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Higher education on the global front

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Abstract

The internationalization of education has evolved from being a preference to a critical necessity in today's globalized world. It equips students with the skills, perspectives, and competencies required to navigate an interconnected society, while also enhancing their ability to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, international education plays a pivotal role in economic development by generating institutional revenue, facilitating international business, and promoting global trade. Beyond these economic benefits, it fosters tolerance, reduces prejudice, and strengthens diplomatic relations, contributing to a more harmonious global community. Given these considerable advantages, educational authorities should prioritize the integration of international education programs. Such programs are vital for fostering mutual understanding, breaking down barriers, and addressing misconceptions that fuel global conflicts and animosity. This literature review examines the multifaceted benefits of international education and highlights its importance in promoting a more inclusive, unified, and interconnected global society. Through a systematic review of relevant scholarly materials, this study explored the imperatives of international education in a rapidly globalizing world.

Keywords: Globalization; Higher education; Student mobility; Exposure

1. Introduction

The interest in international education is not just a trend but a transformative opportunity offering diverse benefits. International educational experiences significantly expand knowledge, cultivate cultural understanding, and nurture a sense of global identity, fostering intercultural awareness (Reuter & Moak, 2022). Moreover, they equip students with the necessary tools to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market, promoting intellectual growth and enabling knowledge exchange (Phung et al., 2019). Beyond personal and intellectual development, international education plays a pivotal role in economic and social spheres, stimulating economic growth, nurturing social tolerance, enhancing national security, and nurturing international harmony (Mukwedeya, 2022).

International Higher Education (IHE) increases neoliberal characteristics within Higher Education (HE) as evidenced by Bulut-Sahin and Kondakci's (2023) findings where they suggested that traditional values in academia are challenged. IHE teaching methods are tailored to meet labor market needs and are predominantly English-based instruction, with research priorities favoring publications in international journals (Dabach & Fones, 2016). IHE draws from the emphasis on Western ideas coupled with economic motivations that influence the movement of international students to study at destinations such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Consistent with Kondakci et al. (2018), the IHE concept has expanded into countries like China, Türkiye, Ukraine, Germany, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Portugal, and Russia, recognized as regional centers for global student mobility.

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Interesting factors have been explored by several studies on the choice of destinations for IHE by students. Significant among these factors include strong bilateral relationships, native language convenience, expanded educational prospects, employment prospects, enhanced university appeal, and improved educational standards (Ke et al., 2022). In addition, the attractiveness of international universities through scholarships has also emerged as a pivotal element that influences the decision-making process of international students to study overseas (Abbas et al., 2021). The importance of internationalization of higher education cannot be emphasized enough as higher education not only enhances the academic experience but also cultivates individuals with global competence, empowering them to make positive contributions in our increasingly interconnected world (Grad & van der Zande, 2022). According to Peterson and Helms, (2013), having an extensive understanding of diverse cultures and the ability to collaborate effectively in an international setting with individuals from various backgrounds is one key benefit of IHE. In this review, we seek to identify the multifaceted advantages and imperatives of international education amidst a swiftly globalizing world.

2. Methodology

A systematic review approach was adopted to identify and select pertinent scholarly materials aligned with the objectives of promoting international higher education. The initial stage involved a comprehensive review of the literature focusing on key issues related to the study's purpose. This approach aimed to systematically examine the existing literature for gaps, discrepancies, interpretations, and interconnections. A systematic literature review entails a thorough investigation of a well-defined question utilizing systematic and explicit methods to identify, select, critically appraise, and analyze relevant research findings. The method involved conducting a descriptive synthesis and interpretation of the literature to identify analytical themes.

The primary goal was to understand the impact of globalization on international education, with a specific focus on the implementation of international education programs. The search criteria comprised keywords such as "student mobility," "globalization," "international program," "cultural dimensions," and "educational barriers." The initial search encompassed studies conducted between 2013 and 2024 across diverse institutions using Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, and RefSeek. Eligibility was determined by screening titles and abstracts and subsequently refining the search parameters to focus more precisely on exploring to answer the research question: How does globalization influence international education and the disparities linked to it?

