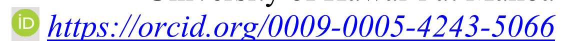
The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 24, No 2, 2025
http://iejcomparative.org

Navigating online horizons: Fully online experiences of adult returning students at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Vanessa Ghersi Cordano
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa

https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4243-5066

DOI: https://doi.org/10.70830/iejcp.2402.19865

This pilot study examined online undergraduate students' experiences in a fully online completion degree while fostering belonging. Using a qualitative approach, the study introduced the "Belonging-Centered Model for Distance Education". Drawing on the TIPEC framework and Sense of Belonging theory, the model explored three spheres: Academic Belonging, Dialogic Belonging and Place Belonging. The findings reveal that student success relies on administrative clarity, flexibility and culturally responsive learning, with belonging rooted in programs that honour Hawaiian and Pacific identities.

Keywords: online higher education; undergraduate students' experiences; nontraditional students; adult students; returning students; Hawaiʻi; Pacific regions

INTRODUCTION

This study amplified the voices of three Pacific Islander women who resumed their undergraduate studies through a fully online program. They are among the 36.8 million "Some College, No Credential" (SCNC) students in the US—individuals who disengaged from college, that is, stopped out, before earning a credential (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSCRC], 2024a; Ruffalo Noel Levitz & Lumina, 2019). Stopped-out students are those who do not enrol in postsecondary education for at least three consecutive terms, while returning students re-enrol part- or full-time after that period (NSCRC, 2024a). Many SCNC students are non-traditional, balancing full-time jobs, family responsibilities and financial constraints and need flexible, supportive pathways for re-entry (Ruffalo Noel Levitz & Lumina, 2019). In Hawaiʻi, where 94,187 SCNC students under 65 outnumber traditional undergraduates nearly two-to-one (NSCRC, 2024b), distance education emerges as a vital alternative.

As online learning has gained popularity, research on various online topics has flourished. Foundational studies examined the needs of non-traditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Rovai, 2003; Tinto, 1987) and the challenges they experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bay View Analytics, 2021). In Hawaiʻi and the Pacific, authors, such as Iding and Crosby (2013), Menchaca and Hoffman (2009) and Raturi (2022) have explored online learning, while Moleni (2020), Wolfgramm (2021) and Sayula (2024) have examined how Pacific students navigate higher education using cultural wealth and wayfinding.

While significant research exists on online education and, separately, Pacific students' values and needs, the studies remain fragmented, revealing a notable gap in integrated, comprehensive approaches. This qualitative study examined the experiences of fully online students from an undergraduate program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), exploring the strategies and challenges of female, adult, non-traditional, online and returning Pacific students as they navigate distance education while fostering a sense of belonging. The study is supported by the "Belonging-Centered Model for Distance Education", developed to contextualise the particular circumstances of distance education in the Pacific, where multicultural identities, connection to land and long-standing traditions, both ancestral and contemporary, shape the educational landscape. This framework integrates the multi-dimensional TIPEC model (Ali et al., 2018) with the theory of Sense of Belonging articulated through three spheres: 1) Academic Belonging, grounded in Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (1999) Community of Inquiry; 2) Dialogic Belonging, based on Bakhtin's Multivoiceness (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981); and 3) Place Belonging, informed by Tuck and McKenzie's (2015) Critical Place Inquiry.

The literature review outlines the proposed theoretical model and its foundations. It is followed by an exploration of online learning in higher education, with an emphasis on Hawai'i and the Pacific. Contextual information on the fully online undergraduate degree serves as the study's axis. Methodology, Findings and Discussion highlight students' voices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review comprises two sections: the guiding frameworks and the proposed integrated model. The latter explores how different factors affect Pacific Islanders' online experiences while observing similarities and differences with other regions.

Theoretical guiding frameworks

This study is grounded in Sense of Belonging, a psychological concept that emphasises the human need to feel safe, respected and "comfortably fit in as our authentic selves" (Vaccaro & Newman, 2022, p. 4). Belonging is a "universal motivation" (Vaccaro & Newman, 2022, p. 3), emerging from the dynamic interaction between individuals and their environments—a perspective with critical implications for online education.

Research on belonging in higher education highlights its complexity. Tinto (1987) emphasised academic and social integration as key to persistence, while Bean and Metzner (1985) argued that social integration is less central for non-traditional students. Rovai (2003) adapted these ideas to online learning, stressing the need for school connection and community building. Yet, these models neither define belonging clearly nor contextualise it within distance education for students in remote regions with unique cultural values and histories. Ellison and Braxton (2022) critique higher education's tendency to prioritise graduation over belonging, overlooking its long-term impacts, even in virtual spaces.

Belonging is perspectival, shaped by identities, oppression, and resistance (Ellison & Braxton, 2022). Intersectionality is central, linking belonging to gender, race, age and socioeconomic status (Williams & Udoh, 2022). Ultimately, belonging depends not only on students' identities but on institutions adopting holistic and intentional commitments to students' welfare (Ellison & Braxton, 2022).

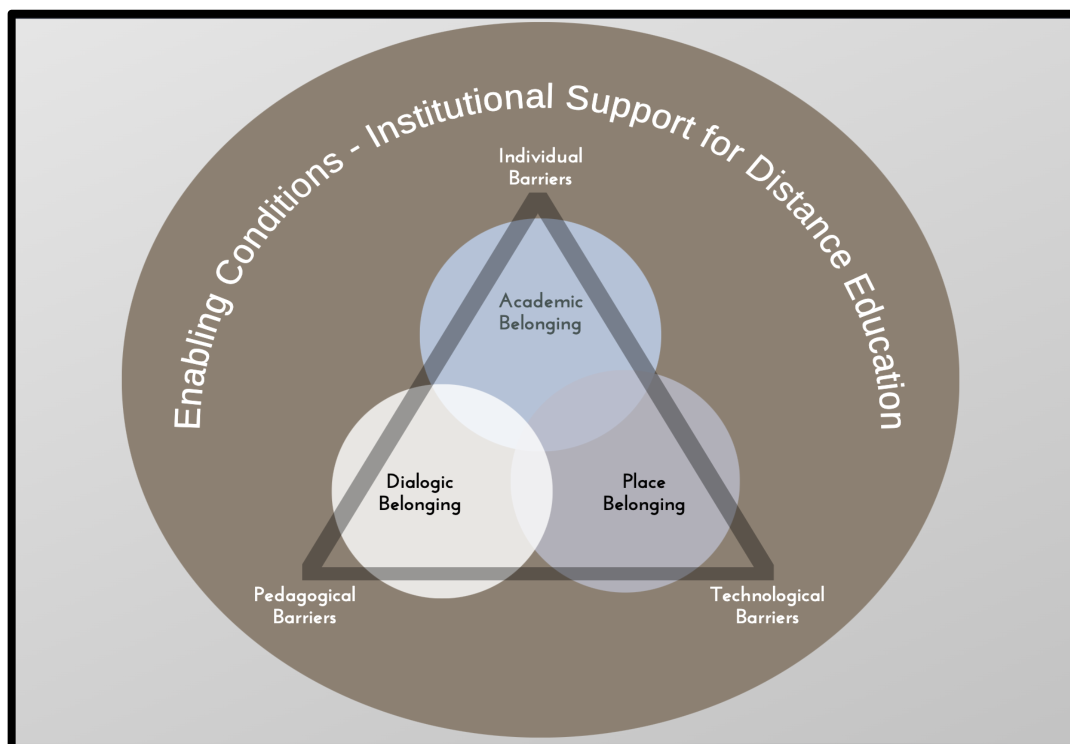
The COVID-19 emergency transition heightened the urgency of fostering a sense of belonging in distance education. Students, especially adults, lost traditional relational spaces, highlighting the need for intentional strategies (Van Heerden & Bharuthram, 2023). During the pandemic, in Tuvalu, a small atoll nation, solidarity grounded in cultural values supported students through isolation and technical barriers (Lagi, 2020).

Complementing this discussion, the TIPEC framework (Ali et al., 2018) identifies 68 barriers to e-learning, categorising them into four areas: technological—issues like infrastructure, technical support, bandwidth and connectivity; individual—factors specific to students; pedagogical—teaching methodologies and faculty/staff challenges; and enabling barriers—factors impacting the other three, such as administrative support, funding and regulations. While comprehensive, TIPEC overlooks belonging. This study addresses that gap, proposing a model that places belonging at the centre of students' experiences within multi-layered barriers.

The Belonging-Centered Model for Distance Education

Multi-level and intersecting factors shape distance education programs, yet research often remains fragmented. This study proposes a holistic model that is centred on belonging to address the complex realities of Pacific online learners. As shown in Figure 1, the "Belonging-Centered Model for Distance Education" places belonging at its heart, articulated through three dimensions: 1) Academic Belonging, 2) Dialogic Belonging, and 3) Place Belonging. These spheres are framed by a pyramid of barriers adapted from the TIPEC framework (Ali et al., 2018) to reflect the unique context of Pacific distance education. Surrounding this structure, enabling conditions reflect an institutional commitment to online student welfare and quality education. This framework highlights the intersections between these elements, acknowledging the complexity of students' realities that cannot be contained in rigid spaces. In the following sections, each component will be explained in detail.

Figure 1. A Belonging-Centered Model for Distance Education



Adapted from Ali, Uppal, and Gulliver's (2018) TIPEC framework; Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (1999) CoI model; Tuck and McKenzie's (2015) Critical Place Inquiry, Bakhtin's Multivoiceness (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981).

Academic belonging

The Academic Belonging sphere addresses Pacific online learners' connections to the virtual classroom, their academic journey and their evolving roles as knowledge co-creators. Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (1999) Community of Inquiry (CoI) model frames this sphere through three presences: cognitive, social and teaching. Cognitive presence fosters knowledge construction and critical thinking; social presence reduces isolation by building trust and group cohesion; and teaching presence supports students through course design, facilitation and feedback.

For Pacific students, the Academic Belonging sphere explains belonging to the class, a sense of pertinence toward the chosen path of studies, a sense of belonging to the new role as students and co-creators of knowledge, a sense of pride in their newly-found voice, a sense of success in their capabilities to navigate the system, and a sense of hope about their future possibilities. Therefore, belonging transcends the virtual classroom, making distance education less distant.

Dialogic belonging

Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia*, or *Multivoiceness*, offers a framework for understanding belonging in diverse educational spaces. It emphasises that culture and individuals hold multiple voices, breaking static identity conceptions (Quantz & O'Connor, 1988). Dialogue is fluid, social, historical and shaped by the interaction of diverse voices over time and space. Heteroglossia illuminates the need for educational spaces to foster varied cultural expressions and narratives, particularly in distance learning. In higher education, this aligns with Manning's (2018) concept of *multivocality*—recognising universities as spaces of competing messages and perspectives—and Veles' (2023) call for hybridity and openness in post-pandemic institutions. Bakhtin's *chronotope* further invites reflection on the relationship between time and space in online education, where asynchronous learning enables students across geographies to engage in shared, meaningful dialogues (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981).

In Pacific contexts, belonging is shaped by diverse identities, communal values and colonial histories. Cultural frameworks like *Tauhi vā* (Wolfgramm, 2021) and Moleni's (2020) wayfinding illustrate how Pacific students navigate academic spaces guided by relational care and ancestral knowledge. Ormond and Reynolds (2024) remind us that for Māori students, well-being is holistic, intertwining the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions. *Wairua* (spirit) reflects the duality of individuals, *whānau* refers to the extended family network, and *hinengaro* encompasses thoughts and feelings. This deep spirituality transcends individuals and connects Māori students to ancestral lands and traditions. Likewise, the Kanaka ʻŌiwi framework (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua et al., 2015) grounds belonging in Hawaiian values: *lāhui* (identity), *ea* (sovereignty), *kuleana* (obligations) and *pono* (justice). Yet Hawaiʻi's colonial tensions complicate belonging. Losch (2023) found that Native Hawaiians often felt less valued at UHM, while Kosaki (2016) warned against homogenising identities by referring to all residents of Hawaiʻi as "Hawaiians". In this landscape, dialogic belonging means creating learning environments that not only allow but also intentionally celebrate multiple voices—ensuring Pacific online learners bring their cultural perspectives into classroom discussions, reflective assignments and collaborative projects, ultimately transforming distance education into a space of connection, agency and cultural affirmation.

