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The Impact of Higher Education Globalisation on University Performance in Shandong Province, China: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

This research has explored the association between higher education globalisation and university performance in Shandong Province through the use of mixed methods. Quantitative data have been collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire with questions on international student mobility, faculty engagement, research collaboration, international programs, institutional partnerships, and university performance. The reliability of the measures has been checked through the internal consistency analysis. Pearson correlation has revealed strong positive relationships between Higher Education Globalisation and University Performance ($r = 0.899$, $p < .001$), International Research Collaboration and University Performance ($r = 0.757$, $p < .001$), and International Academic Engagement and University Performance ($r = 0.852$, $p < .001$). The regression analysis has confirmed all three hypotheses, showing R^2 values equal to 0.809, 0.573 and 0.726 accordingly.

Keywords: Higher Education Globalisation, University Performance, Internationalisation, International Research Collaboration, International Academic Engagement and Shandong Province

Introduction

Higher education globalisation has brought revolutionary transformation in universities through international student mobility, academic collaboration, knowledge flows, curricula, and research collaboration. These transformations can affect university performance through increased access to knowledge, improved research capacity, enhanced teaching and learning, and increased institutional visibility. This becomes very significant in relation to higher education in China due to the size of the higher education system. As of 2024, there were

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58.44 million students enrolled in Chinese higher education institutions. The higher education gross enrolment rate of China was 60.8% [1]. The number of international students in Chinese higher education institutions was 271,064, which sheds light on the substantial global dimension of its university system [2]. China has developed its higher education system to be very extensive and engaged on the global scale. In 2024, China has 1,257 regular academic higher education institutions and 1,562 higher vocational institutions [3]. Shandong represents a unique regional context within this extensive higher education system. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Education, there are 161 regular higher education institutions in Shandong, including 68 academic universities, 3 undergraduate vocational institutions, and 90 higher vocational institutions [4]. There were about 1.29 million regular undergraduate students enrolled in Shandong in 2024 [5].

Despite the expansion of internationalisation, the extent to which global engagement translates into improved university performance is not necessarily uniform across institutions. Internationalisation can improve university performance through opportunities for research collaboration, curriculum development, and institutional visibility, while it can pose problems through resource constraints and institutional capacity issues [6]. Therefore, there is a need for empirical evidence to examine this association within the unique higher education environment of Shandong.

This research aims to investigate the influence of higher education globalisation on university performance in Shandong Province, China.

The core objectives will be:

- To investigate the major dimensions of higher education globalisation in Shandong.
- To determine the association between these dimensions and university performance.
- To explore qualitative explanations behind these associations.
- To combine quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

The research will also intend to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What are the major dimensions of higher education globalisation in Shandong?

RQ2: What is the association between globalisation and university performance?

RQ3: How can secondary qualitative findings be explained using quantitative findings?

The study provides context-specific evidence for higher education researchers, university managers, and policymakers who are interested in understanding how internationalisation can contribute to further academic research and institutional performance in Shandong.

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Literature Review

Higher education globalisation and internationalisation

Globalisation of higher education is defined by the increasing cross-border movement of people, knowledge, research, technologies, money, and educational services, linking universities to international academic and economic networks [7]. In particular, the OECD highlights higher education institutions as crucial channels for international flows of people, information, knowledge, and technology, and the internationalisation of research and academic mobility [8]. On the other hand, internationalisation is associated but more institutionally focused process representing the international and intercultural aspects of teaching, research, and institutional work. These include mobility of students and faculty members, international cooperation, joint degree programs, and research cooperation on an international level [9]. Hence, globalisation represents the broader context, and internationalization stands for university responses to global trends.