A revised search strategy that involved unpublished articles, conference abstracts, and editorials unincluded as a revised search strategy which resulted in a narrowed selection of articles incorporated into the literature review. As a systematic literature review ethical approval was not sought before its commencement. This methodology was devised to meticulously evaluate the available literature, extract meaningful insights, and identify potential strategies aimed at advancing international higher education.

3. Results and discussion

This paper aims to investigate the impact of globalization on international education and the disparities associated with international education. To achieve this objective, the study explored the research question: How does globalization influence international education and the disparities linked to it? Through an examination of scholarly sources, the study identified six key themes that presented evidence addressing this research query. The discussions about these themes are succinctly summarized in the subsequent paragraphs.

3.1. Trends in International Student Mobility

The phenomenon of student mobility transcends geographical boundaries, evident in both Western and Eastern regions. Historically, until the 1960s, student mobility was primarily confined to designated zones in Europe, America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and other socialist states, such as China (Teichler, 2017). This mobility was facilitated by scholarship programs, often compelling students to return to their home countries to practice their studied professions (Yue & Lu, 2022). This mobility landscape underwent a significant transformation in subsequent years. As globalization surged and educational opportunities expanded, the spectrum of student mobility broadened exponentially (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017). The barriers that once constrained movement across continents gradually eroded, opening pathways for students to traverse diverse regions and pursue education in countries far beyond their own (Brooks & Waters, 2022; Teichler, 2017).

The United States stands as a primary destination for international students, boasting a consistent increase in enrollment numbers (Bound et al., 2021; Brooks & Waters, 2022). The population of international students in the United States has experienced fluctuations over recent years. In the 2017/18 school year, there were 1,094,792 international

students, comprising 5.5% of the total student population (Institute of International Education, 2023). The following academic year, 2018/19, witnessed a marginal 0.05% increase to 1,095,299 students. However, in 2019/20, there was a slight decline, with 1,075,496 international students, accounting for a 1.8% decrease from the previous year (Institute of International Education, 2023). In 2020/21, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a significant drop to 914,095 international students, marking about 15% decrease from the previous year, as reported by the Institute of International Education (2023). The trend reversed in 2021/22, showing an increase to 948,519 international students, reflecting a 3.8% rise. The most recent data for 2022/23 displays a further surge, reaching 1,057,188 international students, marking an 11.5% increase from the previous year (Institute of International Education, 2023). These fluctuations highlight the dynamic nature of international student enrollment in the U.S., influenced by various factors impacting global mobility and education trends.

International students are enrolled across a spectrum of educational institutions in the United States, spanning both public and private sectors. For instance, statistics from the 2017–2018 academic year illustrate that 63% of the international student cohort attended public institutions, while 36% opted for not-for-profit institutions (Hacker & Bellmore, 2020). Furthermore, a significant concentration of these students, surpassing 50%, is situated within the top 20 metropolitan areas in the country (Agyapong et al., 2022). Noteworthy cities such as New York City, Los Angeles, Texas, and Boston serve as pivotal hubs, attracting a substantial portion of the international student population. This clustering emphasizes the appeal and significance of certain urban centers as educational magnets for students from around the globe (AlGerafi et al., 2023).

Students holding temporary visa status, predominantly international students, pursue diverse fields of study across the United States. Notably, a significant concentration gravitates toward disciplines such as engineering, computer sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, and various other scientific domains (Chang, 2014). Remarkably, reports from the National Science Foundation in 2015 and 2017 revealed that international students accounted for the majority of doctoral degrees conferred across science, mathematics, and engineering fields, showcasing their substantial contribution to advanced education and research in these domains (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2019).

In the academic year of 2022/23, a substantial proportion, specifically 53%, of international students in the United States originated from China and India (Institute of International Education, 2023). This demographic composition remained consistent when compared to the preceding academic period. However, there has been a significant reconfiguration in the market share attributed to each country of origin. Notably, 27% of students hailed from China, while 25% came from India, diverging from the 33% and 18% shares attributable to China and India, respectively, in the academic year 2017/18 (Institute of International Education, 2023). China maintained its position as the foremost contributor of international students to U.S. institutions, representing 289,526 students, albeit experiencing a marginal decline of 0.2% from the previous year (Institute of International Education, 2023). India emerged as the second-largest source country, achieving an unprecedented milestone with 268,923 international students in the academic year 2022/23, reflecting a remarkable surge of 35% compared to previous years (Institute of International Education, 2023).

