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Exploring Innovation of Internationalisation Effectiveness in the Higher Education Sector: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

The government, business, and higher education sectors benefit from internationalisation. This viewpoint is articulated in light of the improved academic quality and international recognition derived from faculty/student exchange programs and research partnerships, which elevate academic standards and the institution's profile internationally. This systematic review is intended to i) highlight the prevalence of current publications and other research-related activities that are steered towards the innovation of internationalisation in HES, ii) analyse and organise data on the impact of internationalisation effectiveness in the HES, and iii) conclude with future characteristics of internationalisation effectiveness with suggestions to government, decision-makers, and institutions to achieve sustainable HES. A search strategy was initiated through various research databases within the years 2005 – 2024. Of the 3865 identified papers from the database search, 3558 were excluded, and 307 were selected, of which 32 publications were utilised in the review process. The study identified several themes: transformation, factors, global nationality, international mobility, impact, curriculum and strategic framework. The study highlights the need to decolonise the HES for internationalisation effectiveness. This study also highlights future empirical research on the innovative effects of internationalisation for economic development.



Guidelines

Internationalisation is regarded as an anticipated choice for expanding the delivery of services, while innovation is referred to as new ideas that can create change in an existing system. Innovation of internationalisation in the higher education sectors (HES) can be significant towards achieving the United Nations Vision 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of numbers 4 (quality education) and 17 (partnerships for the goals). Equally, internationalisation equips students with the language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and global perspectives that employers highly value in today's interconnected workforce. Furthermore, cooperation between industry and internationalised institutions fosters innovative research, technological transfer, and international commercialisation opportunities. Higher education is a valuable export sector for the government since international students make substantial contributions to the national economy through tuition, living expenditures, and spending. Similarly, sponsoring international students and scholars develops diplomatic contacts and fosters long-term goodwill, helping the country achieve its worldwide impact and foreign policy objectives.

Introduction

- 1 Internationalisation is regarded as an anticipated choice for expanding the delivery of services, while innovation is referred to as new ideas that can create change in an existing system. Innovation of internationalisation in the higher education sectors (HES) can be significant towards achieving the United Nations Vision 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of numbers 4 (quality education) and 17 (partnerships for the goals). Equally, internationalisation equips students with the language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and global perspectives that employers highly value in today's interconnected workforce. Furthermore, cooperation between industry and internationalised institutions fosters innovative research, technological transfer, and international commercialisation opportunities. Higher education is a valuable export sector for the government since international students make substantial contributions to the national economy through tuition, living expenditures, and spending. Similarly, sponsoring international students and scholars develops diplomatic contacts and fosters long-term goodwill, helping the country achieve its worldwide impact and foreign policy objectives.

A brief description of innovation and internationalisation

- 2 There are countless misconceptions about the meaning of innovation and internationalisation, and where they fit in the research area. Innovation is described as the “process of bringing about new ideas, methods, products, services, or solutions that have a significant positive impact and value”. Innovation is regarded as a novel way of initiating a change process in an existing system. Thus, innovation in higher education could portray new ways of tutoring and sharing of knowledge, as well as ideas in the sector.
- 3 Knight defines internationalisation as “a series of international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers; international relations; partnerships and projects; new international academic programmes; and research initiatives.” Teichler also defines internationalisation as “the integration of international, intercultural and global dimensions into the curriculum and teaching-learning process in institutions.” Both definitions describe internationalisation as significant towards developing the education system.
- 4 Given the critical role of innovation in other spheres, including the recent revelations of its value in higher education, it is necessary to intentionally further the discourse through a systematic review to examine how innovation could impact internationalisation effectiveness and highlight the future characteristics of the HES.

Reasons for systematic review

- 5 Internationalisation has been in demand for a long period, yet research on the innovation of internationalisation in the HES is still at a revolving stage. However, there is an increase in the demand for research on the subject in several sectors, such as education in developing economies. Interestingly, most developed/developing countries as the United States of America (USA), Australia, China and South Africa, have invested resources towards successful internationalisation practices. However, several other nations are yet to identify the contribution of internationalisation to their economy. Therefore, a systematic review is significant towards identifying information from previous studies on the innovation of internationalisation effectiveness in the HES.

