

# 162 Internationalisation and its impact on students in higher education: A scoping review of the literature 2011 - 2022

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## Research Domains

International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

## Abstract

Research about internationalisation of higher education has expanded rapidly in recent decades with few attempts to map available evidence. This scoping review synthesises articles about how internationalisation practices specifically impact students' outcomes and experiences. We identified 967 articles in 21 themes, spread across 493 journals and 27 disciplines. Of these, only 233 (22.8%) were categorised as 'designed to highlight impacts on students'. We characterise research as scattered and primarily descriptive, with limited efforts to build on previous research. However, we have synthesised five key principles that underpin practice with the most demonstrable impact on students: (1) embedding internationalisation holistically across the institution; (2) centring inclusion and connection; (3) developing active and creative learning approaches; (4) providing opportunities for reflection and personal connection; and (5) explicitly scaffolding intercultural skills. At SRHE, we call for researchers to design more research that builds on this maturing subfield, centring evidence to inform critical practice.

## Full paper

Internationalisation is considered a disruptive force on the practices in global higher education (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016), commonly defined Knight (2004, p. 2) as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education'. This definition is purposefully vague, including 'comprehensive internationalisation' (Hudzik, 2015) efforts across teaching, research, and service operations. Due to this vagueness, scholars have argued that the ways institutions approach internationalisation are not systematic between and across sectors (Kehm & Teichler, 2007). This has led to a burgeoning area of research, where it is estimated that there are more than 2,300 published articles about internationalisation (Kuzhabekova et al., 2015), with over 200 articles published each year (Tight, 2021). However, most systematic reviews on this topic have been macro bibliometric analyses (e.g., Kuzhabekova et al., 2015; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022; Tight, 2021; Yemini & Sagie, 2016), meaning there is scope for developing a synthesis of existing knowledge for evidence-based internationalisation practices.

We have narrowed our focus specifically on how internationalisation impacts students, their outcomes, and their experiences. One reason is the exponential rise of international students over the last few decades (OECD, 2021), leading to growing scholarly interest in their experiences and associated supports. Another reason is that internationalisation is also positioned as a tool for supporting students 'at home', mainly through internationalising the curriculum (Leask, 2009) and pedagogies (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2021). Therefore, there are questions about whether existing scholarly publications can provide an evidence base for whether and how internationalisation demonstrably impacts students' learning and campus experiences.

We focused on two research questions:

1. How is the internationalisation of higher education being researched in relation to students' outcomes and experiences?
2. How and under what conditions does internationalisation make a demonstrable impact on higher education students?

We conducted a scoping review of global evidence about internationalisation and its demonstrable impact on students using the guidance of Arksey and O'Malley (2005), conceptualised as 'a process of summarizing a range of

evidence in order to convey the breadth and depth of a field' (Levac et al., 2010, p. 1). We identified 967 articles which met our exclusion and inclusion criteria, published between January 2011 and April 2022. Identified articles were sorted into three categories according to whether and how authors demonstrated impact on students' outcomes or experiences: demonstrable impact, reflected impact, and limited impact. We also outlined 21 thematic categories within existing evidence. In addition to mapping research on this topic, we also synthesised research findings to develop a "what works" understanding of five key principles of effective internationalisation, based on the approach undertaken by Evans (2013).

This review was the first to synthesise global evidence about internationalisation and how it impacts students in higher education. Our review outlines a prolific subfield with great quantities of research produced within a short timeframe and across disciplines. However, we also characterise the subfield as scattered rather than cohesive, with a tendency to be descriptive rather than provide demonstrable evidence for how internationalisation impacts on students' outcomes and experiences. While there is also extensive critical and conceptual literature offering richer and more nuanced insights, this is often divorced from empirical scholarship.

Yet, building on the analytical approach by Evans (2013), there is enough available evidence to identify five clear principles of successful internationalisation, as outlined in our findings. These provide guidance for practice by highlighting 'what works' in internationalisation:

1. Internationalisation should be purposefully (re-)designed and embedded through holistic campus approaches
2. Internationalisation efforts should centre inclusion and connection
3. Internationalised teaching should centre active and creative approaches
4. Internationalisation efforts should provide targeted opportunities for reflection and be made relevant to students' lives and futures
5. Internationalisation efforts should provide explicit scaffolding of international and intercultural skills

Internationalisation, therefore, should be holistically planned by institutions across domains of teaching, student support, extra-curricular activities, and (although this review did not include these in the discussion) policy, staff training, research, professional services, and administration. These findings are significant, considering our prior work has outlined that the vast majority of institutional strategies about internationalisation focus on research and international student recruitment, rather than issues of student experience, pedagogies, or curricula (Lomer et al., in press). Therefore, there is a need for strategic focus not just on what universities can gain from internationalisation (particularly in terms of research funding or impact and tuition fees), but also on what it *contributes* to the development of graduates with critical, ethical, and meaningful intercultural competencies and experiences.

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