In a similar vein, Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrated the most significant contributor to the growth rate among global regions, recording an increase of 18% (Institute of International Education, 2023). A noteworthy development was Ghana's entry into the top 25 places of origin with 6468 students in the United States, marking a historic first in the annals of Open Doors. This occurrence also signifies the first instance in over a decade where two places of origin from Sub-Saharan Africa have secured positions within the top 25 rankings (Institute of International Education, 2023). This marked progress underscores the burgeoning significance of Sub-Saharan Africa as a key contributor to global student mobility. The region's remarkable growth not only highlights the expanding interest in international education but also emphasizes the evolving academic landscape within Sub-Saharan Africa itself.

3.2. Economic Impact of International Education

International education is crucial in shaping the global landscape, contributing not only to the cultural exchange but also exerting a significant economic impact on host countries. As students cross borders to pursue education, they bring with them not just knowledge but also economic opportunities (Diedering & Kwiatkowski, 2015). One of the primary economic impacts of international education is on individuals themselves. Students who choose to study abroad often acquire skills and knowledge that are highly valued in the global job market. This enhanced human capital can lead to improved employability and increased earning potential. Additionally, exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives can foster adaptability and a global mindset, further enhancing an individual's professional prospects (Diedering & Kwiatkowski, 2015; Jarvis, 2020)

International students contribute significantly to the economic well-being of educational institutions (Institute of International Education, 2019). Tuition fees paid by international students form a substantial part of the revenue for many universities and colleges (Institute of International Education, 2019; Jarvis, 2020). This influx of funds allows institutions to invest in state-of-the-art facilities, research initiatives, and academic programs. The economic contribution extends beyond tuition, as international students often spend on accommodation, food, transportation, and various other goods and services in the host country. Accommodation, living expenses, and part-time work by international students collectively boost the local economy, support businesses, create jobs, and contribute to the host country's labor market (Diedering & Kwiatkowski, 2015; Jarvis, 2020).

The influx of international students contributes to the labor market of the host nation, with many international students being allowed to work part-time during their studies. This not only helps them cover living expenses but also brings diverse and skilled workers to local businesses. The presence of international students enriches the workforce, fostering innovation and creativity in sectors requiring a global perspective (Diedering & Kwiatkowski, 2015; Jarvis, 2020). Businesses benefit not only from the talents and unique experiences of these students but also from increased productivity and efficiency (Diedering & Kwiatkowski, 2015; Jarvis, 2020). The additional income generated circulates within the local economy, creating a positive ripple effect by supporting various sectors such as retail, hospitality, and transportation. In essence, the symbiotic relationship between international students and the local labor market promotes economic growth and prosperity in the host nation.

International education fosters collaboration and knowledge exchange, leading to advancements in research and innovation (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Jarvis, 2020). When students from diverse backgrounds come together, they bring unique perspectives and ideas, contributing to a dynamic learning environment. This cross-cultural collaboration can lead to breakthroughs in various fields, driving economic growth and competitiveness on a global scale. The presence of international students contributes to cultural diversity that enriches the local community (Sawir, 2013). Additionally, friends and family visiting these students become tourists, contributing to the tourism industry. Cultural events, festivals, and international student gatherings further stimulate the local economy (Diedering & Kwiatkowski, 2015). Similarly, host countries improve upon their economic diplomacy and global reputation through education. Therefore, positive experiences for international students can lead to long-term partnerships, attracting more students and fostering economic diplomacy.

3.3. Cultural and Intercultural Impacts of International Education

International education exposes students to diverse cultures, languages, and perspectives (Jackson, 2015; Morgan & Volante, 2016). Living and studying in a foreign country allows them to engage directly with local customs, traditions, and ways of life. Likewise, hosting international students provides local communities with the opportunity to interact with individuals from different backgrounds (Bittencourt et al., 2019; Lumby & Foskett, 2015). This exposure contributes to a more global mindset among host community members (Bittencourt et al., 2019).