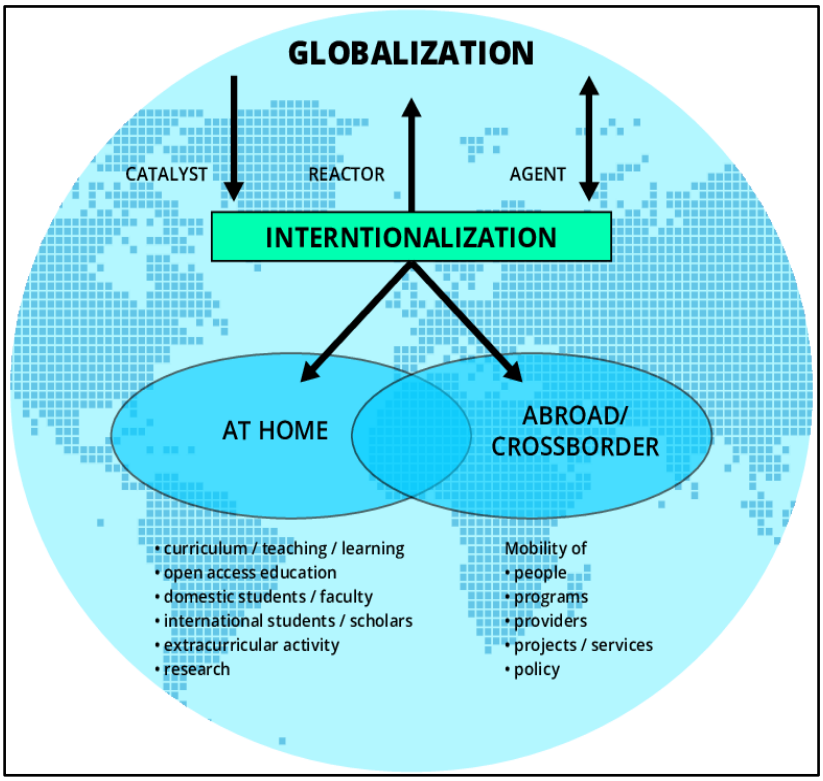


Figure 1: Pillars Of Internationalisation Of Higher Education [25]

Dimensions of higher education globalisation

There are several dimensions associated with globalisation of higher education. These include international student mobility, which allows expanding cultural diversity and promoting knowledge transfer, international faculty mobility, which introduces new expertise and new teaching techniques [10]. International research collaboration allows enhanced knowledge production through cross-border collaborations and co-publication [11]. Transnational education, including joint and dual-degree programs and foreign branch campuses, is

another channel for internationalisation. Internationalisation can also occur through curriculum development, English-medium instruction, international partnerships, international digital academic networks, and quality assurance of international dimension. According to evidence from China, international student mobility can contribute to scientific research concerning students' countries of origin, thus suggesting the connection between internationalisation and knowledge production of institutions [12].

University performance

University performance is a multidimensional concept extending beyond financial performance, including quality of teaching, research productivity, outcomes for students, university reputation, and international performance. Research performance can be measured through publications, citations, research funding, and international collaborations, while educational performance can be defined by the quality of the learning process, students' satisfaction, and their outcomes after studies [13]. Institutional performance can also include institutional reputation, competitiveness, and attraction of students and academic staff. As highlighted by the OECD, higher education performance should be analysed through several dimensions rather than a single indicator [14]. Under the conditions of globalisation, internationalization indicators, such as international students, faculty mobility, and research collaborations on an international level, can be considered potential contributors to institutional performance.

Globalisation and university performance

The association between globalisation and university performance can operate through several mechanisms. These include international students and faculty, contributing to cultural and academic exchange, as well as international research networks, allowing universities to gain access to knowledge and expertise. According to empirical evidence from China, international student mobility has contributed to research publications on students' countries of origin, indicating a possible knowledge-production effect. Transnational education allows expanding learning opportunities and improving international visibility of the institution, but quality assurance is still essential [15]. However, internationalisation does not guarantee positive outcomes. Evidence from Chinese universities highlights the challenges related to English language resources, student-faculty communication, and socio-cultural adaptation [16].

Chinese and Shandong higher education

Higher education in China has experienced significant massification, diversification, and internationalisation, changing both the internal institutional structure and the global position of the system [17]. Research highlights internationalisation as one of the main results of the reforms in Chinese post-1978 higher education reforms along with massification and marketisation [18]. Moreover, China has increased international education,

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research collaboration, and transnational programs as means of engaging in the international academic world. In the context of such national developments, Shandong is an important regional context, since its universities have engaged in international cooperative education and cross-border academic activities [19]. For instance, the documents of the Ministry of Education include the description of Sino-foreign cooperative institutions and programs involving universities of Shandong.

