

DO QUALITY AND INTERNATIONALIZATION INTERRELATE IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

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Abstract. This article presents a methodical review of the literature focusing on the relationship between quality and internationalization. The authors have formulated a research query for the literature review: How do quality and internationalization interrelate? Upon scrutinizing the research articles that closely align with the topic, it was noted that within the realm of quality and internationalization, there exists an inseparable nexus between globalization and competitiveness. Through an examination of the literature, it was deduced that two distinct perspectives exist concerning internationalization and quality. The PESTEL analysis recognized various classifications of elements, with the principal ones being economic, social, and legal factors, leading to the affirmation that each set of elements in the PESTEL analysis is interconnected with quality assurance.

Keywords: quality, internationalization, higher education, university, quality assurance.

JEL Classification: I23.

1. Introduction

Today, the issue of internationalization remains pertinent within the higher education sector. The incorporation of internationalization in university strategies and daily operations plays a crucial role in fostering and enhancing collaborations with foreign academic institutions and partners in research and education, thereby creating extensive possibilities. This period can be viewed as a phase of metamorphosis for universities, wherein they ascertain their identity and approach to determine their receptiveness to novel encounters, willingness to exchange best practices, and readiness to adopt strategies from other academic institutions. Consequently, this leads to international acknowledgment, which is intricately linked to the aspect of quality and quality assurance. The concepts of quality and quality assurance are fundamentally intertwined with the process of internationalization. Despite the existence of abundant literature on both internationalization and quality assurance, the synergistic relationship between these concepts has received comparatively less attention, necessitating an exploration of the factors influencing a university's stance on internationalization.

Internationalization, akin to quality assurance, exerts its influence on universities across various dimensions encompassing institutional, managerial, and governmental spheres. The primary objective of this study is to elucidate the impact of quality on internationalization and to pinpoint the determinants shaping universities' perspectives on internationalization through a PESTEL analysis conducted through the lens of quality. Giving rise to the research question – How do quality and internationalization interrelate? Specifically, the groups of factors examined are closely associated with quality assurance. For instance, the political factor of competition is intricately linked to university accreditation when viewed through the quality framework. The correlation of the remaining factors with quality is deliberated in the subsequent sections. The first section examines the theoretical background, emphasizing the significance of internationalization within higher education institutions, along with quality and quality assurance. The second section delineates the selection and validation of methodologies. This is followed by a third section that outlines the results of the review of the literature and the PESTEL analysis.

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2. Theoretical background

2.1. What is the internationalization of universities?

Internationalization represents a key priority for the university. The internationalization of higher education institutions can be approached both at the institutional and national levels (Hoai et al., 2023). Internationalization involves incorporating international, multicultural, and global components into the strategic goals of a university while emphasizing it as a core value. The concept of internationalization can be approached in two main ways: through cross-border education and by integrating international perspectives into the university's academic programs to foster global understanding. The implementation of internationalization at the national level is influenced by the political system and structure of the country, while at the international level, it is shaped by liberal principles such as individual freedoms and equality (Matache, 2023). The significance of internationalization can be assessed through various lenses, including its impact on education, research, and enhancing the university's reputation, visibility, and competitiveness. Engaging in internationalization creates opportunities for global collaboration, benefiting both students and researchers (Heiser, 2023). The process of internationalization encompasses the university's administration, its staff, and the government, aiming to enhance its presence on a broader global scale (Butum et al., 2020). Various factors may influence a university's choice to pursue internationalization. These factors include economic incentives such as boosting revenues and attracting skilled individuals, meeting academic standards, and potentially social, political, and cultural considerations (Vardhan, 2015). In the international context, universities must review their values, objectives, and curriculum to align with global perspectives. Internationalization efforts encompass activities like faculty and student exchanges, joint program development, research partnerships, and university collaborations, with the quality of these services being vital for students (Amzat et al., 2023). Through internationalization, traditional educational approaches are disseminated, new methodologies are adopted, and innovative practices emerge, fostering continuous enhancement of learning techniques and student accomplishments and fostering entrepreneurial ideas and university networks (Alam et al., 2022; Lara et al., 2009). The state's involvement in internationalization is significant, particularly in regulating quality assurance, accreditation, and standardization processes, aligning universities with the European higher education framework (Coppieters, 2023). There are instances where universities may opt against internationalization due to perceived threats to autonomy, inadequate capacity, or a strong nationalistic ethos, especially in regions with stable labor markets and demographic structures (de Oliveira Barbosa & Neves, 2020; Cerna & Chou, 2023). Internationalization can be viewed as a strategic move, including financial contributions from

