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The Influence of Globalisation in Higher Education on the Performance of Universities in Shandong Province, China: A Mixed-Methods Investigation

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Abstract

Although globalisation has emerged as an important issue in developing higher-education institutions in China, it is the implementation of internationalisation policies in institutional practices that determines the institutional outcomes. This study examined the correlation between the globalisation of universities, the effectiveness of implementing policy, and the three dimensions of university performance, namely academic performance, construction of facilities and international student exchanges, in the province of Shandong in China. The design used was a quantitative dominant mixed-methods design. The primary data were collected from 181 academic, administrative and managerial staff of higher education institutions in Shandong and processed by descriptive statistics, Cronbach's α, Pearson correlation coefficient and ordinary least-squares regression in the software package of Microsoft Excel. The qualitative part of the study involved thematic document analysis of 15 recent open access papers related to internationalisation in the field of Chinese higher education. Internal reliability was excellent with α ranging from .922 to .933 for all constructs. The University Globalisation Level was significantly related to Policy Implementation Effectiveness ($\beta = .579$, $p < .001$). Globalisation and policy implementation together accounted for 56.4% of the variation in Academic Performance, 46.4% in Infrastructure Development and 51.0% in International Student Exchange Programmes. All of the seven hypotheses were confirmed. The findings of the qualitative research confirmed the significance of international research collaboration, the implementation capacity, the availability of resources and sustainable student mobility. The results suggest that engagement at global level is most beneficial if accompanied by a coherent institutional approach and resources.

Keywords: higher education globalisation; internationalisation; university performance; policy implementation; Shandong Province; China

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1. Introduction

International networks of research, teaching, knowledge exchange and student mobility have gained a stronger foothold in higher education. Internationalisation has been an integral part of Chinese efforts to improve the quality of universities, their international visibility and research competitiveness. Internationalisation is not just the use of western forms of education, however. The scholarship of recent years has highlighted the fact that there is a global engagement in Chinese higher education, but with a distinctive national, cultural and policy focus [1, 2]. The systematic review by Xu (2023) reveals that Chinese internationalisation is fundamentally grounded in several educational, economic, political and cultural logics, while Si (2026) demonstrates that the current Chinese policy is still in a position to ensure both openness and strategic goals.

Internationalisation has also taken a new meaning in the changing context of the world as a concept that transcends physical mobility. Digital cooperation, internationalisation at home, internationally oriented curricula and virtual exchanges come increasingly into the focus [3, 4]. In this way, Chinese students can also engage with the world without the need to go overseas, but the implementation and availability of these opportunities will still be significant issues [4, 5].

These relationships are worth considering in the context of the province of Shandong. Its universities have developed more international partnerships and cooperation, however, international faculty constraints, access to high-quality resources, institutional structures and exchange mechanisms have been listed in the past as limitations of SDN [6]. While previous research often focuses on individual issues like research collaboration or mobility, the few studies that do combine the globalisation level, the effectiveness of globalisation implementation, and multiple dimensions of institutional performance in the same empirical framework.

The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate whether there are relationships between globalisation of the universities and academic performance, infrastructure development and international exchange programmes of selected universities in Shandong, respectively, and to determine if the effectiveness of policy implementation can have a stand-alone effect on these outcomes.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Globalisation and internationalisation in higher education

Internationalisation refers to the way individual universities react to globalisation and to the processes that result in inter-university cooperation, curricula, mobility, research and organisations, while globalisation is the broader economic, technological and knowledge context in which universities operate across borders. Modern Chinese scholarship warns of a uniform internationalisation process. Although international engagement can enhance knowledge exchange and global competence, its impact can be enhanced through institutional context, access and integration of global and local priorities [1, 4, 5].

University Globalisation Level (UGL) as used in the current study is thus an expression of the extent of institutionalized international cooperation, research collaboration, internationally oriented curriculum and international involvement. This operationalisation does not just consider internationalisation on the basis of foreign students.