Place belonging

The place belonging sphere in this model highlights the centrality of land, heritage and cultural identity in shaping Pacific students' educational experiences. Rooted in Tuck and McKenzie's (2015) Critical Place Inquiry framework, this perspective recognises place as dynamic, shaped by settler colonialism, regional histories and acts of resistance. In Hawaiʻi and the Pacific, education cannot be separated from land, where Indigenous values of sovereignty, survival and knowledge-making are deeply tied to place.

The *Kanaka ʻŌiwi* framework further links land, identity, education and governance, as Goodyear-Kaʻōpua et al. (2015) remind us: "The health/breath of the people is directly linked to the health/breath of the land" (p. 10). In distance education, this connection must not be erased but intentionally nurtured. Decolonising online learning requires centring students' profound relationships to place, honouring their land-rooted knowledge and empowering them as co-creators in their learning journeys. Pacific students are not passive recipients of content but hold place-based wisdom, understood by Tuck and McKenzie (2015) as "sites of presence, futurity, imagination, power, and knowing" (p. xiv).

Individual barriers

This section examines how students' individual characteristics shape their online learning experiences. The TIPEC framework (Ali et al., 2018) identifies individual barriers such as motivation, preparedness, perceived usefulness of studies, family and economic support, technological anxiety, and isolation. As suggested by Williams and Udoh (2022), these factors often intersect with gender, age and ethnicity, requiring a nuanced understanding of student experiences. In the Pacific, cultural identity deeply influences belonging and persistence. Sayula (2024) found that Pacific students' motivations were tied to family and community expectations, often positioning education as a pathway for collective advancement. Moleni (2020) similarly emphasised wayfinding as a collective process, where family networks provide essential resources and guidance for navigating higher education.

These issues extend beyond the Pacific. In Peru, Indigenous students face parallel challenges shaped by rural isolation, systemic inequalities and cultural expectations. Johnson and Levitan (2021) studied 28 *Quechua* and *Asháninka* students from Andean and Amazonian communities, highlighting their collective resilience rooted in parents, elders and teachers—their *ayllu* or community nucleus. Forero (2023) further documented rural Peruvian women's struggles in preserving language and cultural traditions while pursuing education within a system marked by economic hardship and limited infrastructure. Comparing Pacific and Peruvian contexts underscores shared barriers in remote regions, where education requires navigating tensions between tradition, structural inequality and cultural resilience.

Pedagogical barriers

This section draws on the TIPEC framework (Ali et al., 2018), which encompasses teaching methodologies and faculty-related barriers. For adult, returning and non-traditional Pacific students, pedagogy shapes how they navigate online learning and foster their sense of belonging when positioned as central actors in their education.

Kaiwipunikauikawēkiu Lipe, a Native Hawaiian student at the University of Hawaiʻi, shared her struggles with cultural dissonance in what she considered a predominantly non-Hawaiian institution. Educational methods often failed to reflect her ways of being and learning. Lipe, Oliveira and Wright (2015) emphasised *moʻolelo*—genealogical oral communication—through practices like *mele* (chants), *ʻōlelo noʻeau* (proverbs), and storytelling. These could inform

distance education practices in Hawaiʻi and other regions with Indigenous or marginalised populations. Sayula (2024) similarly revealed that Pacific students valued curricula that reflected their cultural identities—featuring Pacific literature, maps, and storytelling—and deeply appreciated faculty and staff acting as "institutional agents" (p. 38), demonstrating genuine care for student success. Wolfgramm (2021) found that Pacific students in STEM leaned on social capital and trusted networks to navigate their academic journeys, reflecting communal cultural practices.

Meaningful interaction and active faculty presence are vital for student success. This need aligns with US federal requirements for Regular and Substantive Interaction (RSI), which mandates instructor-initiated academic engagement in distance education (US Department of Education, n.d.). Culturally responsive teaching and intentional design enrich online education, fostering a sense of belonging while meeting institutional quality standards.

Technological barriers

This section, drawing on the TIPEC framework (Ali et al., 2018), examines institutional technological readiness, including infrastructure, network capacity, e-learning platforms and technical support. It raises critical questions about how institutions facilitate distance education for Pacific students in remote areas and about how technological support affects their navigation of the system and sense of belonging.

UNESCO's (2024) "Pacific Technology and Education Report" emphasises that "technology is a tool, not a panacea" (p. vii). While digital tools expand educational access, limited and costly infrastructure undermines equity. Effective implementation requires context-driven solutions that are not necessarily advanced but impactful on student outcomes. Iding and Crosby (2013) describe significant disparities across Hawaiʻi and the Pacific Islands—especially in outer islands—where outdated computers, weak bandwidth and frequent outages deepen the digital divide. Similarly, Forero (2023), studying rural Peru, advocated for an expanded definition of infrastructure that incorporates digital and communication technologies as critical enablers of educational spaces. Whelan's (2008) analysis of the Pacific eLearning Observatory at the University of the South Pacific (USP) shows persistent ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) barriers across 12 member nations. Despite 70% access to tertiary education (which is relevant given that half of the 22,000 USP students are distance-based), underfunding, limited staffing, and weak infrastructure particularly affect rural distance learners. These findings call for coordinated national, local and institutional support.

Aligning technology with students' realities and integrating it with culturally responsive, student-centred pedagogy is essential. When used thoughtfully, technology can support inclusion and foster belonging rather than reinforce exclusion.

Enabling conditions: Institutional support for distance education

This section draws on the TIPEC framework from Ali et al. (2018), which highlights institutional conditions, including funding, administrative support, policies and ethical considerations, that shape all spheres of belonging. In this model, the institution's role in ensuring program quality and student success is central, making organisational culture a critical factor. Manning (2018) reminds us that universities are sites of contestation—shaped by multiple goals, competing definitions and diverse pressures. Yet, it is this very complexity that sustains them. Veles (2022) calls attention to the "Third Space" emerging in higher education's post-pandemic, highly technological reality. In this space, professional identities shift, power

tensions emerge, and diversity must be repositioned as essential for partnership-building and new knowledge creation. Grounding this concept in the Pacific, Moore (2023) invokes the Oceanic metaphor of *vā/vā/wā*, the relational "space between" that holds all entities in unity (p. 52). Through the Hawaiian practice of *pāʻina*—a shared meal where everyone contributes and listens to each other's stories—Moore illustrates a dialogic, ethical space that erases insider–outsider binaries and affirms each participant's value.

Institutions must, therefore, be defined by their intentional pursuit of quality and culturally responsive education, anchoring a true commitment to student welfare as the foundation for belonging (Ellison & Braxton, 2022). Baice (2023) cautions against reducing equity to vague ideals like "equity for all" (p. 11), which positions all students as having equal opportunities while masking systemic inequalities and framing Pacific learners through deficit lenses. Instead, she advocates for the "unequal treatment of unequals" (p. 12), recognising that meaningful support must be responsive to the distinct needs and lived experiences of Pacific students. Quality assessment should likewise move beyond rigid accountability measures and be embraced as a process of continuous improvement, ensuring programs align with students' cultural contexts and realities (Menchaca & Hoffman, 2009). Online students, particularly in the Pacific region, deserve programs that not only meet federal standards but also honour the diverse knowledge systems and identities they bring to higher education.

Moleni (2020) recommended that institutions actively engage Pacific communities in dialogue to facilitate students' wayfinding trajectories in higher education. Iding and Crosby (2013) proposed building leadership structures between universities and Indigenous communities to collaboratively support students, celebrating Pacific experiences rather than viewing students through deficit lenses. Sayula (2024) warned that institutional practices often led Pacific students to feel invisible or objectified, treated as enrolment numbers rather than individuals. To counteract this, Sayula called for faculty and staff development in cultural competency, along with fair compensation for efforts supporting minority students. Ultimately, institutions must ask themselves: How are we facilitating Pacific students' journeys toward success in distance education? What institutional structures are shaping or hindering their sense of belonging? And what future for distance education are we choosing to build?

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Between 2022 and 2023, UHM enrolled 14,198 undergraduate students, with nearly half (46.1%) exclusively enrolled in online courses. The majority of these online students (87.4%) were residents of Hawaiʻi, with smaller percentages from other US states (12.1%) and international locations (0.6%) (College Tuition Compare, 2023). This pilot study focuses on a fully online, asynchronous degree-completion program offered by the College of Social Sciences at UHM. Designed for students who have already completed their first two years of general coursework, this program provides a flexible pathway for returning, non-traditional and adult learners. Its five-week accelerated format allows students to concentrate on one course at a time, while its interdisciplinary curriculum explores issues related to Pacific lands, waters, cultures and communities, reflecting the university's mission to become a Native Hawaiian Place of Learning and leveraging its location in the Pacific region.

The program maintains a small enrolment, supporting close-knit learning environments and individualised pathways to completion. During Spring 2024, it served 21 active students, had six graduates and recorded 12 non-persisters (Table 1).

Table 1: Program's profile report 1

General enrolment information			
Criteria (students)	**%**	**Participants**	**Additional notes**
21 Active	53.8	2	● 39 students enrolled between 2020-2024-01. ● 3 participants in this pilot study.
12 Non-persisters	30.7	1	
6 Graduated	15.3		
Gender Enrolment			
Female	60		● The 3 participants of this pilot study were females.
Male	40	0	
Age Distribution			
20-25	14.3		● 46-50 age group with more active students ● 43.5 average age of active students ● 69 maximum age of active students ● 22 minimum age of active students ● 61.9% of active students older than 40 years ● 38.09% of active students younger than 40 years old
26-30	4.8		
31-35	9.5		
36-40	9.5		
41-45	14.3	1	
46-50	19	1	
51-55	4.8		
56-60	14.3	1	
61-65	0		
66-70	9.5		

Table 2: Program's profile report 2

Geographic location enrolment			
Criteria	**%**	**Participants**	**Additional notes**
Hawai'i	80	2	● *CFA status: (Compact of Free Association/Palau): U.S. special relationship with the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federal States of Micronesia, Palau, Pacific Island district, commonwealth territory, or insular jurisdiction, state or nation.
US Mainland	13.3		
US National/CFAS*	5	1	
International	1.7		
Race & ethnicity enrolment			
White	38.9	0	● *Native Hawaiian or Part Hawaiian. ● **Asian, including Filipino, Vietnamese and Thai.
Native Hawaiian*/ Pacific Islander	35.2	1	
Multiracial	20.4	2	
Asian**	5.6	0	
Credit hours enrolment			
Part-time	76.7	1	● Full-time students are students enrolled in at least 12 credit hours or more. ● Part-time students are defined as students enrolled in less than 12 credit hours. ● 2 participants of the pilot study were full-time students during 2023, and 1 was a part-time student.
Full-time	23.3	2	

Tables 1 & 2: Information gathered in March 2024 via advising tools supporting online learners in the College of Social Sciences.

One of the three participants in this study stopped out during the research period and was later included in the non-persisters group. The program's 60% female enrolment was reflected in this study's all-female participant sample, aged between 40 and 57 years (Table 1). The majority (80%) reside in Hawaiʻi, represented by two participants (Table 2). Racial and ethnic composition includes 38.9% white, 35.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1 participant), 20.4% multiracial (2 participants), and 5.6% Asian (Table 2). Although 76.7% of students are enrolled part-time, two of the three participants were full-time, revealing different enrolment choices within the cohort (Table 2).

METHODS

This IRB-approved pilot study was conducted as part of a qualitative research course in Fall 2023 to inform a larger doctoral project. Its purpose was to test feasibility, refine the research design and anticipate potential challenges. The unit of analysis was a fully online, asynchronous undergraduate degree-completion program offered by the College of Social Sciences at the UHM, selected for its distinctive characteristics serving non-traditional adult learners across the Pacific region. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit three online students from the program, all of whom had recently participated in an outreach activity. The final selection was based on availability. Although additional participants could have been invited, the depth of these three women's experiences provided rich insights.