international students that can enhance the university's standing, yet merely attracting foreign students does not equate to true internationalization (Orechova, 2023). It is debated that internationalization may not substantially impact student achievements, as academic success primarily hinges on individual effort (Burad et al., 2022). Universities regard internationalization as a means to equip graduates with the skills to compete globally in the job market (Ndaipa et al., 2022). The internationalization process primarily affects university policies rather than educational practices (Orechova, 2021). Universities encounter multiculturalism and should embrace diversity rather than assimilate foreign students, recognizing the value of varied perspectives and experiences that can enrich the university environment (Kim, 2016). The engagement of the community in recognizing current issues alongside the university's establishment of objectives that could enhance the national economy, in the long run, is emphasized (Amutuhaire, 2023). The Bologna Declaration highlights the mention and significance of internationalization, which holds particular importance and obligations within the European Higher Education Area (Lourenço et al., 2020). Internationalization is a multifaceted concept that influences the strategic direction, principles, and economic impact of the university. The progression and execution of internationalization rely on the national attitudes of both the university and the country, as well as the institution's level of openness.

2.2. Quality and quality assurance

Quality assurance in higher education encompasses various functions – evaluation of academic accomplishments, performance, and delivery of academic courses is conducted. The correlation between internationalization and quality is reciprocal. Internationalization and quality assurance are closely intertwined (Yuzkiv et al., 2022). Quality fosters internationalization and internationalization enhances quality. Due to this interdependent relationship, the significance of quality is paramount, challenging universities to attain their quality objectives (Orechova, 2023). The university has to uphold specific standards and ensure the quality and continuity of operations through quality assurance (Debych, 2020). Internationalization extends beyond fostering global collaborations, facilitating mobilities, and partnerships. It is crucial to recognize that activities related to academic studies and research, promoted through global collaborations, are not the primary aim of internationalization but rather to ensure quality (Teixeira & Shin, 2020). Overlooking quality aspects in internationalization processes can lead to adverse outcomes. Enhancing quality, and guaranteeing and adhering to quality standards, constitute a fundamental aspect of university internationalization. Quality also functions as a benchmark for the university's positioning in the global market. Integrating quality into the university's internationalization endeavors is crucial for its competitiveness in the global market (Bhandari & Chakravaram, 2020). This competitiveness encompasses

adherence to international standards and recognition of the university at the global level. The implementation of quality standards significantly influences the university's quality standing internationally (Chien, 2023). Within the quality framework, universities are guided by key performance indicators (KPIs), which assess the engagement of faculty in the academic process, as well as student appraisals in academic subjects. KPIs pertain not only to academics but also to research and its efficacy (Javed & Alenezi, 2023). In the realm of quality assurance, accreditation warrants mention. Accreditation criteria enable the evaluation of the quality of university services in internationalization processes. Accreditation and rankings reflect the university's positioning in the global market and, notably, confer credibility. For international students and potential university collaborators, the element of reliability holds significant importance. It essentially forms the initial impression of the university. Accreditation criteria are explicit and objective, emphasizing efficiency and oversight, and encapsulating the practices and framework that universities should consider (Romanowski, 2022). ISO 9001, recognized as an international benchmark, stands as a vital standard for ensuring university quality. Both internal and external assessments are conducted to uphold quality. External assessments are conducted by an independent entity. The university's compliance with the standards is evaluated by examining the evidence of actions taken internally and externally (Vykydal et al., 2020). Quality assurance cannot be conceived without the implementation of inspections and audits, aiming to enhance the quality of academic endeavors, both in terms of pedagogical delivery by faculty members and the acquisition of knowledge by students (Carvalho et al., 2023). The attainment of successful internationalization is significantly impacted by the quality assurance components previously mentioned, such as accreditation, standards, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). It is quality that enables the facilitation of a prosperous internationalization process. Within the realm of European education, quality assurance promotes a student-centered approach to learning, active engagement in academic pursuits, and an experiential educational journey (Gessa et al., 2022). Quality assurance also assumes a pivotal role in transnational education by encompassing the evaluation of educational processes, students' learning experiences, and their academic assessments, while also enhancing the professional competencies of faculty members to optimize educational practices.