2.2 Globalisation and university performance

The one of the clearest routes in which internationalisation can have an impact on academic performance is research collaboration. International collaborative research has been found to be correlated with increased impact of publications, broader research networks and university's performance in innovation [8 - 10] (evidence from Chinese universities). The infrastructure and institutional resources are also essential as they are needed for international research, teaching and mobility, which involve the use of laboratories, digital platforms, administrative capacity and student-support services. Chinese universities have been studied and found that the utilization of resources and facilities in the university is an effective way to promote the educational and organizational achievements of the university [15, 16].

Student level outcomes can be achieved as a result of internationalisation. Internationalisation-at-home activities are linked to cosmopolitan learning and global competence [4] and international curricula, contact with foreign participants and substantive study-abroad experiences can contribute to students' global competence [19]. Therefore, this study considers the performance of the university through 3 complementary perspectives: Academic Performance (AP), Infrastructure Development (ID) and International Student Exchange Programmes (ISEP).

2.3 Policy implementation effectiveness

Internationalisation does not have to be accompanied by institutional outcomes; it is not something that is automatically achieved through formal internationalisation strategies. Leadership commitment, inter-departmental co-ordination, resources, monitoring and the right incentives are needed for implementation. However, inconsistencies can happen between internationalisation policies and lived reality within institutions, as shown by evidence from Chinese universities, in the context of international programmes of teaching, for example [13, 14]. Policy Implementation Effectiveness (PIE) is then put in an institutional position that connects international goals with the concrete results of the universities.

The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: UGL positively influences PIE.

H2: UGL positively influences AP.

H3: UGL positively influences ID.

H4: UGL positively influences ISEP.

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H5: PIE positively influences AP.

H6: PIE positively influences ID.

H7: PIE positively influences ISEP.

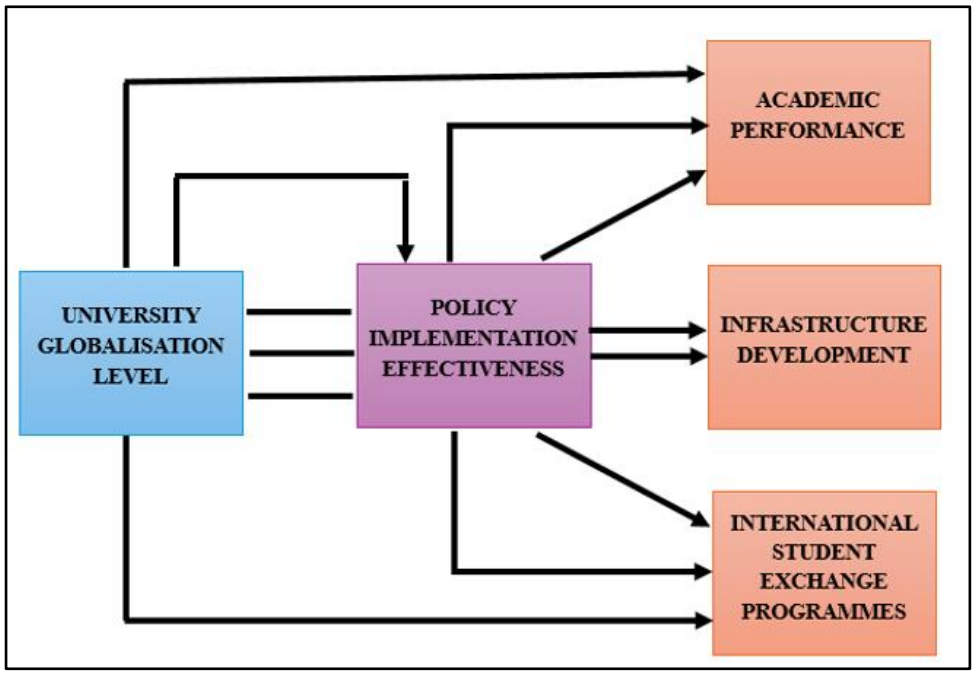


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework linking University Globalisation Level, Policy Implementation Effectiveness and university performance

3. Methodology

A quantitative-dominant mixed method design was used, which included a cross-sectional type of questionnaire survey and qualitative thematic analysis of the secondary academic research that had been conducted in the past. Hypothesis testing was done in the quantitative component, and the qualitative evidence was interpreted and contextualised in the statistical relationships.