Participants signed informed consent forms, and I assigned them pseudonyms—Grace, Lagi, and Faith—to protect their privacy and honour their fortitude. Semi-structured Zoom interviews were the primary data collection method, guided by 30 open-ended questions exploring motivations, challenges and online learning experiences. Examples included: What aspects of the program do you like most? What motivates you to persist? What challenges have you faced? Interviews lasted about one hour, were audio-recorded using Otter.ai and transcribed. Participants reviewed transcripts for accuracy. Additional data included enrolment, attrition and graduation records, as well as institutional reports. A demographic survey offered context to their experiences (Table 3). This study addressed two questions: Q1. What factors influence Pacific Islander online students' participation in the degree program? Q2. How do online students' integration experiences shape their sense of belonging?

I analysed the data using an abductive approach (Bloomberg, 2022), balancing inductive exploration with deductive guidance from the proposed model. As Stake (1995) noted, this involves observing and interpreting meaning as it evolves. The TIPEC framework supported the categorisation of barriers, while the academic, dialogic and place-belonging spheres informed the interpretation of emotional and personal connections. Manual coding in Word and Excel followed three levels: (1) in vivo coding using highlights to identify shared participant language; (2) dramaturgical coding (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018), capturing objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, emotions and subtext; and (3) a priori coding, mapping student experiences onto theoretical concepts.

To ensure trustworthiness, defined as the "truthfulness of your findings and conclusions based on maximum opportunity to hear participants' voices in a particular context" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 192), I used multiple strategies. These included a reflexive journal, member checking, triangulation of data sources and theory, peer debriefing, simultaneous data collection and analysis, thick description and an audit trail.

While the small, all-female sample limits transferability, the study prioritised depth to honour participants' voices and offers context-rich insights supported by multiple trustworthiness strategies.

Table 3. Participant characteristics

Characteristics	Grace	Lagi	Faith
Age group	56-60	46-50	41-45
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Race/ethnicity	Multiracial	Pacific Islander	Multiracial
Geographic location	Hawaiʻi	Compact of Free Association status (CFA)	Hawaiʻi
Marital status	Married	Married	Single
Dependent children	Non-dependent	Dependent	Dependent
University enrollment	PT	FT	FT
Previous academic background	Some college with credential: AA	Some college, no credential	Some college with credential: AA
Work status	FT	FT	PT
Economic status of household	Medium-income tier	Medium-income tier	Lower-income tier

Note: PT: Part-time. FT: Full-time.

FINDINGS

The findings are organised into two sections, corresponding to each research question and connected to an emerging theme.

Ability of online students to participate in the degree program

The three participants, Grace, Faith, and Lagi, brought unique life experiences shaped by personal, professional and cultural contexts. Grace, living in Oʻahu, worked full-time for a nonprofit supporting Pacific communities, making in-person classes impossible. Secretly pursuing her degree, she planned to surprise her family with her accomplishment. Faith, a single mother in rural Kauaʻi, balanced caregiving, part-time jobs and a desire for a stable future. Lagi, a Native Pacific Islander in Micronesia, followed in her educator parents' footsteps and worked in a non-governmental organisation focused on Indigenous learning recovery. Despite their varied backgrounds, all three exemplified resilience, integrating their studies into their demanding lives.

Returning to school after 17 to 25 years was transformative. Motherhood and early academic struggles had delayed their education, but the pandemic unexpectedly prepared them for online learning. They became comfortable with digital tools like Google Drive and video conferencing. As Grace noted, "The pandemic happened, and everybody was going online." The decision to return was also deeply personal. Grace and Lagi sought career advancement, while Faith hoped a degree would provide better job opportunities and allow her to give back to her Hawaiian community.

Family support varied. Lagi's family ensured quiet study hours and reminded her to stay on track. Faith, as a single mother and caregiver, had fewer resources and often struggled to balance responsibilities. She admitted, "I go all over the place sometimes . . . I have a lot going on."

Each participant encountered the online program differently. Grace initially aimed for an associate degree but was encouraged by an advisor to continue to a bachelor's degree. Lagi's colleagues, many of whom are UHM alums, supported her decision, noting her passion for

education. She recalled, “I felt out of place not having a degree”. Faith, recognising UHM’s strong reputation, valued how “if you tell them you graduated from UH, it’s automatic”, signalling employment opportunities. Distance education presented a rare opportunity, as all three women saw this as possibly their last chance to achieve their academic goals.

While technology was already part of their lives, navigating university systems proved challenging. Registering for courses and using unfamiliar platforms felt overwhelming. One participant described feeling like she was “just floating around for a second”. However, a responsive advisor and a supportive college unit helped ease the transition.

Adapting to online learning required both logistical and technical adjustments. Although they had basic resources, they needed additional tools such as printers, second monitors and microphones. Lagi and Faith frequently experienced power outages and unstable internet, forcing them to print materials in advance. Grace sought IT assistance to install applications like FlipGrid and Padlet. Faith struggled with being recorded—a requirement for many courses—but her ethnic studies classes introduced her to presentation theory, helping her overcome this fear.

Academic challenges also emerged, particularly in reading and writing. The complexity and volume of scholarly articles made them question their ability to persist. However, engaging discussions with peers facilitated their experience. Faith described how the content “keeps surprising me . . . I’ve been turned into an activist!” The program’s compressed five-week format sparked mixed opinions—Grace and Faith valued its focus, while Lagi preferred the 16-week structure, which allowed deeper reflection. Two participants had to enrol full-time to receive financial aid, intensifying their workload. Despite these challenges, the program’s interdisciplinary nature stood out, broadening their perspectives. Faith remarked, “That’s going to be the key to all of this, to a better world—everybody from all different angles”.

Time zone differences added another layer of difficulty. Lagi, balancing her studies from Micronesia, shared, “My Monday is your Sunday; I dedicate at least half of it to schoolwork”. Assignments due during the week sometimes conflicted with her schedule, but she remained focused on learning over grades.

Instructor support played a crucial role in their experiences. However, faculty responsiveness and course design varied. Some instructors maintained open communication, while others left students feeling directionless. Grace explained, “Some are just throwing the class onto the student: whatever you get out of it and however you want to define it”. Grace strongly claimed, "You still direct me!” This inconsistency underscored the need for clearer instructional expectations in online education.

Their cultural and professional identities were deeply connected to their academic pursuits, with the program’s emphasis on Pacific knowledge giving their studies a clear sense of purpose. Grace found the coursework “interesting and relevant to [her] work”. Lagi took pride in encouraging her daughter to study at UHM, where their Pacific heritage was valued: “This part of yourself that you’ve been distancing from . . . it’s all available at UH”. For Faith, education was both personal and place-based, shaped by two certainties: setting an example for her children and giving back to Kauaʻi. Aware of her island’s economic struggles, she aspired to teach Hawaiian *keiki* (children), combining her degree, a Hawaiian Studies Certificate, her fluency in Hawaiian and a parallel pursuit of a Hawaiian Music Certificate.

These experiences reveal the complexity of distance education for multifaceted adult learners. Their success relied on administrative clarity, flexibility and culturally relevant learning

experiences that accommodated their digital literacy levels, time constraints, internet access and academic needs.

Integration experiences and sense of belonging

The results from this section intend to dig deeper into the three spheres of sense of belonging; therefore, the findings are organised accordingly.

Academic belonging

The academic belonging sphere captures students' connection to course content, classmates and instructors as they evolve into active knowledge creators. Though their academic community was primarily virtual, culturally relevant coursework strengthened engagement. Grace shared how her learning reshaped her work with Pacific youth: "I've seen a correlation . . . history I wasn't aware of, which makes me look at things from a different perspective". Similarly, Lagi found the program deeply affirming: "That's what keeps me going . . . that's what I've wanted to learn since I was a child . . . it connects". For both, academic belonging was not just about coursework; it reflected their identities, aspirations and sense of purpose.

In terms of peer interaction, participants identified discussion forums as the main space for academic inquiry. Tools like Flip and Padlet supported expression, yet students did not engage in group work or practices grounded in Hawaiian or Pacific traditions. Many approached their studies pragmatically, focusing on degree completion, though they also missed the warmth of a traditional classroom. As Lagi admitted, "My main focus was just taking courses and getting a degree . . . I wasn't really worried about having the connections". Still, when challenges arose, connection proved essential. Grace leaned on a trusted classmate, and Lagi appreciated the familiarity built through the program's cohort-style rotation. While they valued community, they didn't engage in optional peer spaces, suggesting a need to rethink interaction design to reflect Pacific non-traditional students' relational values.

Teaching presence—essential for student success—was experienced unevenly. Students valued instructors who offered flexibility, clarity and understanding of their unique lives. Lagi described an impactful teaching strategy involving a shared document in which she reflected on her Pacific Islander identity and the course material. Her instructor's personalised feedback made her feel seen: "Writing everything down . . . how it applies to me, where I'm from—felt meaningful. Having at least one person paying attention and looking at it made a big difference". These moments illustrate the power of culturally responsive teaching and highlight the need for consistent, relational instructional approaches in online learning.

Dialogic belonging

Dialogic belonging highlights the role of diverse voices and reciprocal exchanges in fostering meaningful relationships in online spaces. Despite limited opportunities for connection, participants engaged through discussion forums, written responses, videos, online meetings and the cohort course structure. Their maturity and life experiences enabled them to approach interactions with empathy and openness. Lagi reflected, "I'm beginning to understand: this person, this is their experience, and this is where they're talking from". Grace emphasised, "That hint of experience, being around, that awareness has helped me through these classes". Faith valued the exposure to diverse perspectives, explaining, "We think we know, but we really don't because there are so many other ways of thinking . . . there's so much happening out there that we don't understand".

Beyond appreciating multiple perspectives, the Dialogic Sphere of Multivoiceness captures participants' transformation as their voices grow more confident. Their Hawaiian and Pacific identities, age and gender were not barriers but sources of strength. Lagi proudly saw herself contributing to education in Micronesia: "My sons are lucky to be in this age. I can see things that my parents both helped shape in the education system . . . I am being part of that change! Yes, yes, yes, and yes!".

Faith echoed this sense of empowerment and possibility, stating, "I did the family planning first; I did things a little bit backward, but I think I'm getting there . . . I'm not done yet!" Their experiences illustrate how multivoiceness in distance education fosters understanding, strengthens identity and inspires change within their communities and beyond.

Place belonging

For Pacific Islander students, land, heritage and cultural identity shape their sense of belonging and academic engagement. Grace found that her studies deepened her understanding of the broader impact of her work: "I know what we do; I didn't know why we do it . . . The water projects down in the Marshall Islands; I didn't realize they have got those issues". Education illuminated the cultural and environmental dimensions of her projects, reinforcing their significance. Faith, deeply attuned to her island's challenges, aspired to give back to her community. Studying in a program focused on Pacific issues, Hawaiian studies, and Hawaiian music reflected her connection to Hawaiian heritage, and she saw UHM's prestige as a gateway to working in Hawai'i: "It will allow me to work at home, in Hawai'i".

Lagi's academic journey was intertwined with her Pacific identity, her work and her cultural responsibilities. Frustrated by a Westernised education disconnected from her surroundings, she recalled: "Why do I have to learn about the capital of so and so when I don't know where this is?" Today, her work in Indigenous learning recovery fosters the same place-based knowledge she once lacked. After online coursework and Zoom meetings, she travels by boat to outer islands, supporting Indigenous elders in teaching children traditional practices. Life, work and education are inseparable for Lagi: "It all gets woven into what I'm doing throughout the region".

Adult students returning to higher education bring life experience, resilience and commitments to family and community, helping them navigate an often impersonal online environment. These women embody personal growth and empowerment, demonstrating that their contributions to their communities matter just as much as earning a degree. Higher education institutions must listen to their voices and ensure that online learning reflects their realities and supports their success.

DISCUSSION

This study presents a comprehensive framework that builds upon existing models to elucidate the complex realities of Pacific Islander online learners. For participation (RQ1), adapting TIPEC (Ali et al., 2018) maps how technological, individual and pedagogical barriers intersect with age, gender, race and socioeconomic status. Yet TIPEC overlooks emotional and cultural dimensions. Embedding TIPEC within a belonging model underscores the importance of purpose, voice and relationships in sustaining engagement.

For belonging (RQ2), the model diverges from linear integration frameworks, such as those of Tinto (1987) and Rovai (2003), which emphasise institutional assimilation or classroom interaction. Its three belonging spheres—academic, dialogic, and place-based—show how students create meaning through identity, community, and cultural continuity, often beyond

traditional structures. While Bean and Metzner (1985) downplay social integration for non-traditional learners, this study affirms that belonging remains central—redefined through Indigenous and Pacific lenses as land-rooted learning, culturally sustaining ties and dialogic empowerment in virtual spaces.