Research gap and conceptual framework

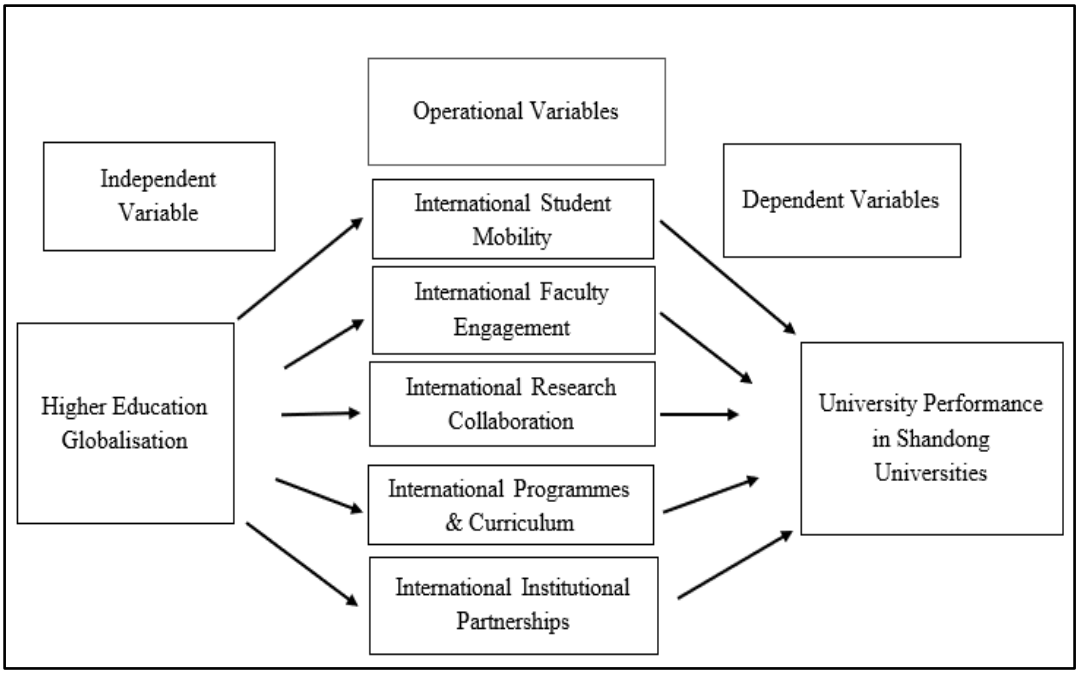


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Although existing literature has explored higher education internationalisation in China through student mobility, international partnerships, research collaboration, and transnational education, minimal attention has been paid to the relationship of these internationalisation dimensions on university performance in Shandong Province [19]. Furthermore, existing studies tend to focus on individual internationalisation activities instead of integrating multiple dimensions with empirical evidence [20]. This research will address this gap by defining higher education globalisation in terms of international student mobility, international faculty engagement, international research collaboration, international programmes, and partnerships. Such dimensions can affect university performance defined in terms of academic research performance, institutional reputation, and student experience.

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Identified Hypothesis

H1: Higher education globalisation is significantly and positively associated with university performance in Shandong Province, China.

H2: International research collaboration is significantly and positively associated with university performance in Shandong Province, China.

H3: International academic engagement, reflected through international student mobility, faculty engagement, and international programmes and curriculum, is significantly and positively associated with university performance.

Methodology

The mixed-methods research design was adopted for examining the association between higher education globalisation and university performance in Shandong Province, China. The design implied the use of primary quantitative research and secondary qualitative research in order to provide evidence that could be measured and explained within the context. Primary quantitative research was also aimed at examining the impact of major dimensions of higher education globalisation on university performance, while secondary qualitative research was designed to investigate themes, explanations and contextual issues identified in existing academic and institutional evidence. This design enabled the findings from both aspects to be compared and integrated rather than relying on a single source of evidence. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire completed by respondents representing higher education institutions in Shandong Province. The population was represented by university stakeholders, including academic staff, administrative staff, and students associated with universities that possess experience and awareness of higher education globalisation. The non-probability purposive sampling included individuals based on their relevance to the research topic and ability to respond to institutional performance and university internationalisation.

A total of 151 valid responses were received and analysed in the context of higher education globalisation. The questionnaire consisted mostly of closed-ended questions that were based on a five-point Likert scale, including 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree [21]. Questions were asked to measure the major dimensions identified in the conceptual framework, such as international student mobility, international faculty engagement, international research collaboration, international programmes and curriculum, and international institutional partnerships. University performance indicators considered in the questionnaire were academic performance, research performance, institutional reputation, and student experience. Qualitative evidence in the research was collected from existing secondary sources that included peer-reviewed academic studies, government and policy documents, institutional reports, and

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relevant academic research on higher education internationalisation in China and Shandong Province. The selection of evidence was based on its relevance to the study questions, credibility, and contextual relevance. The approach implied not collecting secondary evidence as an additional statistical dataset but using it to find the recurring explanations, opportunities, and challenges associated with higher education globalisation.