The survey subjects included academic, administrative, research, international-office and managerial officials in higher education institutions in Shandong Province. The purposive sample was suitable as it was criterion-based as the respondents needed the necessary institutional knowledge. Eligibility criteria included being employed at a higher education institution in Shandong and having at least one year of higher-education experience as well as some experience of internationalisation or institutional activities related to internationalisation. A total of 200 respondents were identified but 181 complete and valid responses were received.

The questionnaire had 30 research statements that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The following five constructs had six items each: UGL, PIE, AP, ID and ISEP. Arithmetic means were computed for composite variables, defined by six items.

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Data screening and quantitative analysis were carried out in Microsoft Excel. Procedures involved were frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's two-tailed correlation and ordinary least-squares regression. Statistically significant effects were considered to be those with $p < .05$. Multicollinearity was checked using VIF values below 5, and residual skewness and kurtosis with a range of ±2.

In the qualitative part of the study, 15 open-access studies published in the period of 2021-2025 were selected on purpose, following the principle of relevance to Chinese or Shandong higher-education internationalisation. They identified four themes from their findings: academic and research performance; policy implementation; institutional infrastructure/resources; and international student mobility. The quantitative results were then combined with qualitative results, for interpretation. The survey was anonymous and aggregated analysis of results was performed.

4. Results

4.1 Data screening and respondent profile

181 records were screened to meet the criteria. The questionnaire was complete and there were no responses falling outside the Likert's scale (1-5) or any cases that needed to be excluded. The respondents were of varying ages, positions, experience level and types of institutions.

Table 1. Respondent demographic profile (N = 181)

Variable	Distribution
Gender	Male 99 (54.7%); Female 76 (42.0%); Prefer not to say 5 (2.8%); Other 1 (0.6%)
Age	<30: 23 (12.7%); 30-39: 58 (32.0%); 40-49: 60 (33.1%); 50-59: 31 (17.1%); ≥60: 9 (5.0%)
Position	Lecturer 55 (30.4%); Professor/Associate Professor 42 (23.2%); Department Head/Coordinator 14 (7.7%); Administrative 18 (9.9%); International Office 18 (9.9%); Management 7 (3.9%); Research 23 (12.7%); Other 4 (2.2%)
HE experience	1-5 years 30 (16.6%); 6-10 years 53 (29.3%); 11-15 years 39 (21.5%); 16-20 years 37 (20.4%); >20 years 22 (12.2%)
University type	Public comprehensive 47 (26.0%); Science/Technology 45 (24.9%); Normal/Teacher 18 (9.9%); Finance/Business 27 (14.9%); Medical 18 (9.9%); Private 24 (13.3%); Other 2 (1.1%)
Internationalisation knowledge	Substantial 108 (59.7%); To some extent 73 (40.3%)