New idea concerning this systematic review

- 6 The range of this review is from 2005 to 2024. Previous studies on internationalisation in HES were focused on multidisciplinary reviews conducted through extracts from different sources such as academia, educational programmes, decolonial perspectives, retrospective learning, and transformations. This review aims to i) highlight the prevalence of current research on innovation and internationalisation in the HES, ii) analyse and organise data on internationalisation effectiveness, and iii) conclude with the future characteristics of the innovation of internationalisation effectiveness research and outcomes. A systematic review will be necessary to guide in identification of several themes from published papers on innovation and internationalisation in the HES.

Method

- 7 A wide-range search approach was used to assess the articles and other published papers at the beginning of the review, through online database indexes such as Web of Science, Cochrane Library, IEEE, Higher education reports, Science Direct, Embase, Scopus, Countries/regions/continents such as Australia, China, USA, SA, Asia, Europe, America, and Africa amongst others. Other scholarly outputs, such as the thesis and research reports, were also examined through Google Scholar and Reference lists to identify additional information pertinent to the review. The review covered all publication statuses irrespective of the language used. This search was initiated due to innovation and internationalisation increasingly becoming important in the education sector, the search was within the range (2005 – 2024).

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

- 8 The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow guideline was used to identify and select the relevant papers for the review. The PRISMA guideline assists the authors in explaining the processes followed in selecting the papers utilised, the transparency and the non-biased research report. The PRISMA checklist can be found in the Supplementary Material Section.

Publication screening and selection

- 9 At the early stage, the researchers read through the abstracts and titles of all the generated papers to identify their relevance in the review, before downloading the full texts of the chosen studies. With this technique, the researchers were able to measure the paper's fit with the inclusion criteria. The researchers also committed enough time to affirm that the final chosen studies aligned with the concept of the review.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

- 10 The circumstances of the search aided the choice of data and documents selected for the review through the following; i) the involvement of studies on innovation and internationalisation in the HES, ii) studies in perspective of institutions, organisations, government departments and other sectors, and iii) studies on how innovation impact on internationalisation regarding mobility, curriculum structure, partnerships, technology, transformation, global nationality and citizenship among others. Papers which do not conform to the requirements were excluded from the review.

Search terms and strings

- 11 Due to the integration of the most relevant publications, the search was first focused on internationalisation, and subsequently streamlined to two main search terms: innovation in higher education and internationalisation in higher education. Table 1 shows how the search terms were combined through compilation of alternative search strings between "Innovation in higher education" and "Internationalisation in higher education" to identify the data and information specifics for the review.

Data extraction and assessment

- 12 The researchers obtained data and other materials from chosen studies through a process consisting of the author's name, the topic and year of the publication, keywords, where the paper was published, the research focus, and outcomes. The researchers reviewed the topics individually to align with the study focus, then coded the data and the outcomes. Also, the researchers assessed all the chosen studies for accuracy and consistency purposes.

Result

- 13 Figure 2 shows the PRISMA flow diagram. It shows that overall, 3865 papers were identified from the database search after excluding 3558 papers not aligned with the specifics of the review, and 307 results were selected. Then, 212 titles and abstracts were assessed as eligible after disregarding 95 duplicates. 32 publications were chosen as fit and suitable for the review. 180 did not have satisfactory information in the content

to contribute to the review. Hence, the information derived from the chosen studies was conceptualised and themed for discussion.

Research designs and study eminence

- 14 Figure 5 shows that of 32 chosen studies, the literature review is the highest (19 or 59.4%), followed by the qualitative method (9 or 28.1%). Quantitative method (3 or 9.4%), and mixed method (1 or 3.1%).

Discussion

- 15 Transformation can effect change in performance through digital and positive drive for internationalisation in HES. Drori et al. are of the notion that improving internationalisation performance could be accomplished through a blend of institutions' brand, digital intensity and transformation. However, there is a need for a more nuanced, innovative internationalisation concept through transformation to achieve success in the education sector. Kriz and Welch believe that internationalisation in HES is uneven, however, the transformation process and timeline to effect innovative global education sector is slowly progressing. This explains why transformative tensions between innovation and internationalisation in HES are slow in several countries. In the past decade, studies have shown that some institutions transformed their internationalisation practices more rapidly than others, and such achievements were attributed to transformation as the dynamic strength behind the phenomenon. Ramos et al. emphasise that the likely effect of innovation through transformation could intensify internationalisation to accomplish success in technology initiatives in institutions. Therefore, transformation could assist in identifying the parameters in terms of technology initiation for rapid innovation of internationalisation practices in the HES.