Primary quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis [22]. Descriptive statistics gave a wider picture of respondent characteristics and the distribution of variables, while Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of multi-item constructs. Pearson correlation helped to reveal associations between globalisation dimensions and university performance, followed by regression analysis to measure the relationship between them. Secondary qualitative evidence was analysed using thematic analysis when recurring patterns were organised into themes related to international mobility, research collaboration, curriculum internationalisation, institutional partnerships, academic development and university performance. Finally, the findings of both aspects were integrated through comparison and interpretation, identifying similarities, complementarities and contradictions. Ethical principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were applied to primary survey research.

Findings and Analysis

Primary quantitative findings

The main quantitative analysis was carried out on 151 valid responses gathered from respondents who belonged to higher education institutions in Shandong Province, China. The analysis of the sample showed that the proportion of males (53.6%) is slightly larger than that of females (44.4%), while the major age group is 20-29 years old (36.4%). The sample contained 32.5% undergraduate students and 25.2% academic staff, while 64.9% of respondents had connections with public universities. In addition, 67.5% of them participated in internationalisation activities personally.

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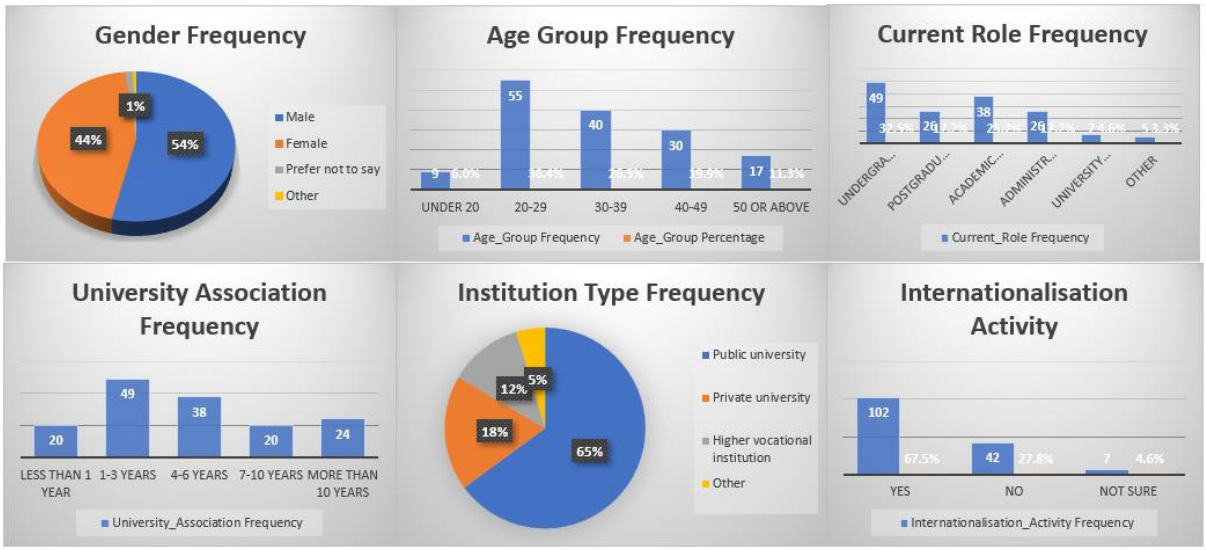


Figure 3: Frequencies of Demographic Profiles

Measurement scales demonstrated excellent internal consistency. The value of Cronbach's alpha was equal to 0.956 for Higher Education Globalisation and 0.985 for University Performance, while all individual dimensions of globalisation exceeded 0.94. Descriptive analysis shows relatively moderate perceptions: the average scores for Higher Education Globalisation (3.016), International Research Collaboration (2.962), International Academic Engagement (3.045), and University Performance (3.015).

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
International Student Mobility	3	0.946	Excellent
International Faculty Engagement	3	0.952	Excellent
International Research Collaboration	3	0.958	Excellent
International Programmes & Curriculum	3	0.947	Excellent
International Institutional Partnerships	3	0.943	Excellent
Academic/Teaching Performance	3	0.946	Excellent
Research Performance	3	0.942	Excellent
Institutional Reputation & Visibility	3	0.942	Excellent
Student Experience	3	0.943	Excellent
Higher Education Globalisation	15	0.956	Excellent
International Academic Engagement	9	0.934	Excellent
University Performance	12	0.985	Excellent

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

Pearson correlation analysis showed strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between university performance and all three explanatory variables. Higher Education Globalisation had the strongest correlation with University Performance ($r = 0.899$, $p < .001$), while other correlations were with International Academic Engagement ($r = 0.852$, $p < .001$) and International Research Collaboration ($r = 0.757$, $p < .001$).