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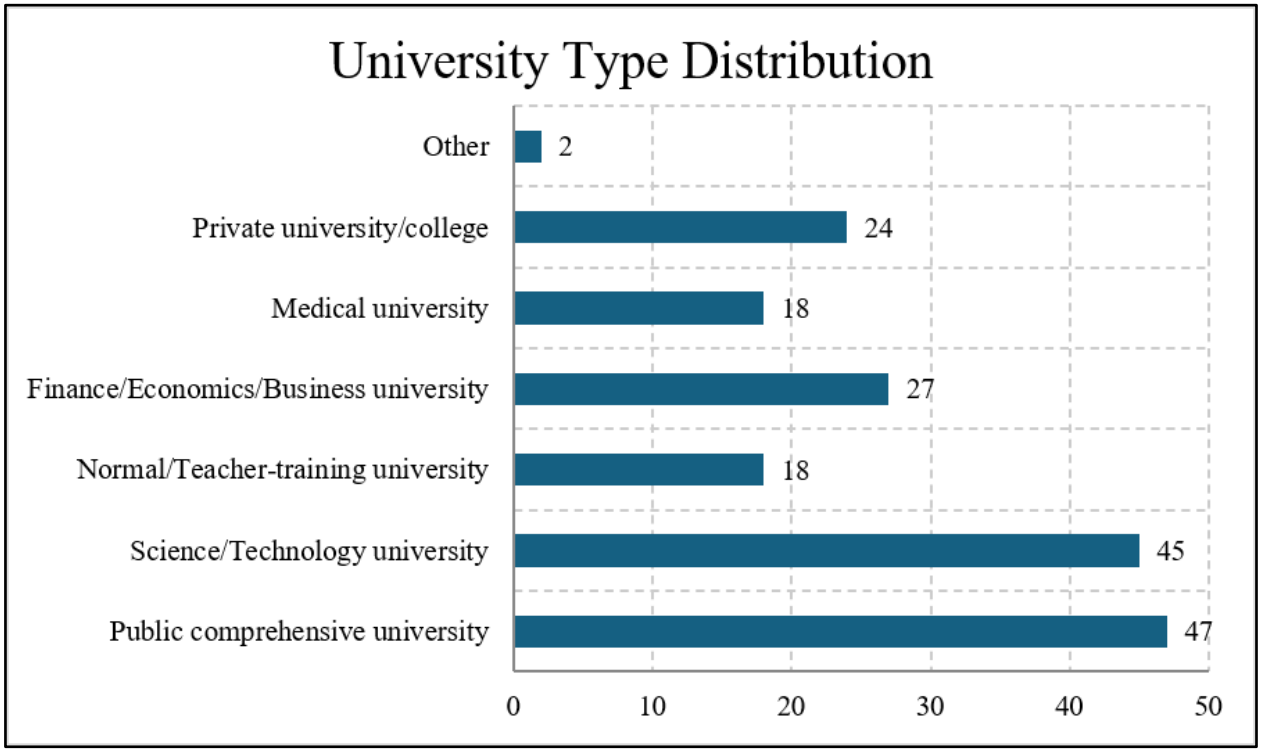


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by university type

4.2 Descriptive statistics, reliability and correlations

All construct mean scores were above the scale midpoint of 3.0 but within the "moderate" interpretation range of the workbook. UGL recorded the highest mean (M = 3.451), followed by AP (M = 3.431) and PIE (M = 3.401). The lowest mean (M = 3.231) was for ID.

Table 2. Construct descriptive statistics and reliability

Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
UGL	3.451	1.036	.932	Excellent
PIE	3.401	1.009	.926	Excellent
AP	3.431	1.017	.932	Excellent
ID	3.231	1.015	.922	Excellent
ISEP	3.326	1.030	.933	Excellent

The internal consistency of the instruments was excellent in the range of Cronbach's alpha of .922 to .933. The item total correlation was greater than .73 and omitting any item did not significantly affect construct reliability.

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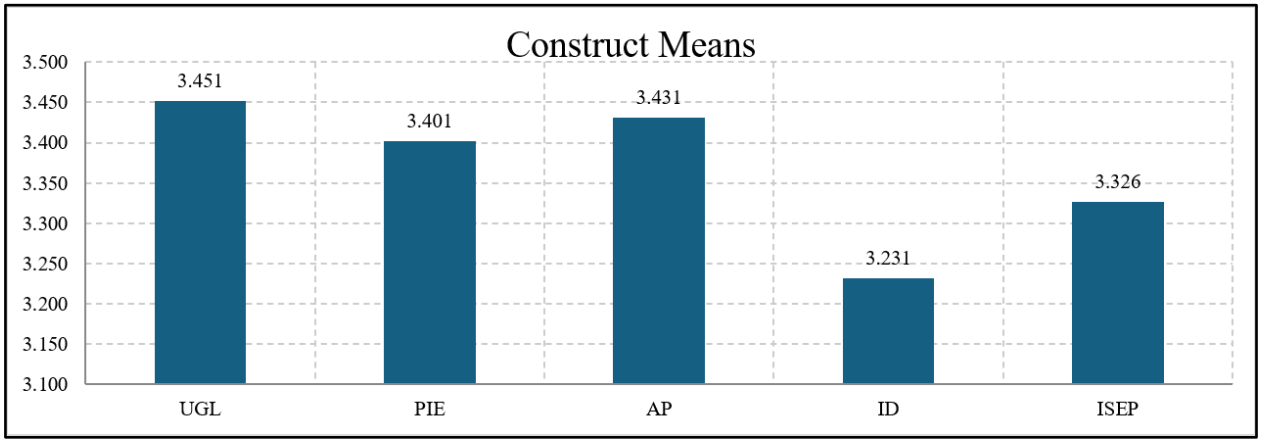