Building on CoI (Garrison et al., 1999), the academic belonging sphere offers a culturally grounded lens that redefines presence for Pacific non-traditional learners. Beyond CoI's triad—cognitive, social, teaching—this study reveals needs that are place-driven, historically rooted and culturally affirming. Cognitive presence deepened when Pacific identities were centred in coursework. Teaching presence proved critical when instructors offered relational, flexible and responsive feedback. Rather than general notions of community, belonging here reflects embodied histories, purposeful pragmatism and relational validation—expanding CoI through Pacific epistemologies.

Dialogic belonging emerged as participants' voices grew more confident and culturally grounded. While these shifts reflect Bakhtin's multivoiceness (Quantz & O'Connor, 1988), asynchronous formats often yield sequential monologues rather than true dialogue, thereby revealing tension with Bakhtin's chronotope, in which meaning arises through shared time and space. Still, dialogic learning is possible through intentional design that fosters responsiveness and narrative continuity, whether asynchronous or supported by complementary synchronous elements. Embedding Pacific epistemologies requires community-building and culturally grounded presence. Timely feedback and regular interaction remain essential to realising multivoiceness.

Place belonging emphasises how land, heritage and culture shape educational purpose and epistemologies (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). For Faith, this was deeply affective, anchored in giving back and sustaining Hawaiʻi's culture. Her goals were entwined with land, family and future. For Lagi, place belonging was epistemological: her frustration with disconnected curricula fueled efforts to critique dominant paradigms and revive Indigenous knowledge across outer islands. These contrasts show that place belonging is neither uniform nor static. In both cases, distance education became a vehicle for rooted, community-responsive learning across time and space as students navigated their cultural responsibilities and educational goals not only within physical geographies but also across generational knowledge systems and digital platforms.

This pilot study has limitations, including a small, all-female sample, the absence of Native Hawaiian and male voices, and the lack of faculty or administrative perspectives. While not generalisable, the findings offer transferable insights into how institutional support, culture and relational well-being can shape online learning. Notably, even with only one Native Pacific Islander, Hawaiian and Pacific values emerged as central. The model reframes success as multidimensional and culturally anchored, but its broader applicability remains to be tested.

In Peru, belonging and multivoiceness face distinct constraints. Johnson and Levitan (2021) describe how rural students struggled when forced to use Spanish instead of *Quechua* or *Asháninka*, compounding linguistic, gendered and class-based exclusions. Forero (2023) highlights the fragility of bilingual education, as 45 Indigenous languages confront systemic inequities. These examples show that place and voice are not abstract ideals but lived experiences, shaped by marginalisation, historical violence and structural barriers that limit expression and connection.

Applying this model elsewhere requires interrogating local meanings of place: what histories, values and communication patterns shape distance learning in that setting? Multivoiceness must also be re-examined in contexts where colonial, gendered, or economic hierarchies silence non-dominant voices. Future research should explore these dynamics to refine the model and support more inclusive online education systems.

Actionable Recommendations:

1. *Bridge the Digital and Cultural Access Divide*: Prioritise accessible, culturally relevant tools and materials that reflect students' lived realities, not just advanced infrastructure.
2. *Design for Cultural and Place-Based Relevance*: Embed Pacific knowledge systems, traditions and land-rooted epistemologies into course content, design and learning outcomes.
3. *Identify and Support Students Proactively*: Use learner profiles and early alert systems to identify barriers, provide mentorship and nurture relational well-being throughout the program.
4. *Foster Belonging through Institutional Integration*: Strengthen students' institutional ties via online orientations, peer networks and rituals that reflect Pacific values of community and reciprocity.
5. *Create Meaningful Dialogic Engagement Channels*: Ensure reciprocal, ongoing communication among students, faculty, and administration through structured, culturally attuned mechanisms.
6. *Train Faculty in Culturally Responsive and Dialogic Pedagogies*: Equip faculty to facilitate multivoiced, inclusive learning through Pacific-centred epistemologies and relational teaching practices.
7. *Diversify Course Formats to Reflect Pacific Learning Styles*: Incorporate multimodal and synchronous components, project-based learning, and storytelling formats that honour cultural variation and learner voice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study positions belonging as central to Pacific adult online learners, offering a holistic model rooted in lived experience. It carries theoretical, institutional and pedagogical implications: distance education must support connection and growth; institutions must centre student welfare; and pedagogy must prioritise equity, clarity and cultural relevance. Ultimately, fostering belonging requires intentional strategies that empower learners and nurture meaningful, relational engagement in culturally grounded online spaces.

REFERENCES

Ali, S., Uppal, M. A., & Gulliver, S. R. (2018). A conceptual framework highlighting e-learning implementation barriers. *Information Technology & People*, *31*(1), 156–180. https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-10-2016-0246

Baice, T. (2023). Su'esu'e manogi: Conceptualising the fragrances of equity in higher education. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives,* 22(2), 5–20.

Bakhtin, M. M., & Holquist, M. (1981). *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1st ed.). University of Texas Press.

Bay View Analytics. (2021). *Pandemic-era report card: Students, faculty and administrators reflect upon the academic year.* https://www.bayviewanalytics.com/reports/pulse/pandemic-era-reportcard.pdf

Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*, *55*(4), 485–540. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543055004485

Bloomberg, L. D. (2022). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

College Tuition Compare. (2023, September 17). *University of Hawaii at Manoa student population*. https://www.collegetuitioncompare.com/edu/141574/university-of-hawaii-at-manoa/enrollment/#online-block

Ellison, B., & Braxton, J. M. (2022). Reviewing, theorizing, and looking ahead: The relationship between college students' sense of belonging and persistence. In E. M. Bentrim & G. Henning (Eds.), *The impact of a sense of belonging in college: Implications for student persistence, retention, and success* (pp. 35-56). Stylus Publishing, LLC. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003447870

Forero, M. (2023). *Rural education in Peru: A study of its performance, physical and digital infrastructure, gender, linguistic, and social and cultural development* (Publication No. 106) [Master Thesis, Rollins College]. https://scholarship.rollins.edu/mls/106

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (1999). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, *2*(2), 87–105.

Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, N., Oliveira, K.-A. R. K. N., & Wright, E. K. (2015). Reproducing the ropes of resistance: Hawaiian studies methodologies. In N. Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, K.-A. R. K. N. Oliveira, & E. K. Wright (Eds.), *Kanaka 'Ōiwi methodologies: Navigating our past and future* (pp. 1). University of Hawaiʻi Press. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824855857.003.0001

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). Maximizing trustworthiness. In *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings* (pp. 190–220). Guilford Press.

Iding, M., & Crosby, M. E. (2013). Going beyond access: On-line education in Hawaii and the Pacific Islands. *Education and Information Technologies*, *18*(2), 245–252. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-012-9226-8

Johnson, A., & Levital, M. (2021). Rural Indigenous students in Peruvian urban higher education: Interweaving ecological systems of coloniality, community, barriers, and opportunities. *Journal of Higher Education Studies*, 12(3), 45–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2021.1974383

Kosaki, K. (2016). *Supporting Pacific islander student identity in higher education* [Master Thesis, Oregon State University]. Oregon State University. https://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/2514np85s

Lagi, R. K. (2020). COVID-19: Resilient education in the islands. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 39(7), 1367–1371. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1825347

Lipe, K., Oliveira, K.-A. R. K. N., & Wright, E. K. (2015). Moʻolelo for transformative leadership: Lessons from engaged practice. In N. Goodyear-Kaʻōpua, K.-A. R. K. N. Oliveira, & E. K. Wright (Eds.), *Kanaka 'Ōiwi methodologies: Navigating our past and*

future (pp. 53–71). University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824857516-007

Losch, T. K. C. (2023). *An examination of native Hawaiian belonging at Leeward Community College: Applying the culturally engaging campus environments model to an aspiring model Indigenous-serving institution* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Hawaii at Mānoa]. University of Hawaii at Mānoa. https://hdl.handle.net/10125/106086

Manning, K. (2018). *Organizational theory in higher education (2nd ed)*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315618357

Menchaca, M. P., & Hoffman, E. S. (2009). Planning for evaluation in online learning: University of Hawaii case study. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 6(8), 45. https://doi.org/10.19030/tlc.v6i8.1113

Moleni, K. (2020). *Pacific islanders: Wayfinding in higher education* (Publication No. 28315274) [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Utah]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Moore, M. (2023). Pā'ina: Using the metaphor of a potluck to explore the vā/wā in Indigenous Pacific knowledge systems. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives,* 22(2), 48–60. https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/IEJ/article/view/17731

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2024a). *Some college, no credential: A 2024 snapshot of the Nation and the States.* https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/SCNCReport2024.pdf

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2024b). *Some college, no credential student: A 2024 snapshot of the Nation and the States-National/State Data* (2024 Report) [Data set, XLSX file]. https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/

Ormond, A., & Reynolds, M. (2024). Quality education, connection and wellbeing: Māori tertiary students' accounts. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 23(2), 141–153. https://doi.org/10.70830/iejcp.2302.20345

Quantz, R. A., & O'Connor, T. W. (1988). Writing critical ethnography: Dialogue, multivoicedness, and carnival in cultural texts. *Educational Theory*, *38*(1), 95–109. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1988.00095.x

Raturi, S. (2022). Learners' preferences versus instructors' beliefs in technology-enabled learning environments in Pacific Island countries: Are we listening to the learners? *Journal of Computers in Education*, 9(3), 403–426. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40692-021-00208-6

Rovai, A. P. (2003). In search of higher persistence rates in distance education online programs. *The internet and higher education*, *6*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516(02)00158-6

Ruffalo Noel Levitz & Lumina. (2019). *2019 National adult student satisfaction and priorities report*. www.RuffaloNL.com/AdultStudent

Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2018). *Qualitative research: Analyzing Life*. SAGE Publications.

Sayula, S. (2024). *Understanding Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander Students' Ways of Knowing and Belonging* (Publication No. 31143013) [Master thesis, University of California]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press.

Tuck, E., & McKenzie, M. (2015). *Place in research : Theory, methodology, and methods*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

UNESCO. (2024). *Global education monitoring report 2024: Pacific: Technology in education – A tool on whose terms?* https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/2024pacific

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Electronic Code of Federal Regulations: Title 34 - Education, Part 600 - Institutional eligibility under the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended.* https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-VI/part-600#p-600.2(Distance%20education)

Vaccaro, A., & Newman, B. M. (2022). Chapter 1: Theoretical foundations for sense of belonging in college. In E. M. Bentrim, & G. W. Henning (Eds.), *The impact of a sense of belonging in college: Implications for student persistence, retention, and success* (1st ed., pp. 3–20). Stylus Publishing, LLC. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003447870

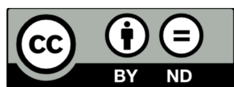
Van Heerden, M., & Bharuthram, S. (2023). 'It does not feel like I am a university student': Considering the impact of online learning on students' sense of belonging in a 'post pandemic' academic literacy module. *Perspectives in Education*, 41(3), 95–106. https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v41i3.6780

Veles, N. (2023). *University third space environments and their theoretical and conceptual antecedents introduction: Case Studies of intercultural and cross-boundary collaboration*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003259527

Whelan, R. (2008). Use of ICT in education in the South Pacific: Findings of the Pacific eLearning observatory. *Distance Education*, *29*(1), 53–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587910802004845

Williams, M. S. & Udoh, E. E. (2022). Connecting gender and belonging: An intersectional approach. In E. M. Bentrim & G. Henning (Eds.), *The impact of a sense of belonging in college: Implications for student persistence, retention, and success* (1st ed., pp. 84–91). Stylus Publishing, LLC. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003447870

Wolfgramm, M. V. (2021). *The influence of community cultural wealth and Tauhi Vā on the navigation of Pacific Islanders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)* (Publication No. 28415448) [Doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University and San Diego State University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.