3. Methodology/methods

The investigation was conducted in two phases - a comprehensive analysis of literature to acquire scholarly articles addressing the inquiry raised on the impact of quality on internationalization. The subsequent phase of the study involved a PESTEL analysis based on the literature review summary to pinpoint the factors influencing the perspectives of universities. The Scopus

database was utilized to retrieve papers by searching for "internationalization and quality," though future research could encompass additional databases such as Web of Science and EBSCO. The selection of the literature review and snowballing method was influenced by the findings of various scholars, demonstrating the comprehensive understanding and contextualization a literature review can offer on a subject (Kokins & Straujuma, 2020; Pham & Vu, 2024). The significance of conducting a PESTEL analysis for universities lies in its contribution to risk management and its utility in informing strategic planning (Artyukhov, 2020). The snowballing method serves to authenticate the findings. The scholarly articles employed in both the literature review and the PESTEL analysis were categorized by their countries of origin, with the snowball sampling method chosen to prevent the omission of valuable articles. This method entails an initial article from which a citation network is expanded. No keywords are utilized, and quotes are the basis. The citation network consists of multiple tiers, starting with articles citing the initial article, moving on to articles referencing those, and so forth, necessitating a specific set of starting points to initiate the snowballing process. It is imperative when searching for articles to avoid focusing solely on a particular publisher's or author's works, but rather consider a broader timeframe of publication. Diversification of articles leads to successful outcomes. To enhance the effectiveness of the search, specific terminology should be eschewed, and the initial set of research articles for the snowballing process should be sufficiently extensive. Familiarizing oneself with and critically evaluating the articles for validity before incorporating them in the "snowball" is crucial; otherwise, it may compromise the results of the extraction method. The "snowball" method operates through two distinct mechanisms - backward and forward snowballing. Backward snowballing involves identifying new articles through a reference list while excluding those that do not meet the criteria (e.g., language) or have already been reviewed. Forward snowballing entails discovering new articles based on those referencing the article under scrutiny (Wohlin, 2014). The purpose of employing this method is to complement existing literature reviews. The preparation of the literature review, analysis, and synthesis of articles, including the utilization of the snowballing method, was conducted between November 2023 and February 2024.

4. Results

4.1. Literature review

For the literature review, only research articles that have been published and are in English were specifically chosen. Multiple keywords, such as "higher education," were carefully selected to limit the number of articles retrieved from the database. Consequently, a total of 2298 articles

were initially identified. Subsequently, the focus was narrowed down by limiting the subject area, resulting in 1184 articles. Only those articles that have already been published were considered, leading to a final selection of 803 articles. The scope was further refined to articles specifically related to “higher education” due to the study’s focus on examining the influence of quality on internationalization within higher education institutions, hence 149 relevant articles were identified. Through the manual review, 121 articles were subsequently excluded. During the aggregation of articles based on their country of origin, those with a frequency of “1” were omitted, retaining only those that were repeated two or more times. Notably, countries such as Thailand, Romania, Portugal, China, Poland, and Ukraine emerged as prominent contributors. A total of 16 countries with a frequency of “1” were not considered, including the Czech Republic, Denmark, and Germany. A significant number of articles were collaborative efforts between universities from different countries (Figure 1). Initially, four articles were selected [1–4] to supplement the existing literature review with a complementary approach. From the first candidate (C1), five new articles were identified out of a pool of 26 articles. Similarly, the second candidate (C2) yielded six new articles from 76 articles, while the third candidate (C3) resulted in one new article from 69 articles, and the fourth candidate (C4) contributed one new article from 54 articles, totaling 13 new articles. Articles that did not align with the author’s research question, which was consistently referenced throughout the literature review, were excluded. This included articles that lacked open access and were not available in English. The unavailability of free access to articles was a key factor in the exclusion of many articles. Subsequently, when employing the snowballing method to gather additional articles, the author opted to categorize the articles by their country of origin to present a clear overview, acknowledging the substantial differences in education systems.

4.2. PESTEL analysis

Drawing upon the existing body of literature, the PESTEL factors have been categorized and subsequently examined in greater detail within this section (Table 1).

Government involvement and the political system of

the nation have been recognized as political elements that impact the university’s perspective on internationalization. Universities are significantly reliant on governmental authorities and the policies established within the nation, specifically in the realm of education. Collaborative engagement between the government and universities is essential, encouraging partnerships with businesses to enhance the national economy through co-creation (Matache, 2023). The utilization of the European quality assurance framework is crucial for ensuring maximum efficiency, necessitating adjustments not only at the institutional level but also in legislation at the national scale (Vashchenko et al., 2020). Global convergence, epitomized by internationalization, is a strategic response to globalization that serves as a political instrument impacting academic and research activities as well as economic development (Wysocka et al., 2022). The forces of globalization compel universities to remain dynamic and competitive to attract foreign students. This requires a focus on providing high-quality services, diverse academic programs, conducive learning environments, and competent faculty members, who significantly influence the satisfaction levels of international students (Daud et al., 2019). Economic factors encompass aspects such as human capital, revenue growth, demographic composition, labor market dynamics, and financial stability. These factors warrant attention due to their predominant influence. Examining human capital and demographic structure from an internationalization perspective involves attracting foreign students and academic staff, which may be necessary to address insufficient staffing or student numbers (Wohlin, 2014). The government plays a vital role in articulating its vision and fostering closer relationships between universities and industries to fortify the national economy, ensuring that graduates are equipped to meet labor market requirements (Butum et al., 2020). Graduates’ competitiveness and alignment with labor market needs can be enhanced through the completion of programs at accredited higher education institutions, underscoring the importance of quality assurance. Social factors encompass elements like national mentality, cultural diversity, recognition, and competitiveness. A national mentality can serve to safeguard cultural heritage and identity, potentially limiting the appeal of foreign students in countries with strong national identities, where international collaborations are

