly integrating internationalization into courses and programs, university curricula, learning contexts, and practices, as crucial steps for successful implementation of internationalization at home (p. 455). The thematic analysis in the study of Singh and Kaur (2023), revealed that international students in Chinese higher education institutions encounter difficulties such as instruction dominated by the Chinese language, limited opportunities for discussion and autonomy in the classroom, minimal interaction with domestic students, and a lack of practical or hands-on learning experiences (pp. 1293-1294).

The existing literature has not offered a thorough, contextual examination of the organizational aspects and dynamics surrounding staff engagement and the implementation of curriculum internationalization. This gap persists because broader change initiatives typically require collaboration among various stakeholders at different hierarchical levels (van den Hende, Riezebos, et al., 2023, p. 2). Academic staff involvement in implementing curriculum internationalization (institution, disciplinary, and individual contexts) has been a frequently reported problem, so scholars van den Hende and Riezebos (2023) present a comprehensive framework of organizational change, to explain and facilitate academic staff engagement with curriculum internationalization (p. 1249). The curriculum internationalization as an organizational change process is worked out in the study of van den Hende, Whitsed, et al. (2023) and Wimpenny, Finardi, et al. (2022). As the movement towards decolonizing higher education curricula gains momentum, academics must initiate the process by decolonizing their own academic identities as an ongoing endeavour (Wimpenny, Beelen, et al., 2022, p. 2502).

Internationalization is crucial for students as it enriches their knowledge and intellectual capacities, fosters critical and comparative thinking, enhances language and communication skills, and develops their intellectual and cross-cultural capabilities (ElKaleh, 2021, p. 72). It aims to equip them to effectively address both global and local challenges while retaining their cultural identity and values. For academic staff, internationalization offers opportunities to participate in international research and scholarly endeavours, expand their knowledge base, refine their research skills, and develop cross-cultural competency.

The findings of study Breaden et al. (2023) underline the potential of concept "Students as Partners" as a "win-win" partnership approach which engages students to shape students' experiences in future as intercultural agents (p. 1193). It encompasses three

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main types of knowledge: propositional knowledge (expert knowledge), personal knowledge (personal experiences), and procedural knowledge (skills and techniques) (Cotton et al., 2024, p. 3).

Service quality research can be classified into three key streams of research. One stream address service quality dimensions and measurement; a second stream investigates service quality antecedents and outcomes; and a third stream examines quality processes and systems (El Alfy & Abukari, 2020, p. 14).

Quality work is conceptualized as the implementation and performance of activities to improve quality in higher education The review of the scholars Bloch et al. (2021) shows that the literature on quality work can be categorized into three major areas: the role of institutional conditions for quality work, types of quality work practices, and notions of quality and quality outcomes (p. 701).

In the study of Wysocka et.al. (2022) are presented several ways of defining quality in the context of higher education: "fitness for purpose", "excellence", "zero defects", and "value for money", and two approaches: "elitist approach" when the exceptionally high standards of academic achievements are surpassed, and "egalitarian approach" when the quality constantly meet predefined requirements and integrate quality assurance and quality enhancement (p. 215). Lamers-Reeuwijk et al. (2020) highlight the necessity for quality assurance and quality enhancement to be pursued simultaneously (p. 744). To enhance quality, understanding how key stakeholders such as students, academic staff, administrative staff, and senior management perceive and implement quality work is crucial, shows the Danish HEIs (Bloch et al., 2023, p. 15).