Figure 3. Mean scores for the five study constructs

All the Pearson correlation coefficients were in the positive and significant direction throughout.

Table 3. Pearson correlation matrix

Construct	UGL	PIE	AP	ID	ISEP
UGL	1.000	.579	.651	.598	.657
PIE	.579	1.000	.682	.612	.610
AP	.651	.682	1.000	.534	.547
ID	.598	.612	.534	1.000	.522
ISEP	.657	.610	.547	.522	1.000

All off-diagonal correlations: $p < .001$.

4.3 Regression and hypothesis testing

UGL was a strong predictor of PIE (β = .579), accounting for 33.5% of its variance. Simultaneous entry of UGL and PIE accounted for 56.4% of the variance in AP, 46.4% of the variance in ID and 51.0% of the variance in ISEP. All models were significant at a p value of < .001.

Table 4. Regression and hypothesis-testing results

Hyp.	Path	B	Standardised β	t	p	Model R^2	Decision
H1	UGL → PIE	.564	.579	9.499	<.001	.335	Supported
H2	UGL → AP	.378	.385	6.335	<.001	.564	Supported
H3	UGL → ID	.358	.366	5.431	<.001	.464	Supported
H4	UGL → ISEP	.454	.457	7.100	<.001	.510	Supported
H5	PIE → AP	.463	.459	7.563	<.001	.564	Supported

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H6	PIE → ID	.403	.401	5.950	<.001	.464	Supported
H7	PIE → ISEP	.352	.345	5.366	<.001	.510	Supported

There was no problematic multicollinearity as VIF values for multi-predictor models were 1.504 at maximum. The Durbin-Watson values were between 1.725 and 2.248 with residual skewness and kurtosis between ±2.