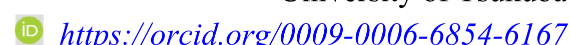
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Authors and readers are free to copy, display and distribute this article with no changes, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives (IEJ: CP), and the same license applies. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at. The IEJ: CP is published by the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (formerly ANZCIES) and Sydney Open Access Journals at the University of Sydney. Articles are indexed in ERIC, Scimago Journal (SJR)Ranking / SCOPUS. The IEJ:CP is a member of the Free Journal Network: Join the IEJ: CP and OCIES Facebook community at Oceania Comparative and International Education Society, and Twitter: @OceaniaCIES

The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 24, No 2, 2025
http://iejcomparative.org

Teachers' strategies for English-medium instruction in International Baccalaureate schools: An analysis of the diploma programme in Japan

Mitsuhiro Kimura
Okayama University of Science

https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7834-407X
Shizuko Umetsu
University of Tsukuba

https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6854-6167

DOI: https://doi.org/10.70830/iejcp.2402.21026

The implementation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) is expanding globally. In Japan, the number of schools offering the IB has increased from 27 in 2014 to 122 in 2025, including public and private schools. The Dual Language Diploma Programme (DLDP) of the International Baccalaureate Organization, promoted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan, requires at least two of the six courses to be taught in English, with the remaining courses taught in Japanese. This study explores the English-medium instruction (EMI) in DLDP high schools in Japan. Seventeen teachers from three public schools offering the programme within the Japanese educational framework were interviewed to qualitatively examine the state of English instruction in Japan, and the data were analysed using Williams and Moser's three-step coding. Teachers reported using English and Japanese flexibly to meet their students' needs and adjusting instructional emphasis based on subject-specific characteristics. Notably, mathematics and science instruction prioritised computational processes, thereby expediting calculations when conducted in Japanese. A gradual transition from Japanese to English, beginning with basic content in Japanese, was shown to be effective for student learning. Teachers' narratives revealed that assessment demands and the socio-cultural relevance of each subject influence subject learning in English. This study is among the first to explore long-term EMI practice through subject-specific teacher perspectives in Japan. The findings offer valuable information and novel insights for schools implementing second-language instruction, particularly in non-English-speaking contexts.

Keywords: second language; English-medium instruction; teacher strategy; International Baccalaureate; diploma programme; secondary education

INTRODUCTION

The International Baccalaureate (IB) was established in Switzerland in 1968 with the aim of creating a standardised curriculum and expanding university access worldwide (International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], 2017). In Japan, the IB is currently being implemented in schools that serve students who have never been abroad.

Japan first recognised the IB in 1979. Initially, most authorised schools were international, but in the 2000s, some private schools also began seeking authorisation. In the 2010s, the focus shifted towards expanding the IB to cultivate global human capital. Supported by the Business Federation of Japan (Keidanren), the Japanese Cabinet officially adopted IB promotion as national policy in 2013. In response, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) established various initiatives, including the development of the Dual Language Diploma Programme (DLDP) in Japanese with the IBO (Umetsu, 2025). The introduction of the DLDP helped to gradually expand the number of public DLDP-approved schools in Japan. Currently, there are 21 such schools (Fujita, 2024). The DLDP requires that at least two of the six IB subject groups (language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, sciences, mathematics, and the arts) be taught in English. Subjects in mathematics and the arts, and language acquisition are typically offered in English (Kimura et al., 2024). This requirement has introduced English-medium instruction (EMI) into public high schools where Japanese is the primary language of instruction. Japanese high school teachers traditionally view themselves as subject specialists (Uno, 1961), and many may consider teaching English as the responsibility of the English department. The introduction of the DLDP could, therefore, be a major barrier for high school teachers who have always taught their subjects in Japanese. How, then, do Japanese public school teachers perceive teaching subjects in English, and how do they overcome the traditional expectation about teaching?

This study examines the implementation of EMI within the IB programme in Japanese secondary schools, focusing on its long-term application. In this study, "long-term EMI" refers to EMI implemented continuously across multiple academic years and subjects rather than short-term or unit-based interventions. Previous research on how English, as the language of instruction in Japan, has focused on higher education, with limited exploration of long-term practices at the elementary and secondary levels (Kimura et al., 2024). The DLDP, as a two-year curriculum, is a good example of a long-term EMI initiative.

This study addresses the following research question:

> *What strategies do EMI subject teachers apply in second-language and content teaching?*

This study is novel in that it presents teachers' insights from long-term EMI practice in secondary education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EMI in higher and secondary education

While much EMI research has focused on higher education, recent scholarship in comparative education has begun to address related issues in more diverse school and teacher contexts. For instance, Rodríguez et al. (2023) examined how teacher-preparation programmes in multilingual and multicultural settings form "pedagogical multicultural communities where language ideologies influence instructional strategy. Several journals have also published work on educational recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic (Chan, 2023), highlighting how teachers negotiate multilingual class realities and institutional policy. In parallel, Zhou et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study of an EMI course at an international school in China and reported that students and teachers employed strategic translanguaging practices to scaffold understanding and maintain classroom engagement. Together, these studies suggest that EMI practice in school or cross-cultural contexts is deeply intertwined with teacher identity, policy and language diversity. These studies also indicate that understanding long-term, subject-specific EMI (such as in IB/DLDP settings) requires attention to broader comparative and professional dimensions. Selzer and Gibson (2009) found that local Japanese students enrolled in EMI courses often struggled, ultimately dropping out of such courses and even university altogether. Further challenges include teachers' limited ability to use intelligible English (Tange, 2010), reduced quantity and depth of academic content (Chapple, 2015), and increased workload and difficulties providing feedback in a second language (Hawkes & Adamson, 2023). Borg (2015) presented quantitative and qualitative evidence of the gap between the required and actual English-language skills of EMI teachers, noting that implementing EMI is difficult even for very skilled instructors. One of the most frequently reported issues regarding EMI implementation is the role of other languages used in instruction. Studies show that the language used by teachers and students is not necessarily exclusively English (Borg, 2015). In most courses taught in English, the students' first language is often used alongside English, with significant variation across institutions and teachers (Galloway et al., 2017).

Regarding EMI research in secondary schools, Kimura et al. (2023) conducted a classroom analysis of IB mathematics in Japan. They found that approximately 40% of classroom discourse was in English and 60% in Japanese. They showed that in inquiry activities, particular consideration was given to reducing the load on students and teachers in processing instruction, interaction, and subject learning through a second language, using students' first language. Other studies, such as those by Yamazaki (2016) and Watanabe et al. (2019), examined EMI implementation in English classes in high schools. However, the studies were short-term interventions. Few studies have explored teachers' long-term experiences with EMI

Secondary schools differ significantly from tertiary education in terms of curriculum, teaching frequency and students' stage of development. The current study focused on long-term EMI practices in multiple subjects in secondary schools to reveal the nature of EMI practice. It aims to clarify the internal dynamics of EMI teaching in secondary schools from teachers' perspectives.

Language support for students' second language

Translanguaging facilitates students' production of content words and improves grammatical accuracy (Wang & Li, 2022). Similarly, using native language exemplars to explain more complex concepts can enhance students' professional vocabulary and motivation (Troedson & Dashwood, 2018). These findings underscore the value of incorporating students' native language to facilitate second-language acquisition and content learning.

The IB's approach to language

The IB recognises language as crucial to self-formation and identity. According to the IB document *Learning in a Language Other than Mother Tongue* (IBO, 2014), language promotes social interaction and cognitive growth, and linguistic diversity in classrooms fosters multilingualism and balanced language development, even when one language is more dominant.

Thus, the IB considers that learners in IB programmes in a language other than their mother tongue can become highly proficient and well-rounded multilingual speakers. By participating in language activities within the IB programme, students develop critical linguistic awareness, enabling them to use different languages effectively for the purpose and audience, and to gain insight into others' language choices (IBO, 2014). Li (2018) also emphasised that a learner's first language can be used as a mediating tool to create effective learning environments for second-language acquisition. Figure 1 outlines scaffolding methods to support students' learning in a non-native language.

Figure 1: Methods of scaffolding in second-language learning

- Visual aids
- Graphic organisers
- Demonstrations
- Dramatisation
- Small, well-structured collaborative groups
- Instructions and utterances tailored to learners' language levels

Source: IBO (2014).

The IBO (2014) states that activating students' understanding in their native language is necessary because of their different learning experiences and background knowledge. For these reasons, the IB envisions the use of multiple languages and, where appropriate, Japanese to stimulate students' understanding. Furthermore, scaffolding strategies help link subject-specific knowledge with students' existing understanding and must be adapted to the learning characteristics of each discipline. Moreover, respecting diverse linguistic and individual

differences necessitates effectively incorporating collaborative activities, targeted scaffolds and instructional strategies that facilitate self-formation and identity development. In summary, previous research highlights the effectiveness of integrating English and native languages in instruction, an approach valued by the IB. This research aims to shed light on EMI in IB schools in Japan, thereby helping address the EMI challenges faced by Japanese secondary education.

METHODS

This study was conducted as part of the MEXT-commissioned "Research Project on the Educational Impact of the International Baccalaureate (IB)", which investigates the implementation and effects of the IB in Japanese secondary schools. Within that project, the present study focused specifically on teachers' experiences with long-term EMI implementation in DLDP schools. We focused on public school teachers and interviewed 17 who taught English to students aged 16-18, as shown in Table 1. We selected one school each from Metropolitan Area A, Regional Central City B, and Regional City C and interviewed teachers for the listed subjects.

Table 1: **Basic interviewee information**

	Subjects taught	Nationality	Teaching experience (IB teaching experience)	Language experience
A	English	U.S.	20 years (6 years)	Native English speaker
	Arts	Japan	6 years (6 years)	Lived in the U.S. (12 years)
	Mathematics	Sri Lanka	14 years (6 years)	PhD in English
	Mathematics	Japan	1 year (1 year)	Lived in Singapore (5 years)
B	Physics	Japan	27 years (4 years)	Overseas experience (3 years in Malaysia)
	Mathematics	Japan	19 years (3 years)	No overseas experience
	Mathematics	Indonesia	4 years (0.5 years)	Studied in English (local university)
	Chemistry	Pakistan	9 years (4 years)	Studied in English (local university)
	English	China	3.5 years (3.5 years)	Studied in Canada
	Geography	Vietnam	4 years (4 years)	Learning in English (local university)
C	English	Japan	20 years (3 years)	Short-term study abroad experience (1 month in the US)
	Mathematics	U.S.	13 years (6 years)	Native English speaker
	Mathematics	Japan	18 years (4 years)	No overseas experience
	English	U.S.	10 years (3 years)	Native English speaker
	Mathematics	Japan	15 years (9 years)	No overseas experience
	Mathematics	Japan	6 years (3 years)	No overseas experience
	English	Japan	6 years (3 years)	Studied in the UK (1.5 years)

Note. IB = International Baccalaureate.

Interviewee selection

Using purposive sampling, we selected schools and recruited current DLDP teachers who taught at least one IB subject in English, focusing on trends in Japanese EMI subjects (Kimura et al., 2024) to ensure variation across subjects, contexts, and backgrounds. We interviewed as many EMI subject teachers as possible, providing a balanced representation from other subjects. In addition to the interviews, we spent eight hours at each school observing classes and learning about the school to familiarise ourselves with the situation.

At the time of the survey, School A in the metropolitan area had its first graduating cohort and was entering its first university entrance examination cycle. The school offered English, arts and mathematics classes in English. Schools B and C had their second graduating cohorts during our survey period. School B (Regional Central City) worked with local foreign teachers and offered second-language acquisition, science and mathematics classes in English. School C (Regional City) responded to diverse career requests, including attending university abroad, and offered English and mathematics classes in English. All schools had both IB and non-IB classes, reflecting efforts to extend IB methodologies to general education. Moreover, as per the rotation system in public schools, all teachers were expected to be transferred to non-IB schools in the coming years, where they were encouraged to implement inquiry-based teaching practices. Figure 2 presents the questions used in the semi-structured interviews with teachers. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Figure 2: Interview items

[Things to keep in mind and guidance]

1. Are there any challenges in teaching a second language?
2. Is there anything you are aware of?

[Status of understanding]

1. What do you think of balancing subject content and language development?
2. Are there any challenges when deep understanding and abstract thinking are required?
3. What do you think of the need for Japanese language support?

[Teacher growth and teaching examples]

1. Based on your experience as a language teacher, how do you see your own growth?

Additionally, please share any examples of successful teaching in English.