In the study of Chien (2023) "quality assurance" is defined as "a systematic review of higher education activities for the assessment of educational quality to ensure continuous quality of education in teaching, learning, and research that leads to efficient and excellent educational outcomes and competitive educational quality" (p. 116). The internationalization of quality assurance refers to a comprehensive approach by international higher education institutions to establish quality assurance in higher education based on international standards and for international recognition. Carvalho et al. (2023) explore into various perspectives on quality assurance in the context of cross-border higher education (pp. 696 – 706). These include examining the roles of regulations and legislation, quality assurance processes and standards, the necessity for mutual recognition, the responsibilities of both importing and exporting countries, the importance of cooperation and mutual trust at institutional, national, and international levels, and the need for a transnational quality assurance system. Adot et al. (2023) introduce a framework for implementing an internal quality assurance system by developing a standardized set of quality indicators related to "teaching and learning", "research" and "relations with society" (p. 1524). The study of Chien (2023) conducted in Taiwan suggests that higher education institutions should evaluate the quality of various outcomes, including faculty and teaching, programs and courses, research, administrative efforts in internationalizing quality assurance, student learning, postgraduate achievements, and students' societal contributions (p. 116). According to Velkoska and Nuredin (2023), there are challenges in relation to quality assurance, digitally enhanced learning and teaching, research-based

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knowledge, open science, smart environments, and sustainability within higher education (p. 69).

A Comprehensive Framework for Internationalization through "Flow of Quality"

The literature review conducted in this paper highlights the complexity, ambiguity, and dynamic nature of internationalization in higher education. This complexity arises from the overlapping and interconnected nature of its sub-themes, and numerous interpretations of the concept of "university voice". There is not remarkable trend towards homogenization of approaches and policies of the internationalization. The connection between quality and internationalization in the higher education process is also intricate, further qualitative exploration is necessary to understand the extent to which internationalization contributes to the quality assurance and enhancement.

Therefore, the internationalization process requires further contextualisation with an inclusive and comprehensive approach due to accountability and pressure for quality in a global way. The scientific literature review gave us motivation and room to develop a comprehensive framework of internationalization process from the quality point of view by adoption of holistic change process. A schematic representation of the framework can be observed in figure 2. This framework emphasizes the need to place the internationalization process in a new frontier from the quality perspective. The manner in which an institution engages in establishing, developing, and monitoring the internationalization process should be the fundamental consideration in conceptualizing the internationalization process from a quality perspective (Grecic, 2024, p. 12).

The development of internationalization process will be considered with a process approach through which the quality of internationalization is neither controlled, nor embedded but customizable. The framework should incorporate a comprehensive approach (Adot et al., 2023, p. 1529), which includes performance management aimed at objectively measuring and evaluating performance levels, primarily focusing on assessing outcomes (Beerkens, 2022, p. 32), and evidence-based policy considerations (Beerkens, 2018, p. 273).

In proposing the framework building blocks as: context, policy rationales, flow of quality, and internationalization-quality axis along with the components input, process, outcomes, outputs and impacts need to be considered in a synergetic approach. These components arise from the study of Dwaikat (2021) that offers a comprehensive view of input-based, process-based, and output-based factors influencing the quality of academic programs (p. 841); the CIPO model (context, inputs, process, and output) as a fundamental systemic model for understanding educational functioning (Niedermeier, 2017, p. 26); and the study of Chang and Lin (2018) that introduced a comprehensive indicator framework for assessing internationalization in higher education institutions across contextual, input, process, and outcome dimensions (p. 24). It is imperative that these foundational components are not only meticulously developed but also clearly communicated to all relevant stakeholders involved.