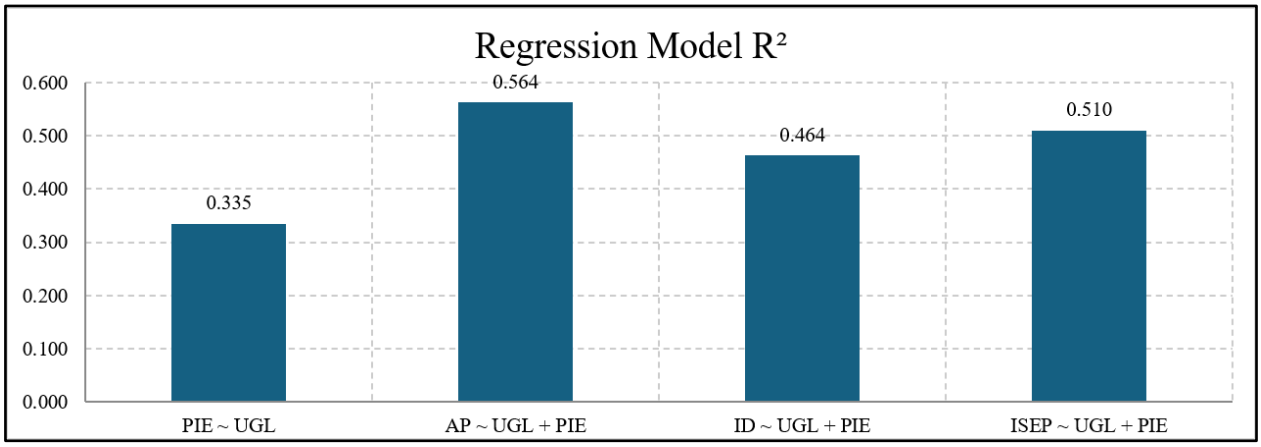


Figure 4. Explanatory power of the regression models

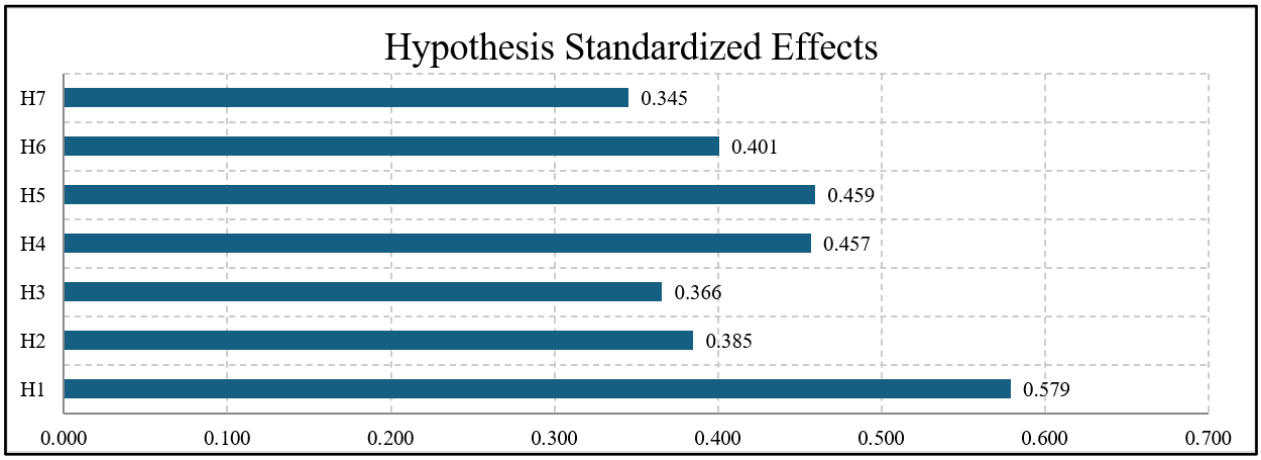


Figure 5. Standardised effects for hypotheses H1-H7

4.4 Qualitative thematic findings

Four themes emerged from the 15 studies short-listed.

Table 5. Qualitative thematic synthesis of the 15 secondary studies

Theme	Studies	Synthesised evidence
Internationalisation and academic/research performance	[7 - 12]	International research collaboration has beneficial effects on networks, impacts on publications, innovation and institutions, but may not be equally positive for all institutions.

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Policy implementation effectiveness	[6, 11, 13, 14]	Other factors affecting the internationalisation outcomes include leadership, incentives, resource inputs and policy-practice alignment, as well as structure and international-resource constraints in Shandong.
Infrastructure and institutional resources	[12, 15, 16]	The university capacity and educational outcomes are related to the facilities, institutional support and efficient resource allocation.
International student mobility and exchange	[17 - 20]	Internationalisation-at-home, university attractiveness and student mobility and global competence are impacted by scholarships, recruitment, mobility programmes.

Strong publication impact and innovation performance have consistently been linked to international engagement in research-collaboration studies [8 - 10] with deeper international engagement being linked to deeper institutional capacity, as demonstrated by Xu (2024) and Oleksiyenko et al. (2024) [11] and [12]. Guo et al. (2022) also note inequalities in access and the potential for the narrow definition of internationalisation as Westernisation [7].