International education assumes a pivotal role in the cultivation of intercultural awareness, identity formation, and cross-cultural competence among students and host communities (Bittencourt et al., 2019). Students in international education settings often communicate and collaborate with peers from various cultural backgrounds, which enhances students' communication skills, enabling them to navigate linguistic and cultural differences (Bittencourt et al., 2019). Similarly, the host community's interaction with international students encourages host community members to develop intercultural communication skills, fostering understanding and reducing cultural barriers (Kim, 2017).

Living in a different cultural context can prompt students to reflect on their own identity and values. As students navigate the intricacies of cultural differences, they often find themselves reassessing their perspectives, beliefs, and personal narratives, contributing to a heightened sense of self-awareness and a broader worldview (Bittencourt et al., 2019; Kim, 2017). This reflective process becomes an integral component of their personal and intellectual development, fostering a rich and multifaceted understanding of their place in the global community (Bittencourt et al., 2019; Kim, 2017). Exposure to diverse identities challenges preconceived notions within host communities, prompting a reevaluation of local norms and values.

The impact of international education is twofold, benefiting both students and host communities. For students, it fosters cross-cultural competence, enhancing skills such as adaptability, empathy, and open-mindedness. This exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences broadens their understanding of different cultures. In host communities, the interaction with international students promotes cultural diversity, encouraging residents to adapt to diverse customs and perspectives, therefore creating a more inclusive and tolerant environment. Overall, international education serves as a catalyst for mutual understanding and collaboration on a global scale. Additionally, the experience often cultivates

a profound sense of global citizenship in students, fostering an increased awareness of global issues, social responsibility, and the interconnectedness of the world. Similarly, in host communities, the act of hosting international students becomes a catalyst for the development of a more globally conscious community, enriching the community culturally and contributing to the establishment of a more interconnected and harmonious global society.

International education fosters a dynamic exchange where cultural elements blend seamlessly, particularly for students who incorporate aspects of the host culture into their own identities. This fusion not only enhances their global perspective but also contributes to the cultural richness within host communities. The presence of international students becomes a catalyst for cultivating a more culturally diverse local community, weaving a vibrant and interconnected cultural tapestry that reflects the diversity of the region. This mutual exchange of cultural influences not only benefits individual students but also enriches the broader community, fostering a more inclusive and globally aware environment.

3.4. Educational and Academic Benefits of Internationalization

The educational advantages in academic institutions extend far beyond conventional learning paradigms and hold multifaceted benefits for both local and international students (Hawawini, 2011). These advantages span various domains such as knowledge transfer, intellectual capital development, innovative learning approaches, and consequential impacts on the institutions themselves (Teichler, 2020). Interactions between local and international students foster a rich exchange of diverse perspectives, cultural insights, and unique knowledge within the classroom. This diversity enriches discussions, broadens understanding of global issues, and fosters cross-cultural appreciation through the sharing of ideas, customs, and practices (de Diego-Lázaro et al., 2020). Moreover, intellectual capital development among students from diverse backgrounds plays a pivotal role in stimulating critical thinking, nurturing creativity, and enhancing problem-solving abilities (Fang & Baker, 2017). Exposure to varying viewpoints encourages innovative thinking while collaborative experiences within diverse student groups cultivate essential teamwork and communication skills. These attributes are vital for success in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world.

The presence of international students within academic institutions often stimulates the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies tailored to diverse learning styles (Carvalho et al., 2021). According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), this exposure to varied educational systems drives experimentation with novel approaches to curriculum design and pedagogy, creating a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment. Furthermore, the impact on the institutions is profound, with international students contributing to bolstering academic reputation, attracting more talent, fostering research collaborations, and ultimately promoting academic excellence (Campbell & Neff, 2020). International students' presence also catalyzes the establishment of specialized programs, language support services, and cultural exchange initiatives, enriching the overall educational experience for all students.