School administrators first informed eligible teachers about the study. Participation was entirely voluntary. No incentives were provided. All participants provided informed consent before the interviews. To ensure confidentiality, all names, institutions and identifying information were anonymised. The study was approved by the institutional ethics committee associated with the larger MEXT project.

Analysis Framework

This study employed a narrative enquiry approach to capture the subjective experiences of teachers implementing EMI within the IB framework. Narrative enquiry can offer rich insight into teachers' subjective experiences as they enact and make meaning of a new curriculum area. Such research aims to understand how stories are constructed, the contexts in which these narratives emerge, and their subjective and social meanings (Andrews et al., 2013). For example, Browning et al. (2025) conducted a narrative analysis of the professional identities of three intercultural curriculum teachers from urban, suburban and rural areas in Australia. Palmer (2024) conducted interviews with administrators, teachers, students, and parents in IB-authorised schools in the Caucasus region, analysing narrative characteristics using a categorisation scheme. In the present study, to enhance validity and reliability, we utilised Williams and Moser's (2019) three-step framework (open, axial, and selective coding). The primary researcher performed the initial coding. A second coder – a project researcher who possesses expertise in the field of EMI/IB education – aided with the axial and selective coding stages. Narrative inquiry helped us interpret the teachers' stories, while grounded theory coding enabled us to systematically develop categories. Thus, the two approaches complemented each other by combining interpretive depth with analytical rigour.

Regarding the grounded theory method (GTM) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), Williams and Moser (2019) stated that researchers should apply guiding principles that intentionally enable them to "codify and publish their methods for generating theory (p. 46). While details of the procedure can be modified to suit researchers' needs, they must keep in mind certain principles on which GTM proponents agree (Larossa, 2005). In this study, as noted, we used the three-step coding process of open, axial and selective coding to inductively re-differentiate and grasp the reality of teachers' teaching in English. Open coding is a process by which researchers identify distinct concepts and themes for classification, and axial coding further refines and categorises themes. Selective coding is the process by which a researcher selects categories of data organised by axis coding and consolidates them into a cohesive and meaningful representation. We performed the three coding processes in a circular manner, continuously re-reading the data collected during each process. In constructing meaning, we interpreted the interview data by relating the emerging codes to theoretical perspectives on EMI and language-related load, while grounding the interpretation in the specific school and classroom contexts in which the participants worked.

Hereafter, { } denotes a theme, < > a category, [ ] the code, and ' ' the interview data.

RESULTS

Teachers' perceptions of themselves

Narratives on <Teaching Examples>

Specific examples: Several teachers described how they adapted explanations to help students overcome cultural or linguistic obstacles in EMI classrooms. The English teacher noted that

students struggled to understand cultural references when discussing Black culture and, therefore, used familiar Japanese youth-culture examples and Socratic questioning to bridge understanding. A mathematics teacher similarly pointed out that students easily understood references such as rock-paper-scissors but required clarification for unfamiliar games mentioned in English word problems. The art teacher highlighted the need to teach English punctuation conventions, such as comma placement, when students wrote their process portfolios. A chemistry teacher explained that he first provided scenario-based questions and had students write initial ideas before refining their answers.

Teachers also described using visual and technological tools to support comprehension. One mathematics teacher used spatial software to help students "see" concepts in motion, while another mathematics teacher observed that students collaborated or used technology independently when they did not understand written problems. A mathematics teacher added that teaching mathematics in English motivated students to attempt more English output, noting that "students do use English because teachers make an effort to teach mathematics in English".

Interdisciplinary initiatives: the English teacher explained that classes sometimes evolved into sociology-like discussions when integrating cultural and analytical perspectives across subjects. Mathematics teachers reported coordinating content with English instruction to avoid introducing new mathematical and linguistic concepts simultaneously. The physics teacher also commented that his own English improved through teaching science in English, and an art teacher noted that EMI was partially introduced in Grades 1 to 4, enabling students to practise making choices and articulating reasons in English before the DLDP years.

Things to keep in mind: Teachers reported varied approaches to balancing Japanese and English. One English teacher sometimes explained grammar in Japanese to support less proficient learners, whereas another English teacher emphasised overall communicative clarity rather than grammatical precision. Several non-English subject teachers encouraged students to speak initially in Japanese and then convert their thinking into English. Conversely, a mathematics teacher expressed a commitment to maintaining English as the primary medium to foster students' ability to explain concepts in English.

Teachers also mentioned the importance of managing technical terminology. One mathematics teacher ensured that he fully understood English terms before class, while the art teacher taught key vocabulary in both languages. Teachers across subjects reported clarifying whether student errors stemmed from conceptual misunderstandings or English phrasing, helping students distinguish between linguistic and disciplinary accuracy.

Narratives on <Perception & Experience>

***Teachers' perceptions of learning*:** an English teacher stated that their role was not only to teach grammar and vocabulary but also to guide students in learning these elements independently. Another English teacher appreciated the IB's emphasis on speaking and conversational skills, noting that this orientation encouraged more interactive classroom

practices. Several non-English subject teachers described how their initial anxiety about using English gradually diminished. One mathematics teacher noted that he shifted from trying to use 'perfect English' to prioritising clear communication through simpler expressions.

Teachers also shared their experiences of challenges in EMI classrooms. The English teacher reported difficulties interpreting aspects of American school culture embedded in IB texts. A mathematics teacher noted that preparing English explanations for lessons was often more demanding than preparing the mathematical content. Non-English subject teachers highlighted struggles with supporting students' academic writing, particularly for extended tasks such as process portfolios and internal assessments.

Teachers' perceptions of challenges: An English teacher remarked, "Sometimes I can't quite grasp the culture of American schools", pointing to cross-cultural difficulties. Another challenge for teachers in non-English subjects was supporting the academic writing process, indicating struggles with teaching dissertation writing in English.

Interdisciplinary teaching, a key IB feature, was recognised as challenging when there was a lack of clear role distribution between English and subject teachers. A mathematics teacher stated that using examples and diagrams made them feel they could communicate with students, even if only in English, suggesting that visual aids could compensate for limited language fluency. As mentioned earlier, one of the teachers commented, "Preparing English expressions for a class is more difficult than preparing for mathematics", highlighting increased preparation demands.

Teachers' experiences and growth: Several teachers described how teaching in English prompted them to deepen their disciplinary and linguistic knowledge. A mathematics teacher reflected that English terminology sometimes differed from what he had learned in Japan and that adapting to these differences expanded his understanding. The art teacher, who had overseas study experience, emphasised that multinational examples and artists were consciously selected to broaden students' perspectives—an awareness she attributed to her intercultural experiences. Another mathematics teacher noted that teaching in English made him more attentive to structuring explanations logically and persuasively.

Teachers also commented on students' linguistic challenges and the need for scaffolding. A science teacher explained that even students with strong English-speaking skills sometimes misinterpret simple written questions, leading to incorrect answers. Another non-native English-speaking teacher noted that while he could write academic English fluently, he empathised with students' anxiety about speaking English in front of peers, recalling similar feelings earlier in his career.

Narratives on <Action>

Teachers' responses: Several teachers described how they adjusted their instructional practices to support students' comprehension and emotional confidence in EMI contexts. A non-native teacher of non-English subjects explained that he often engaged in deeper thinking using his first language, noting that students similarly relied on Japanese when grappling with abstract

concepts. The same teacher emphasised the importance of establishing trust, describing the classroom as a "safe zone" where students felt comfortable expressing uncertainty. The art teacher similarly encouraged students to prioritise clarity over the use of sophisticated vocabulary, advising them that effective communication mattered more than producing difficult English expressions. Mathematics teachers reported deliberately setting aside time to review key English terminology and to prompt students to reflect on concepts using essential vocabulary.

Collaboration between teachers: Both Japanese and foreign teachers described coordinated efforts to strengthen lesson planning and classroom communication. In several schools, co-teaching pairs aligned their lesson content by sharing strengths: Japanese teachers provided disciplinary clarity, while native or near-native English-speaking teachers supported natural phrasing and questioning techniques. A mathematics teacher noted that native English-speaking colleagues used expressions that differed from textbook English, offering valuable input on authentic language use. Conversely, native English-speaking teachers reported learning from Japanese colleagues' approaches to scaffolding problem-solving and posing probing questions. Such collaborative exchanges enabled teachers to refine their instructional strategies and adapt EMI practices to their students' needs.

4.2. Teachers' perspectives on their surroundings

Narratives on <Students>

Students' challenges: teachers consistently noted that linguistic factors affected students' ability to demonstrate content understanding. The chemistry teacher observed that even students with strong spoken English occasionally misinterpreted simple written questions, resulting in mistakes unrelated to subject knowledge. The art teacher similarly noted that producing written texts, such as process portfolios, posed difficulties because students needed to articulate their research and decision-making in English. Mathematics teachers across schools reported that students often understood concepts in Japanese but lacked the English expressions needed to accurately convey their thinking.

Students' behaviours, understanding and significance: several teachers described gradual improvement in students' ability to interpret English-language mathematical and scientific terminology. A mathematics teacher remarked that both students and teachers became more accustomed to the "English of mathematics" over time, enabling students to express ideas more willingly. Teachers also noted that learning subjects through English had compounding benefits; students not only progressed in the subject but also expanded their English proficiency through repeated exposure to disciplinary language.

Students' attitudes and affective aspects: Teachers reported that initial reluctance to participate in discussions diminished as students became more familiar with EMI classroom routines. A mathematics teacher observed that students began to engage naturally in peer discussions,

showing increased confidence. Another mathematics teacher believed that students felt motivated by the sense of accomplishment that came from explaining ideas in English. Conversely, an English teacher noted that some students continued to doubt their performance even when they communicated effectively, emphasising that sustained encouragement remained essential.

Narratives on <Assessments>

Assessment preparation: Teachers noted that the linguistic demands of IB assessments often shaped their instructional priorities. The art teacher reported that students' written work sometimes lacked the formality required in IB assignments, indicating the need for explicit instruction in academic English. A mathematics teacher observed that topics such as statistics, which require reading and interpreting text, took students longer to master because linguistic comprehension influenced their ability to solve problems accurately. The geography teacher noted that IB assessments emphasise written responses rather than speaking, making proficiency in written English essential for demonstrating understanding. Conversely, an English teacher highlighted the value of interview-style practice tests, explaining that one-on-one, recorded discussions helped students prepare for internal assessments and build confidence, though they required significant preparation time.

Narratives on the <System>

Structure and characteristics of the school: Teachers described institutional factors that affected EMI implementation. A mathematics teacher mentioned consciously using English whenever possible in reading and writing tasks, while another teacher noted that the IB's allowance of calculators helped students focus on problem-solving rather than linguistic hurdles.

Characteristics of subjects and curriculum: Science and geography teachers emphasised the importance of interactive and visual approaches, such as prompting students to imagine scientific processes or break down complex IB-style questions, to align with inquiry-based expectations embedded in the curriculum.

Teachers also reported several ***institutional challenges***. A teacher with no overseas experience noted that EMI can be difficult for Japanese teachers without overseas experience, particularly when co-teaching with native English-speaking colleagues whose communication styles differ. Native English-speaking teachers sometimes questioned whether students with limited English skills should participate in the DLDP, whereas Japanese teachers expressed a commitment to including such students and supporting their growth. These tensions highlighted broader challenges related to student selection, teacher assignment and ensuring adequate support structures within the school system.

DISCUSSION

Incorporating native language instruction in the classroom

Regarding language use in the classroom, the IB encourages activating students' native language, and teachers provide instruction in Japanese as needed. Mathematics teachers spoke of the pressure to teach in English and use English correctly. However, effective instruction that includes Japanese without undue pressure is possible. As Borg (2015) noted, classroom language often includes both Japanese and English. Narratives indicated that lessons were taught using a blend of Japanese and English, particularly as final examinations approached. Students were often able to grasp content in Japanese and complete problems in English. Additionally, teachers also noted their own growth as a result of teaching in English, such as becoming more fluent in English classroom vocabulary.

Teachers in the metropolitan area tended to have more university experience in English and more experience living abroad compared with teachers in regional areas, as shown in Table 1. As Galloway et al. (2017) pointed out, the language of teaching varies across institutions and teachers. In this case, schools in the metropolitan area taught primarily in English, with students adapting to this teaching style, whereas teachers in regional areas often selected the instructional language based on student needs.