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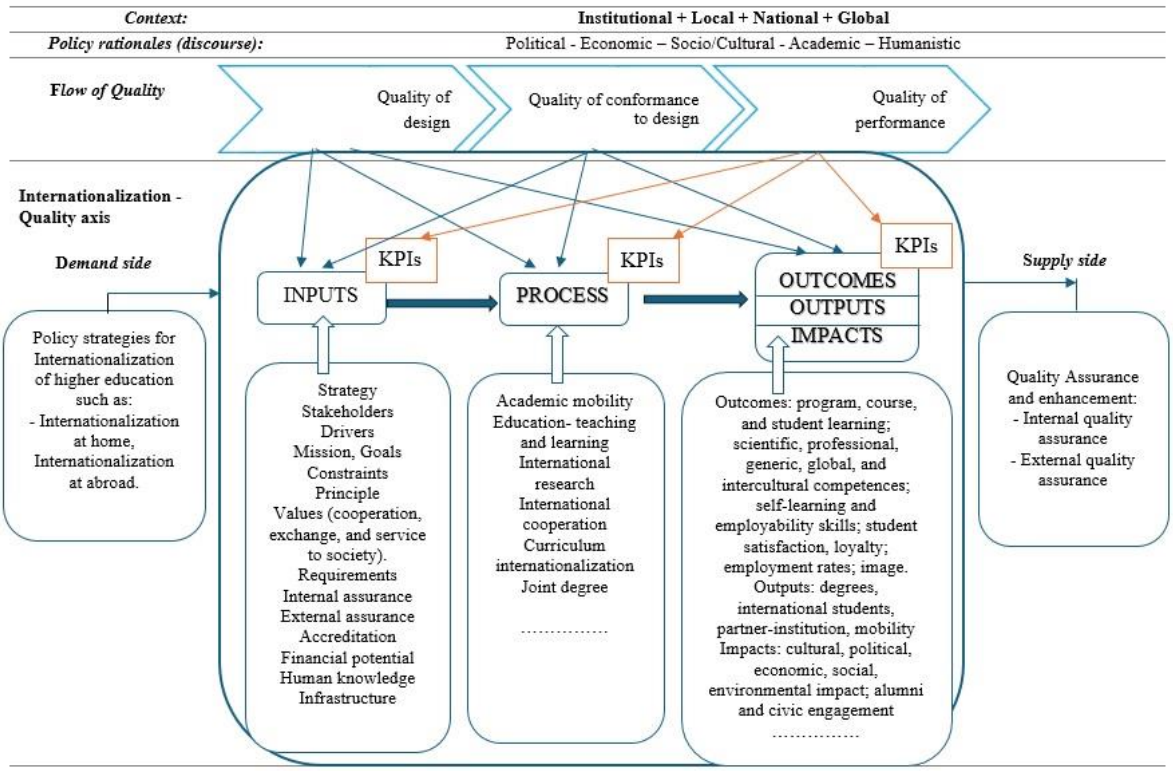

Figure 2. Framework of internationalization from the perspective of quality

We establish a framework for a strategic approach to internationalization. This framework considers internationalization from a quality perspective as encompassing the external environment, which is intertwined with internal culture and structures, and requires addressing considerations from institutional, local, national, regional, and global perspectives. This aligns with the notion that scholars and practitioners should be less constrained by national borders and more attuned to local intricacies and global interconnectedness, recognizing the concept of "Glonacal", which integrates global, national, and local dimensions (Chankseliani, 2022, p. 469). One significant concern regarding internationalization's impact on social work education and practice is the risk of diminishing local relevance and identity (Wilińska et al., 2022, p. 663). Additionally, Law and Le (2023) indicate that trust relationships between universities and business and industry sectors have received more empirical focus compared to those with community and government sectors (p. 393).

Within this framework, the policy rationale guiding the internationalization of higher education is examined through a multifaceted perspective encompassing political, economic, socio-cultural, academic, and humanistic dimensions. Hsieh (2020) outlines various policy rationales for internationalization, including academic goals such as expanding higher education capacity, enhancing quality, bolstering prestige and rankings, and fostering knowledge creation and advancement, global challenges, promoting global citizenship, and fostering mutual understanding (p. 8). Additionally, it is emphasized that humanistic rationales should also be taken into account (Elfert, 2023, p. 398). Without investigating this

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intersection, addressing the present challenges in implementing internationalization in higher education cannot be fully accomplished.