3.5. Global Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Global citizenship education in international settings plays a crucial role in fostering global citizenship, social responsibility, and civic engagement among students. This is achieved through various initiatives that promote cultural understanding, tolerance, and social integration. The Council of International Schools (CIS) emphasizes global citizenship through ethics, diversity, and service, and has developed a research-based model of global citizenship and intercultural learning, focusing on aspects of school life such as teaching and learning, assessment, leadership and staff development, and community engagement (COIS, 2024). According to the literature, global citizenship entails three interrelated dimensions: social responsibility, global competence, and global civic engagement. Social responsibility involves a perceived level of global interdependence and social concern for others, society, and the environment (Casma et al., 2023). Casma et al. (2023) further define global competence as the ability to understand global issues and work collaboratively across cultures, while global civic engagement involves actively addressing local and global community issues through volunteerism, political activism, and community participation. Initiatives promoting cultural understanding, tolerance, and social integration are integral to global citizenship education. Students are encouraged to engage in activities that enhance their awareness of global interdependence, respect for diversity, and commitment to sustainable lifestyles (Grad & van der Zande, 2022). These initiatives aim to develop students who identify with the emerging world community, participate in local and global communities, and become effective problem-solvers (Martindale et al., 2023). By participating in these initiatives, students become more socially responsible, culturally aware, and actively engaged in addressing global issues.

3.6. Challenges and Barriers in International Education

International students face various challenges when studying abroad, including language barriers, socio-cultural adjustments, academic transitions, and policy-related obstacles in their host countries. Language barriers significantly

affect communication in academic settings and daily life, hindering comprehension of lectures, participation in discussions, and integration into the local community (Morais & Ogden, 2011). Socio-cultural adjustments present challenges as students adapt to new cultural norms, social practices, and societal expectations, leading to feelings of isolation, homesickness, and difficulty navigating unfamiliar social environments (Kaya, 2020). Academic transitions, such as differences in teaching styles, assessment methods, and educational structures, demand adjustment and adaptation, impacting the academic performance and stress levels of international students (Ma, 2022). Policy-related obstacles, including visa regulations, work permits, and residency requirements, often add bureaucratic complexities, limiting opportunities for employment, financial support, and access to certain resources or benefits in host countries (Erdal, 2021; McAvay et al., 2023).

The language barrier remains a prominent challenge for international students, affecting their academic performance and social integration (Philips, 2021). Navigating courses conducted in a non-native language creates difficulties in understanding lectures, engaging in discussions, and completing assignments effectively. Socio-cultural adjustments present another significant hurdle, as students grapple with the adaptation to new cultural norms, social behaviors, and societal expectations. These adjustments often lead to feelings of homesickness, isolation, and difficulty forming social connections, impacting their overall well-being and mental health (English et al., 2017). Moreover, academic transitions pose a challenge, with differences in teaching methods, evaluation criteria, and educational structures causing stress and adjustment difficulties, influencing the academic success of international students (Kaya, 2020).

Policy-related obstacles add another layer of complexity for international students studying abroad. Visa regulations, work permits, and residency requirements often impose limitations on students' ability to seek employment, access financial aid or scholarships, and fully participate in various opportunities available to local students (Adeyanju & Olatunji, 2022). These bureaucratic barriers contribute to financial constraints and limit access to essential resources, further challenging the integration and success of international students in host countries (McKivigan, 2020). However, effective management and policies are crucial to maximize the benefits of hosting international students while addressing any associated challenges (Gallagher & Savage, 2023).

4. Conclusions

The literature review unequivocally highlights the numerous advantages and emphasizes the importance of international education in today's interconnected world. Engaging in international educational opportunities not only promotes personal and intellectual growth but also nurtures global competence, cultural understanding, and a sense of social responsibility. By doing so, it contributes to the development of a cohesive and harmonious global society. Moreover, the economic gains for both students and host countries are substantial.

Based on the compelling evidence presented in this review, the following recommendations are made:

- **Policy and Support Systems:** Educational authorities and institutions should prioritize the implementation of international education programs and create supportive structures to address the challenges faced by international students. This includes streamlining visa application processes, providing language support services, and fostering intercultural engagement initiatives.
- **Curriculum Development:** Internationalization of curriculum content and the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies that cater to diverse learning styles can enrich the educational experience for all students.
- **Global Citizenship Education:** Integrating global citizenship education into international programs can cultivate social responsibility, intercultural competence, and a commitment to addressing global challenges.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Universities and institutions should establish international partnerships and collaborations to facilitate student and faculty exchange programs, joint research initiatives, and the development of globally focused programs.
- **Investment in Internationalization:** Increased investment in international education programs is crucial to maximize their benefits and ensure wider accessibility for students from diverse backgrounds.

By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions can harness the transformative power of international education to cultivate a generation of globally competent and engaged citizens prepared to address the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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