Additionally, foreign teachers who were second-language English speakers with first-hand experience of learning in English encouraged students to use their mother tongue. To boost students' speaking confidence, they encouraged them to speak Japanese—a language the teachers did not understand—to help them understand the content. Thus, sharing the experiences of foreign teachers who have learnt English as a second language could help enhance students' positive attitudes towards speaking, even if they make mistakes.

Characteristics of subject teachers' strategies

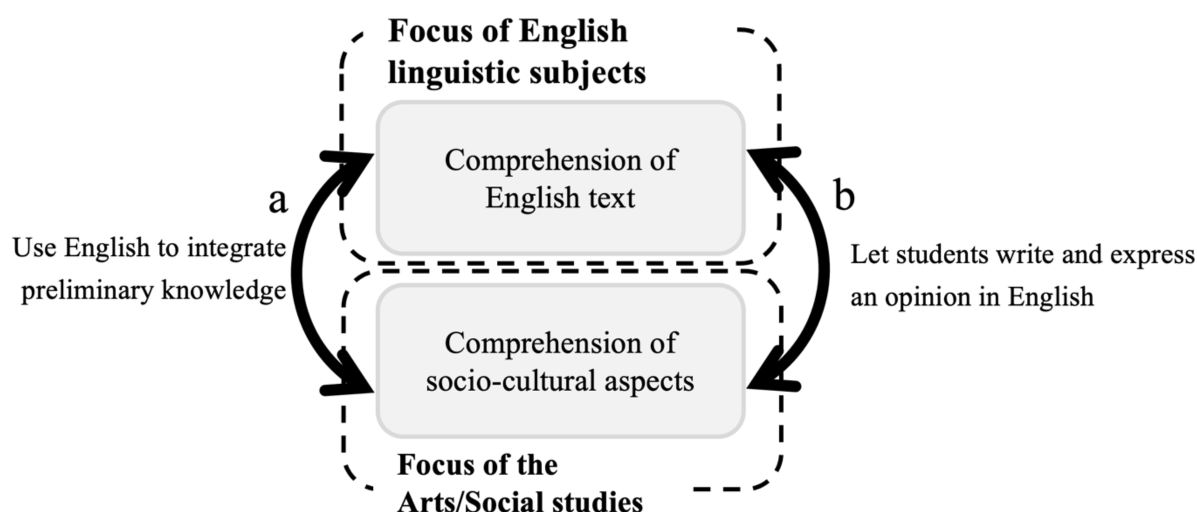
English language teaching, especially in the IB context, involves not only language acquisition but also international socio-cultural learning. Teachers described challenges when students struggled to understand cultural contexts different from their own, but noted the necessity of bridging this gap to bring foreign cultural aspects into students' use of English. Such methods enhance both language acquisition and socio-cultural understanding, which are key areas of focus in the DLDP final assessments (see Figure 3a).

In English and other subjects, teachers used written texts with socio-cultural content and visual aids, such as diagrams, as scaffolding, as recommended by the IBO (2014), to improve comprehension. As Bonar et al. (2025) highlighted, multiple multimodalities were integrated and presented to students. For DLDP final examinations in the arts and social studies, where students must interpret texts and discuss the content of a subject, lessons in English will enhance their ability to write and express opinions in English. Moreover, from a cross-curricular

perspective, the exploration of global topics in arts classes allows students to transfer socio-cultural knowledge across subjects, including English (see Figure 3b). Additionally, students' exploratory learning of socio-cultural aspects in English classes can be applied to other relevant classes.

Figure 3 shows the EMI focus for English, the arts and social studies. The arrows represent the teaching strategy for problem solving, including linguistic and socio-cultural factors. The areas of focus correspond to the IB's final exam components.

Figure 3: Focus of teaching English, the Arts, and Social Studies

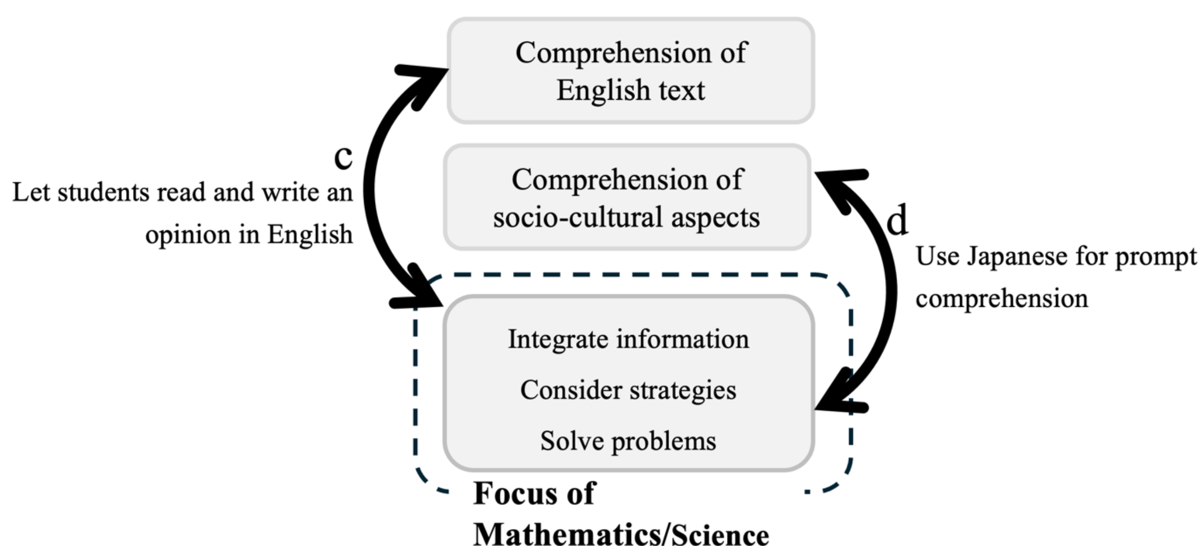


In linguistic subjects, the focus is on comprehending English text. Concurrently, as the left arrow (a) in Figure 3 shows, comprehension of socio-cultural aspects is also emphasised. Therefore, the focus is on English language learning, with both linguistic and socio-cultural aspects. The right arrow (b) in Figure 3 shows that the arts and social studies also focus on comprehending English text. Common socio-cultural topics promote interdisciplinary learning among English, the arts, and social studies.

By contrast, final examinations in mathematics, science and other subjects require students to understand and integrate the content of written problems, consider solutions, process calculations and prepare and write answers. The emphasis in mathematics and science is less on reading comprehension of English texts and more on the computational processing involved in integrating text questions and solving problems, primarily in assessments (see Figure 4c). The teachers' narratives suggest that they implement these practices with these considerations in mind.

Mathematics and science often require strategic use of Japanese to comprehend socio-cultural aspects, especially at the introductory stage, depending on the classroom environment (see Figure 4d). As with teaching English, the arts and social studies, the focus of teaching mathematics and science aligns with the IB's final exam components.

Figure 4: Use of Japanese to understand socio-cultural aspects in Mathematics and Science



In schools where students had higher English skills or teachers with overseas experience, entire classes were taught in English using examples and illustrations. In other cases, particularly in mathematics, students relied on Japanese to interpret and solve problems, especially exam-focused sections. Cross-curricular integration was more common between mathematics and science learning because the mathematics guide primarily highlights links with science.

Science teachers noted that even high-performing English students may struggle with science content. In their first classes, mathematics teachers mentioned the need to start with mathematics that students already know to reduce the load, "making sure that neither mathematics nor English is new to them. Translanguaging involves understanding all the language resources of a multilingual student as one integrated repertoire that transcends language categories (Kano, 2016). For example, in a probability and statistics lesson, teachers scaffolded comprehension through Japanese before transitioning to English problem-solving. This suggests that load in EMI mathematics and science occurs particularly at the stage of understanding the content of English texts. Therefore, teaching in both languages can help students maintain concentration and deepen their understanding of the subject content.

Thus, the teachers' narratives reveal that subject learning in English is shaped not only by IB assessment expectations but also by contextual factors that vary across schools. This pattern reflects issues reported in IB EMI settings globally, indicating that the classroom adaptations observed here align with broader comparative education discussions on how international programmes are mediated locally.

CONCLUSION

The study offers implications not only for Japanese IB schools but also for EMI implementation in other multilingual contexts. Because many non-English-dominant countries offer the IB or similar EMI programmes, the experiences of Japanese teachers, particularly their strategic use of L1, load management, and development of bilingual pedagogical practices, offer transferable insights for supporting teachers elsewhere.

The findings revealed that DLDP teachers attempt to manage EMI by implementing pedagogical adaptations. For instance, mathematics and science teachers noted that the subject focus is on computation and reported using a blend of Japanese and English to quickly explain English-language problems.

While the IB framework emphasises the role of language learning in students' broader personal development, this study did not collect direct evidence on identity formation. The narratives instead reflect teachers' perceptions of changes in students' confidence and willingness to use English. Within this scope, the findings suggest that valuing Japanese and English in IB classrooms can support biliteracy and appreciation of cultural diversity. Although this study focused on subjects taught mainly in English, it recognises that IB classrooms operate with varied language practices.

Acknowledging the nature of qualitative inquiry, our study presents several methodological limitations. The purposive sample captured variation in teaching experience and linguistic background (native, non-native, bilingual, and domestic-only Japanese speakers), which, while valuable for breadth, inherently limited the depth of exploration of specific subject-language dynamics. This diversity means the findings reflect a mosaic of localised practices rather than comprehensive patterns across all EMI subjects. Furthermore, the self-selection bias in interviewee recruitment, with a notable preference for mathematics and the arts among Japanese teachers, resulted in a narrative that underrepresents key humanities and science disciplines. This focus may have skewed the emphasis toward pedagogical strategies, with visual scaffolding and procedural instruction often prioritised over the development of complex academic discourse. Future research is thus required to triangulate these findings by strategically sampling subjects across the full disciplinary spectrum and by exploring unresolved pedagogical issues in professional development engagement and the influence of students' diverse linguistic backgrounds on learning outcomes. Ultimately, a sustained, international perspective integrating practices from the broader Asian context is necessary to address the challenges of EMI expansion in the Japanese IB setting.

In recent years, the implementation of the IB has spread to countries such as South Korea, and subject learning in English has become popular in neighbouring Asian countries. By sharing Japan's situation and challenges, we hope to help improve understanding of the future development of EMI in Asia.

REFERENCES

Amendola, Andrews, M., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (2013). *Doing narrative research*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402271

Bonar, G., Slaughter, Y., Keary, A., & Davies, T. (2025). Supporting students with English as an additional language during emergency remote teaching: A Q methodology study. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *52*(2), 1065–1086. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-024-00753-w

Borg, S. (2015). *English medium instruction in higher education: A survey of teachers' experiences and attitudes*. British Council.

Browning, D., Kriewaldt, J., & McLeod, J. (2025). Narratives of high school teachers' identity renewal through teaching a new intercultural curriculum subject. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *52*(1), 647–664. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-024-00734-z

Chan, P. W. K. (2023). Our education recovery beyond COVID-19. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *22*(1), 44–57.

Chapple, J. (2015). Teaching in English is not necessarily the teaching of English. *International Education Studies*, *8*(3), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v8n3p1

Fujita, T. (Ed.). (2024). *Research project on the educational impact of the International Baccalaureate report*. https://ibconsortium.mext.go.jp/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/7a13a4f16b8a78e9aff6252addc0bfdf-1.pdf (in Japanese).

Galloway, N., Kriukow, J., & Numajiri, T. (2017). *Internationalisation, higher education and the growing demand for English: An investigation into the English medium of instruction (EMI) movement in China and Japan*. British Council.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine.