The internationaization-quality axis from the demand side determines the scope and type of internationalization strategy, with educational and organisational dimensions. The literature outlines various policy strategies for internationalization, including (Hsieh, 2020, p. 5):

- Student Mobility: This involves initiatives such as providing grants and scholarships, shaping visa policies, implementing preferential admission policies, promoting study initiatives, offering financial aid policies, and establishing networks, consortia, and exchange agreements.
- Scholar Mobility and Research Collaboration: Strategies in this area include funding for visiting scholars, programs and grants to send faculty abroad, policies to facilitate the repatriation of faculty from abroad, and project-based research grants.
- Cross-Border Education: This involves fostering partnerships for capacity building, creating "Hubs", campuses, and programs abroad.
- Internationalization at Home: This strategy focuses on internationalizing the curriculum and promoting broad institutional engagement with internationalization efforts.
- Comprehensive Internationalization Strategies: These encompass global strategies as well as strategies with specific geographic focuses.

Vaugh et al. (2022) highlight the importance of understanding the construction of HEIs from the perspective of internationalization, which can be viewed at three levels:

- Micro-level: This level pertains to individual interactions within the internationalization process, involving individuals and their engagements with others.
- Meso-level: This level concerns the socio-cultural structures within HEIs, which are shaped by faculty interactions and the resulting community dynamics within the institution.
- Macro-level: At this level, internationalization involves strategies, governance mechanisms, policies, and the overall culture of HEIs (p. 117).

The internationalization-quality axis from the perspective of supply side examines the scope of both internal and external quality assurance. Beerkens (2018) notes that there has been influence of external quality assurance through quality assurance agencies in higher education (p. 273).

In this study, the process of internationalization in higher education is being examined through a novel lens termed the "Flow of Quality" which draws upon concepts and theories from the domain of quality management, a component of operational management. To grasp how quality can be cultivated at each phase of the process, according to Oakland (2014) it is essential to delve into three interconnected dimensions of quality: the quality of design, the quality of conformance to design, and the quality of performance (p. 9).

Proposed flow of quality in this study is constituated on a continuum of design-compliance-performance and influences directly on quality of inputs, processes, outcomes, outputs and impacts. Measuring the outputs, outcomes and impacts of internationalization

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may be expressed under Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and it is not an easy task. But KPIs should not be about measurement, the focus should be on selecting a set of value-added indicators that serve for a comprehensive discussion for the delivering of internationalization offer. The primary responsibility for all HEIs remains the ongoing assessment of the impacts of internationalization using performance indicators (Beerkens, 2022, p. 33). It enables HEIs to effectively manage their financial, human, and other resources across various domains, including academic services, administrative services, academic facilities, and student well-being (El Alfy & Abukari, 2020, p. 17). Sarrico (2022) evaluates the advantages and drawbacks of existing performance indicators: ensuring the quality of student outcomes, equitable access, societal relevance, and financial sustainability (p. 12). Gessa et al. (2022) represent the inaugural endeavor to apply statistical process control for monitoring the control indicators (p. 571).

Findings from the study of El Marsafawy et al. (2022) reveal the absence of a standardized approach to objectively measure courses and programs (p. 555). Scholars Findler et al. (2019) introduced a framework outlining the effects of HEIs on sustainable development, covering various facets such as the economy, societal challenges, natural environment, policy making, culture, and demographics (p. 32). Liu et al. (2020) highlighted the Global Competence Scale designed for chinese graduate students, which is founded on a three-dimensional model comprising: knowledge and understanding (world knowledge, comprehension of globalization, and international academic knowledge), skills, and attitudes and values (p. 4).

This framework integrates the topics of quality management, performance data management, and performance indicators and provides a nuanced exploration of the intricate internationalization process. Implementing this framework poses significant challenges. Woelert (2023) emphasizes that administrative burdens can significantly impact universities' core functions (p. 415). Chien (2023) underscores the importance of ensuring administrators have a proper understanding of international quality assurance (p. 124).