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Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Pearson r	p-value	Direction	Significance
H1	Higher Education Globalisation	University Performance	0.899	2.243E-55	Positive	Significant ($p < .05$)
H2	International Research Collaboration	University Performance	0.757	2.537E-29	Positive	Significant ($p < .05$)
H3	International Academic Engagement	University Performance	0.852	1.022E-43	Positive	Significant ($p < .05$)

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation

The results of regression confirmed all three hypotheses. Higher Education Globalisation explains 80.9% of the variance in university performance ($R^2 = 0.809$), while International Research Collaboration and International Academic Engagement explain 57.3% and 72.6%, respectively.

Hypothesis	Predictor	Intercept (β0)	Coefficient (β1)	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Significance F	t	p-value
H1	Higher Education Globalisation	-0.210	1.069	0.899	0.809	0.807	629.808	0.000E+00	25.096	2.243E-55
H2	International Research Collaboration	0.877	0.722	0.757	0.573	0.570	199.904	0.000E+00	14.139	2.537E-29
H3	International Academic Engagement	-0.021	0.997	0.852	0.726	0.724	394.564	0.000E+00	19.864	1.022E-43

Table 3: Regression

All three regression coefficients are positive and statistically significant ($p < .001$), which means that H1, H2, and H3 are supported. Therefore, there are strong statistical links between internationalisation-related activities and university performance.

Hypothesis	Statement	Coefficient β	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
H1	Higher education globalisation is significantly and positively associated with university	1.069	2.243E-55	Supported	Positive and statistically significant association

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	performance in Shandong Province, China.				
H2	International research collaboration is significantly and positively associated with university performance in Shandong Province, China.	0.722	2.537E-29	Supported	Positive and statistically significant association
H3	International academic engagement, reflected through international student mobility, faculty engagement, and international programmes and curriculum, is significantly and positively associated with university performance.	0.997	1.022E-43	Supported	Positive and statistically significant association

Table 1: Results of Hypothesis

Secondary qualitative findings

Secondary qualitative analysis involved examination of policy documents, governmental statistics, and university reports in order to identify the implementation of higher education globalisation in Shandong Province. Based on evidence from the Ministry of Education of China, it can be stated that internationalisation remains an established component of higher education, since 271,064 international students were enrolled in China in 2024, along with the expansion of postgraduate and undergraduate programmes [3]. The documentary evidence from the Shandong Provincial Department of Education clearly indicates a strong institutional focus on establishing overseas partnerships, student and faculty exchange, joint programmes, and internationalisation of talent [23]. Shandong policy encourages universities to develop cooperation with foreign partners, establish international partnerships, and recruit international students.

University-based evidence also confirms these trends. Shandong University provides information on more than 300 partnerships with universities and research institutions in 45 countries and regions, while the Weihai Campus of Shandong University provides information about student mobility, international student recruitment, and faculty internationalisation [24]. In addition, the existence of joint research laboratories and projects evidences the research side of internationalisation. Overall, the documents provide four recurring themes including international mobility, international faculty engagement, research collaboration and internationalised programmes/partnerships. These themes are closely related to the main survey, providing documentary support for the established positive relationship between higher education globalisation and university performance.

Mixed-methods integration

The integration of quantitative and secondary qualitative evidence shows a consistent association between higher education globalisation and university performance in Shandong Province. While the survey evidence

shows strong positive relationships between Higher Education Globalisation and University Performance ($r = 0.899$, $p < .001$), International Research Collaboration ($r = 0.757$, $p < .001$) and International Academic Engagement ($r = 0.852$, $p < .001$), the qualitative evidence showed international student mobility, faculty engagement, research collaboration, international programmes and institutional partnerships as dominant features of internationalisation. Therefore, both findings suggested that internationalisation operates through academic, research and institutional activities associated with university performance.