The results of the statistics are well complemented by the implementation theme. Evidence from Shandong specifically highlights that international structures are not enough, as are educational resources, staffing and exchange [6] while the studies reviewed on English-medium instruction suggest that low level of incentive alignment and support can lead to a gap between the policy intention and practices within institutions [13, 14]. Resource-oriented studies have revealed the significance of efficient allocation of resources, facilities and institutional support for the development of universities and the learning process of the students [15, 16]. There are also studies of student-mobility which indicate that quality and sustainability must be priorities, but that scholarships, recruitment practices and international curricula and mobility can contribute to increasing institutional attractiveness and student global competence [17 - 20].

5. Discussion

The results show that the relationship between the three aspects of perceived university performance and university globalisation are all positive and consistent. The most significant zero-order correlation was with ISEP ($r = .657$), which makes sense, given that international partnerships and cross-border engagement by institutions are part of the institutional pillars of student mobility. Internationalisation research also shows that participation in mobility and in international curricula as well as contact with foreign participants help to develop students' international competence [19, 20].

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The results also shed light on the implementation. UGL was found to be a significant predictor for PIE, and suggested that the more globalised the University, the more effective the policy implementation system is reported. More importantly, the standardised coefficient of PIE was the highest (β = .459) in the Academic Performance model, compared to β = .385 for UGL, and in the Infrastructure Development model (β = .401), compared to β = .366 for UGL. International engagement therefore seems inadequate, alone; it is necessary to have leadership commitment, coordination, resources and monitoring in order to translate international aspirations into institutional achievements. This is similar to the qualitative findings related to implementation gaps and institutional capacity [6, 13, 14].

In contrast, UGL was a stronger predictor of ISEP (β = .457) than was PIE (β = .345). This becomes especially important if the international networks are not in place, but of course, an effective internal policy is still important. The levels of R^2 value for cross-sectional institutional-perception study were significant, where explained variance in AP was 56.4%.

In Shandong, the message to the university management is that internationalisation strategies need to go beyond the numbers of agreements, partners or international programmes. Institutional leadership is required to link work with global partnerships and research collaboration, staff development, and resource allocation, international student services, and measurable implementation goals. Investments in infrastructure must also be made to facilitate physical and digitally enabled internationalisation. The moderate construct suggests that although the perception of the construct is generally positive, there is still a lot of room for improvement.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the more globalised the higher education institution, the more effective the implementation of its policy, academic performance, infrastructure building and international student exchange programmes in Shandong. The seven hypotheses were confirmed and the qualitative results from 15 open access Chinese higher education studies generally corroborated the quantitative results. The findings highlight in particular the importance of good policy implementation to turn international orientation into institutional value. Accordingly, universities should be able to coordinate global engagement with the resources, staff capacity, and cross-departmental coordination, and to assess and evaluate systematically. As it is a cross-sectional type study of perception, cause and effect relationships cannot be determined. In addition to this, the qualitative aspect relied on secondary data, the purposive sampling prevented generalisation of the findings on a province-wide level. Longitudinal, multi-university or multilevel designs may be used in future studies and objective measures of performance could also be included in addition to stakeholder perceptions.

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Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire

The Influence of Globalisation in Higher Education on the Performance of Universities in Shandong Province, China

A.1 Participant Information and Instructions

This questionnaire is for a research project that explores how universities in Shandong Province, China, are affected by the influence of globalisation in higher education and how this impacts their performance. The study covers the following areas: globalisation of the university, effectiveness of policies, academic performance, infrastructure development and international student exchange programmes.

This survey is voluntary. The information that is provided will be used only for academic research purposes. All answers will be confidential and analysed in summary form. No personally identifying information will be required.

There is no one right or wrong answer. Respondents are asked to provide answers based on their knowledge and experience of their university for each question.

Estimated completion time: 7–10 minutes.

A.2 Screening Questions

S1. Are you currently employed by a higher-education institution located in Shandong Province?

☐ Yes

☐ No

S2. Have you worked at your current or another higher-education institution in Shandong Province for at least one year?