Table 1. PESTEL analysis on internationalization (source: created by author)

	P	E	S	T	E	I
	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Environmental	Legal
1	Government involvement	Human capital	National mindset	Study process digitalization	International environment	Bologna Process
2	Country’s political system	Increase in revenue	Cultural diversity	Innovation of new products	Openness to new experiences	European Higher Education Area
3		Demographic structure	Recognition			Quality standards
4		Labor market	Competitiveness			Accreditation
5		Financial security				

rigorously scrutinized. Conversely, cultural diversity can positively influence perspectives on internationalization, facilitating cross-cultural exchanges among students and faculty. Rankings are undeniably significant for universities, with factors like recognition and competition playing pivotal roles (Dzimińska et al., 2018). A diverse range of quality assurance endeavors is indispensable for universities, not just for attracting and retaining international students and academics but also for nurturing enduring global partnerships and collaborations (Jampaklay et al., 2022). Technological considerations often revolve around digitizing educational processes and fostering innovation across various domains, serving as key performance indicators for universities and contributing significantly to quality assurance. Both internationalization and interdisciplinary approaches can markedly enhance educational processes by introducing novel programs and phasing out outdated ones, ensuring students are well-versed in contemporary technologies (Li & Xue, 2022). Internationalization leads to enhancements in academic offerings and research endeavors, ultimately contributing to the overall advancement of the education sector, which is an investment in the nation. Internationalization needs to become ingrained in the daily operations of a university, adapting continuously to remain responsive to shifting market demands. In the current era of globalization, internationalization plays a pivotal role in academia by encouraging innovation, diversification of academic practices, and integration of successful teaching methodologies from international counterparts (Lybolt et al., 2023). Environmental aspects also influence universities' perspectives on internationalization. The internationalization of universities, primarily reliant on internal resources, represents a shift towards operating within an international milieu. This transformation necessitates universities to adapt their viewpoints and embrace new experiences that internationalization offers (Nguyen, 2020). Partnerships, initiatives, and other endeavors are prevalent in the international arena. Quality tools, such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), play a crucial role in assessing progress towards established objectives on a global scale. Institutions foster improvement cycles by actively participating in transparent process monitoring (Acton, 2019). The legal dimension is intricately linked to ensuring quality assurance across various critical facets. Adherence to standards, both domestic and international, mandates that universities uphold specific responsibilities and validate their activities against established benchmarks. This aspect can serve as a double-edged sword, motivating or deterring universities based on their ability to meet prescribed obligations. The Bologna Process catalyzes globalization by aiming to equip students with the skills needed for the global job market, albeit with caution regarding public funding, attracting foreign scholars, and students (Kwiek, 2004). European Union universities and their educational frameworks are intricately tied to the Bologna Process and the cohesive European higher education landscape.

5. Conclusions

Upon completion of a thorough literature review, it has been determined that there exist two distinct ideologies concerning the concepts of internationalization and quality, with a central focus on the inquiry – How do quality and internationalization intertwine? The analysis led to the conclusion that one faction views internationalization as a means to achieve financial stability, highlighting the appeal of attracting foreign students and staff. Conversely, the other faction regards quality as the primary objective of internationalization, asserting that neither mobilities nor partnerships should take precedence. Enhancing quality, alongside ensuring and monitoring quality standards, emerges as the fundamental element of university internationalization, serving as a benchmark for positioning the university in the global market. The integration of quality into a university's internationalization endeavors is imperative for its competitiveness in the worldwide market (Bhandari & Chakravaram, 2020). Disregarding quality aspects in the processes of internationalization can lead to detrimental outcomes. Through a PESTEL analysis, various categories of factors were identified, with economic, social, and legal factors being deemed the most critical. Each category of factors in the PESTEL analysis was determined to correlate with quality assurance. Therefore, it can be postulated that the quality factor exerts a notable influence on the process of internationalization within universities and is intricately associated with the globalization of higher education. Subsequently, institutions of higher learning are encouraged to meticulously assess all variables and anticipate the potential benefits and drawbacks of their endeavors toward internationalization.

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Author contribution

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