Discussion

These findings efficiently confirmed a high association observed between higher education globalisation and university performance in Shandong Province. The primary survey detected the presence of a strong positive correlation between Higher Education Globalisation and University Performance ($r = 0.899$, $p < .001$), with the regression results suggesting that globalisation accounted for 80.9% of the variance in perceived university performance. In addition, International Academic Engagement was found to be positively correlated with performance ($r = 0.852$; $R^2 = 0.726$) and International Research Collaboration was revealed to be significantly positively correlated with university performance ($r = 0.757$; $R^2 = 0.573$). Thus, hypotheses H1-H3 have been supported, suggesting that internationalisation is closely connected with teaching, research, reputation and student-experience outcomes. The secondary evidence further confirmed the discovered associations. First, it underpinned the continuous governmental attention to international students' attraction, international cooperation and international research collaborations. Moreover, the provincial policy also emphasised attention to developing overseas partnerships, exchange and international collaboration [3]. At the same time, the evidence collected at the university level from Shandong University shows the large number of global partnerships, illustrating how international activities can be implemented across universities [24]. Overall, the mixed-methods evidence supported that mobility, faculty engagement, internationalised curriculum, research network and institutional partnerships function as the interrelated dimensions of internationalisation of universities. However, the findings indicate association rather than causal impact.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that higher education globalisation is strongly and positively associated with perceived university performance in Shandong Province. All formulated hypotheses were confirmed through the quantitative evidence, where the first two hypotheses proved to show especially high correlations. Along with that, the secondary evidence showed the institutional and policy emphasis on student mobility, international partnerships, research cooperation, and international education. Thus, the study proved the importance of internationalisation as one of the most essential features of university development nowadays. Nevertheless,

it also revealed that universities can benefit from enhancing interconnected international activities in teaching, research, and institutional cooperation.

Limitations and Future Scope

Several limitations should be recognised. First, the primary analysis has involved only 151 respondents. Therefore, the generalisability of the obtained results to other higher education institutions in Shandong remains unclear. Second, the measures were perception-based and may reflect respondent subjectivity. Finally, due to the cross-sectional design, the causal direction cannot be established. In addition, the qualitative component relied on secondary documentary evidence, emphasising more achievements of the universities than their problems.

Future research could use larger longitudinal samples, combine survey data with objective indicators such as international enrolment, joint publications and partnership activity, and conduct interviews with students, academics and managers. Comparative studies across Chinese provinces could examine whether these relationships vary by institutional type.

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Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Section A: Respondent Profile

Q1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Q2. What is your age group?

- Under 20
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50 or above

Q3. What is your current role?

- Undergraduate student
- Postgraduate student
- Academic staff
- Administrative/professional staff
- University management
- Other

Q4. How long have you been associated with your university?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-10 years
- More than 10 years

Q5. What type of institution do you belong to?

- Public university
- Private university
- Higher vocational institution
- Other

Q6. Have you personally participated in an internationalisation activity?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Section B: Higher Education Globalisation

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

B1. International Student Mobility

B1.1 My university actively attracts students from other countries.

B1.2 International students contribute to cultural and knowledge exchange within the university.

B1.3 International student participation improves the university's learning environment.

B2. International Faculty Engagement

B2.1 My university actively engages international academic staff or international academic expertise.

B2.2 International faculty contribute new knowledge and teaching approaches to the university.

B2.3 International faculty engagement strengthens the university's academic development.

B3. International Research Collaboration

B3.1 My university participates in research projects with international universities or organisations.

B3.2 International research collaboration provides access to knowledge, expertise and research networks.

B3.3 International research collaboration improves the university's research capabilities and visibility.

B4. International Programmes and Curriculum

B4.1 My university incorporates international perspectives into its programmes and curriculum.

B4.2 International programmes provide students with greater exposure to global knowledge and practices.

B4.3 Internationalised curricula improve students' preparation for a global environment.

B5. International Institutional Partnerships

B5.1 My university maintains partnerships with universities or organisations in other countries.

B5.2 International partnerships provide opportunities for student and staff exchange.

B5.3 International partnerships contribute to the university's institutional development and international reputation.

Section C: University Performance

C1. Academic/Teaching Performance

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C1.1 Internationalisation has improved the quality of teaching at my university.

C1.2 International engagement has encouraged innovative teaching practices.

C1.3 International perspectives have enriched students' learning experiences.

C2. Research Performance

C2.1 Internationalisation has improved the research performance of my university.

C2.2 International collaboration has increased opportunities for high-quality research.

C2.3 International research networks have strengthened the university's research reputation.

C3. Institutional Reputation and Visibility

C3.1 International engagement has enhanced my university's international reputation.

C3.2 Internationalisation has increased the international visibility of my university.

C3.3 International partnerships have strengthened the university's competitiveness.

C4. Student Experience

C4.1 Internationalisation has improved the overall student experience.

C4.2 International engagement provides greater opportunities for intercultural learning.

C4.3 International programmes enhance students' global competencies.