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the current state of research in this field. It highlights that the internationalization agenda will continue to gain importance in the predictable future due to the ongoing influence of globalization and sustainability.

There is a growing recognition of the need for more balanced and nuanced understandings of internationalization across various contexts. Both individually and collectively, there is a call to adopt new approaches to embracing international perspectives. As a result, the internationalization process within HEIs should be approached in a more systematic, well-understood, planned, designed, implemented, and improved manner. Utilizing a framework can aid in guiding decision-making processes and partnerships between the global community and academia towards a more sustainable internationalization practice.

The proposed framework offers HEIs a means to develop and oversee chosen internationalization strategies through a quality assurance lens, tailored to their specific circumstances. Overall, this framework is designed to assist HEIs in integrating and sustaining the internationalization process from a quality assurance standpoint. It serves as

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a practical instrument for assessing both the perceived significance and the actual execution of internationalization within HEIs.

This framework facilitates the adoption of a critical perspective to achieve a comprehensive comprehension of internationalization on a global scale, benefiting all stakeholders involved. It offers each institution the flexibility to define its own priorities and address the expectations of relevant stakeholders, while expressing its unique approach with a blend of global and local considerations. Emphasizing social responsibility, inclusivity, transparency, self-awareness, expertise, and critical thinking, institutions can navigate the delicate balance between global aspirations and local realities. The outcomes of this balancing act await further exploration in future research. Whether internationalization will retain its distinct characteristics, evolve into a collective understanding, or transcend current conceptual boundaries remains a subject of active debate anticipated in the years to come.

Crucially, this framework advocates for a proactive stance in tailoring internationalization efforts from a quality assurance standpoint. It suggests that HEIs should integrate quality into inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts through enhanced design rather than strict control measures. Moreover, quality assurance must extend beyond mere bureaucratic adherence. This framework conveys the idea that HEIs will shape their comprehension of internationalization through outcomes, outputs, and impacts.

This paper contributes to the literature regarding the higher education internationalization process. By providing an overview of the theoretical findings from the selected studies, we enrich a foundation for future research that can help the academic community. Second, by establishing a framework, this paper becomes significant for scholars to apply this construct in their own investigations. Third, the paper's academic contribution is in providing a holistic understanding of internationalization process from the perspective of quality assurance through "Flow of Quality". The framework sheds light on integration of local, national, and global positions of institutions and enhances the universities' influence through effective collaboration between universities and communities. In this way national regulatory bodies, governments and other policy makers can gain insights into the implications of their efforts, actions, policies, and strategies. Fourth, the framework enables institutions to strategically navigate the complexities of preparing students to thrive in the global knowledge society. Fifth, higher education has been both a contributor and beneficiary of the global, regional, and institutional policy in the context of internationalization.

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. It's crucial to recognize that the findings are constrained by the qualitative approach employed, limiting the extent to which definitive conclusions can be drawn. The authors acknowledge that the discussions around various topics such as academic freedom, university autonomy, typologies of Global Citizenship Education approaches, the influence of international organizations on national internationalization policies, global university rankings, perceptions of competition within HEIs, the impact of global players on national higher education policies, the humanistic educational vision of UNESCO, and the techno-solutionist perspective of OECD are significant in the contemporary landscape of internationalization. These topics warrant further exploration and should be integrated into the framework to provide a more comprehensive understanding of internationalization processes.

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Internationalization & Quality Assurance

Future research recommendations can be divided into two main areas. Firstly, there is a need to delineate the scope, meaning, and attributes of outcomes, outputs, and impacts that have been overlooked in the existing scientific literature. Secondly, further exploration is warranted into both internal and external quality assurance within the context of internationalization.

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Human Participants

There are no human participants in this research; however, all ethical considerations are in alignment with research ethics and journal's guidelines.

Originality Note

The authors declare that this manuscript is entirely their original work. Proper citation and quotation methods have been employed for any references to the works of others.

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