☐ Yes

☐ No

A.3 Section A: Respondent Profile

A1. Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other

A2. Age group

☐ Below 30 years

☐ 30–39 years

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☐ 40–49 years

☐ 50–59 years

☐ 60 years and above

A3. Current position

☐ Academic staff/Lecturer

☐ Professor/Associate Professor

☐ Department Head/Programme Coordinator

☐ Administrative staff

☐ International Office staff

☐ University management/leadership

☐ Research staff

☐ Other: _____

A4. Length of experience in higher education

☐ 1–5 years

☐ 6–10 years

☐ 11–15 years

☐ 16–20 years

☐ More than 20 years

A5. Type of university

☐ Public comprehensive university

☐ Science/Technology university

☐ Normal/Teacher-training university

☐ Finance/Economics/Business university

☐ Medical university

☐ Private university/college

☐ Other: _____

A6. Does your current role involve or provide knowledge of internationalisation activities, academic development, institutional policies, student exchange, or university administration?

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☐ Yes, substantially

☐ Yes, to some extent

☐ Very little

A.4 Response Scale for Sections B–F

For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree by selecting one response.

Scale	Response
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

A.5 Section B: University Globalisation Level

Construct Code: UGL

Item	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
UGL 1	My university has established active academic partnerships with universities and institutions outside China.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
UGL 2	International collaboration forms an important part of my university's institutional strategy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
UGL 3	Academic staff at my university are encouraged to participate in international research and scholarly collaboration.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
UGL 4	International perspectives are increasingly incorporated into teaching programmes and curricula at my university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
UGL 5	My university actively promotes international participation by students, faculty, and researchers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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UGL 6	Internationalisation activities are integrated across several academic and administrative areas of my university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

A.6 Section C: Policy Implementation Effectiveness

Construct Code: PIE

Item	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
PIE 1	Internationalisation policies at my university are clearly communicated to relevant staff.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PIE 2	University leadership demonstrates strong commitment to implementing internationalisation policies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PIE 3	Adequate financial and administrative resources are provided to implement internationalisation initiatives.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PIE 4	Academic and administrative departments coordinate effectively when implementing internationalisation policies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PIE 5	Progress in internationalisation initiatives is regularly monitored and evaluated.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PIE 6	Internationalisation policies are generally translated effectively into practical university activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

A.7 Section D: Academic Performance

Construct Code: AP

For the statements below, please consider developments at your university during approximately the **past three academic years**.

Item	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
AP1	The quality of academic teaching at my university has improved.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
AP2	The quality and visibility of research produced by my university have improved.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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AP3	Academic staff have increased their participation in high-quality research and scholarly activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
AP4	Collaboration with international scholars has strengthened the academic environment of my university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
AP5	My university has strengthened its academic reputation and competitiveness.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
AP6	The overall academic performance of my university has improved.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

A.8 Section E: Infrastructure Development

Construct Code: ID

Item	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
ID1	My university has improved teaching and learning facilities to support internationally oriented education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ID2	Research laboratories and research-support facilities have improved in recent years.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ID3	Digital infrastructure and online learning resources adequately support international academic activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ID4	The university provides suitable facilities and services to support international students and visiting scholars.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ID5	Institutional resources have been increasingly allocated to facilities that support internationalisation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ID6	Overall, my university's academic and institutional infrastructure has improved in recent years.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

A.9 Section F: International Student Exchange Programmes

Construct Code: ISEP

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Item	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
ISEP 1	My university provides adequate opportunities for students to participate in international exchange programmes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ISEP 2	The number and/or range of international student exchange opportunities has increased in recent years.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ISEP 3	My university has developed effective partnerships with overseas institutions for student mobility.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ISEP 4	Students receive adequate institutional support for participation in international exchange programmes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ISEP 5	My university effectively attracts and supports international students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ISEP 6	International student exchange contributes positively to the educational environment of my university.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

A.10 Summary of Measurement Constructs

Construct	Code	Number of Items
University Globalisation Level	UGL	6
Policy Implementation Effectiveness	PIE	6
Academic Performance	AP	6
Infrastructure Development	ID	6
International Student Exchange Programmes	ISEP	6
Total scale items		**30**

End of Questionnaire

Thank you for your participation and contribution to this study.

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