Hawkes, M., & Adamson, C. (2023). Challenges and opportunities for expatriate faculty teaching graduation seminar classes in Japanese universities. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, *8*(1), 7. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-022-00176-z

International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). (2014). *Learning in a language other than mother tongue*. IBO. https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/benefits/pdfs/learning-in-a-language-other-than-mother-tongue-jp.pdf

International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). (2017). *What is IB education?* IBO. https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/about-the-ib/pdfs/what-is-an-ib-education-en.pdf

Kano, N. (2016). Conceptualizing translanguaging to consolidate pedagogy rooted in the language use of multilinguals. *The Studies in Mother Tongue, Heritage Language, and Bilingual Education*, *12*, 1–22. https://hdl.handle.net/11094/62212

Kimura, M., Shibuya, M., Akatsuka, Y., Hara, K., Sasaki, E., & Umetsu, S. (2024, Sep. 15). *The expansion of English-medium instruction in Japan: An examination of the subject learning at the high school due to the promotion of the IBO* [Conference presentation]. The 9th JARIBE Annual Conference, Osaka, Japan.

Kimura, M., Takahashi, S., & Yokomatsu, A. (2023). Analyzing cognitive function in CLIL: Narratives of ESL students in a Japanese–English bilingual mathematics class of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. *Journal of Japanese Society for Global Social and Cultural Studies*, *20*(1), 15–26.

Larossa, R. (2005). Grounded theory methods and qualitative family research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *67*(4), 837–857. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00179.x

Li, J. (2018). L1 in the IRF cycle: A case study of Chinese EFL classrooms. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, *3*, 1. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-017-0042-y

Palmer, N. (2024). Orienting practical global citizenship education in an International Baccalaureate international school. *Prospects*, *55*(1–2), 263–281. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-024-09692-x

Rodríguez, D., Omidire, M. F., & Anyosa, M. S. (2023). Pedagogical multicultural communities in teacher preparation. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *22*(1), 59–73.

Selzer, M., & Gibson, I. (2009). Preparing Japanese students for English-medium instruction in international studies: Methodology and practice in the IIIS international public service programme. *Ritsumeikan Journal of International Studies*, *22*(1), 127–140.

Tange, H. (2010). Caught in the tower of Babel: University lecturers' experiences with internationalisation. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *10*(2), 137–149. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708470903342138

Troedson, D. A., & Dashwood, A. (2018). Bilingual use of translanguaging: Chinese student satisfaction in a transnational Business degree in English. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *17*(4), 113–128.

Umetsu, S. (2025). Globalization of education: Perspectives on the implementation of the International Baccalaureate programmes. In Y. Ida, T. Fujita, I. Chung, T. Kakizawa, Y. Satoh, H. Yoneda, H. Sato, H. Miyauchi, M. Kokubu, S. Matsuda, & E. Komaki (Eds.), *Human diversity and educational equity in Japan: Well-Being in the human sciences landscape* (pp. 169–179). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-2325-9_13

Uno, H. (1961). Perceptions of high school teachers in their teaching life. *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, *16*, 54–66.

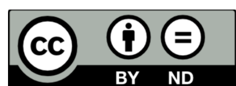
Wang, Y., & Li, D. (2022). Translanguaging pedagogy in tutor's oral corrective feedback on Chinese EFL learners' argumentative writing. *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, *7*(1), 33. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40862-022-00170-5

Watanabe, A., Yamamoto, Y., Anno, K., & Suto, M. (2019). CLIL Practice seeking coherency through elementary, junior high, and high school: Promoting questioning for deeper thinking. *Bulletin of the Integrated Research Center for Educational Practice*, *6*, 493–496.

Williams, M., & Moser, T. (2019). The art of coding and thematic exploration in qualitative research. *International Management Review*, *15*(1), 45–55.

Yamazaki, M. (2016). Introducing CLIL (content-language-integrated learning) into high school English classes. *Dokkyo University Department of Tourism and Transnational Studies Encounters*, *4*, 121–125. https://dokkyo.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/584/files/P-095-E58-4-9.pdf

Zhou, X., Li, C., & Gao, X. (2021). Towards a sustainable classroom ecology: Translanguaging in English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in a finance course at an International School in Shanghai. *Sustainability*, *13*(19), Article 10719. https://doi.org/10.3390/su131910719



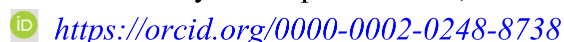
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

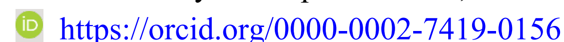
Authors and readers are free to copy, display and distribute this article with no changes, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives (IEJ: CP), and the same license applies. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at. The IEJ: CP is published by the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (formerly ANZCIES) and Sydney Open Access Journals at the University of Sydney. Articles are indexed in ERIC, Scimago Journal (SJR)Ranking / SCOPUS. The IEJ:CP is a member of the Free Journal Network: Join the IEJ: CP and OCIES Facebook community at Oceania Comparative and International Education Society, and Twitter: @OceaniaCIES

The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 24, No 2, 2025
http://iejcomparative.org

Insights from international students studying in Brazil

Arinola Adefila
Buckinghamshire New University, UK

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9759-0104
Yuri Luiz Reis Leite
Federal University of Espírito Santo, Brazil

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0248-8738
Maria Lúcia Teixeira Garcia
Federal University of Espírito Santo, Brazil

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2672-9310
Patricia Alcantara Cardoso
Federal University of Espírito Santo, Brazil

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7419-0156

DOI: https://doi.org/10.70830/iejcp.2402.20937

This paper investigates the experiences of international students in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions within the context of Brazil's evolving internationalisation agenda. Despite significant investment in mobility programs, there is limited evaluation of student experiences and support mechanisms. The research addressed three core questions: Who are the international students studying in Brazil? What are their academic and social experiences? How effective are the support systems in place? Using an adapted international student survey and the Evidencing Value Framework, data were collected from 293 students. Findings reveal high satisfaction with academic quality and international office support, but highlight systemic challenges, including linguistic barriers, bureaucratic barriers to accessing social benefits, and a lack of standardised admissions. The study underscores the need for a more integrated, student-centred internationalisation strategy, including multilingual offerings, improved onboarding, and national data infrastructure to enhance policy responsiveness and institutional planning.

Keywords: Internationalisation; international student surveys; international student experience; support programmes; student mobility school

INTRODUCTION

Internationalisation has shaped the higher education university ecosystem over the last two decades (Lee & Stensaker, 2021). Driven by the winds of globalisation, proponents argue internationalisation enhances educational quality because students benefit from diverse perspectives and methodologies integrated into the curriculum and broader university cultural and intellectual traditions (Beelen & De Louw, 2020). This enrichment of the educational experience results in broader research collaboration (Gao, 2019) and a range of cultural competencies for both home students and their international counterparts. Institutions also benefit from the global networks that accompany internationalisation programs (Lee, 2021) because countries invest and support the competition for a global experience and leverage collaborations to enhance the societal impact of research and the economic benefits of securing funds through international recruitment. In some countries, internationalisation is framed mainly through the lens of economic exchange in the form of fees, diverse and talented labour and varied research ideas (Garson, 2023).

Internationalisation agendas often focus on the most visible aspects: student mobility or exchange. Governments invest substantial time and resources in developing international student mobility (de Wit & Hunter, 2015). The OECD (2023) defines international students as learners who study a proportion or the entirety of a programme in a destination country, having received prior education in another country. They are not residents of their current country of study. The justification for the emphasis on internationalisation in universities has been amplified by the societal impact of promoting diverse epistemologies and inclusion of varied voices, resulting in projects that enhance global collaboration around the Sustainable Development Goals and support development more broadly. However, the internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a challenge faced by universities worldwide (De Wit & Hunter, 2015). Labraña et al. (2024) argued that New Public Management logics increasingly shape Latin American Internationalisation, though in some areas managerial reforms have resulted in a critical reflection on the purpose and values of internationalisation.

Knight (2012, p. 17) points out that "the importance of the international dimension of higher education in the last two or three decades has led to 'internationalisation' becoming a catch-all phrase, currently used to describe anything and everything remotely linked to worldwide, intercultural, global or international. Consequently, the notion of internationalisation is at risk of losing its meaning and direction". Knight suggests that internationalisation is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education. Accordingly, her typology positions various features linked to transboundary engagement on an administrative continuum, as summarised in Table 1.

De Wit and Altbach's (2021) Model of internationalisation emphasises the multidimensional and contextual nature of institutional policies, developed in collaboration with state agencies over the last 80 years. Across Europe, traditional aid and cooperation initially funded by post-war scholarship schemes aimed to support reconstruction and low-income countries, for

example, DAAD/Germany and British Council/United Kingdom. The strengthening of EU partnerships and exchange since the late 1980s via Erasmus supports Joint Master's Degrees, integrated joint curricula, and staff and student mobility. The 2000s saw a marked increase in market-oriented competition, with institutions in Europe, North America and Australia strategically recruiting international students to support their incomes. More recently, a more comprehensive and integrative approach is developing where internationalisation is embedded across teaching through projects and Problem-Based Learning with global case studies, as well as multinational research projects (see Table 2).

Table 1: Typology of internationalisations

Rationale	Institutional approach
Political {Nation-building & foreign policy}	Student and staff mobility, joint programs, partnerships.
Economic: {Global labour/institutional income	Graduate employability, international rankings, reputation
Academic {Enhancing teaching quality & research collaboration}	Embedding internationalisation across teaching, research and services
Socio-cultural {Promoting intercultural understanding & global citizenship	"Internationalisation at home" such as intercultural campus activities) vs "cross-border education" such as TNE

Table 2: Exemplars of types of internationalisations based on de Wit and Altbach's typology

	Traditional Cooperation/Aid	Partnership-Based	Market-Oriented	Comprehensive/ Integrative
Latin America	Brazilian CAPES Programme – Historically funded postgraduate students to study abroad (e.g., in Europe/US) to strengthen Brazil's higher education capacity.	Universidad de los Andes (Colombia) – Strategic alliances with US and European universities for dual degrees and research.	Fundación Universitaria Empresarial de la Cámara de Comercio de Bogotá (UNIEMPRESARIAL) in Colombia uses international partnerships to enhance student competitiveness in global markets, focusing on internships, dual degrees, and applied research	Universidad de Costa Rica – Focus on curriculum internationalisation, South-South cooperation (with other Latin American universities), and regional leadership in sustainability studies.
Africa	Several countries depend on scholarships and	University of Cape Town (South Africa) – Extensive	South Africa attracts a significant number of students from across	University of Ghana – Embeds global citizenship

	Traditional Cooperation/Aid	Partnership-Based	Market-Oriented	Comprehensive/ Integrative
	external funding. The Soviet Union, Cuba and Western Europe/USA/Canada funded scholarships during the Cold War. Several of these programmes are still supported by countries such as the UK, Finland and Japan.	collaborations with European/American universities in climate change, medicine, and social sciences.	Africa, especially the SADC.	into curriculum, while maintaining international research partnerships and diaspora engagement.
Asia	India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 encourages foreign universities to establish campuses in India and promotes Indian institutions abroad	Tohoku University, Japan, has developed a comprehensive International Strategy under its "Vision 2030" framework, which emphasises strategic partnerships	Malaysia's Monash University Campus – Education as a commodity, hosting thousands of fee-paying international students.	Singapore's National University of Singapore embeds global perspectives across all disciplines and forms strategic partnerships that support an integrative internationalisation strategy

BACKGROUND

Internationalisation of universities has become part of the agenda of academic leaders, major funding agencies, and representative entities of public and private HEIs in Brazil (Neves & Barbosa, 2020). Neves & Barbosa (2020) acknowledged that universities' movement towards broad institutional goals around internationalisation in the global south is being developed along Western models. This is viewed as short-sighted due to regional obstacles, such as language barriers for students and staff involved in exchange programs, and economic challenges that complicate the implementation of the goals. Notably, while traditional host countries continue to attract significant numbers of students and academics, there is a growing trend of reverse mobility toward emerging destinations such as China, Poland and Turkey (Kurek-Ochmańska & Luczaj, 2021; Seggie & Calikoglu, 2021; Xu et al., 2022). These shifts highlight the need to understand international academic mobility not only as a global phenomenon but also as deeply contextual and shaped by diverse national realities. In Brazil,

however, there remains a limited body of literature addressing inbound mobility in higher education from a national perspective (Robles & Bhandari, 2017; França & Padilha, 2021).

Carlson et al. (2025) highlight the emergence of a dynamic and multi-scalar landscape of academic mobility, where students increasingly move not only from the Global South to the Global North, but also in reverse—from North to South—as well as across South–South and East–West axes. Despite these evolving patterns, the overall scale of such multidirectional mobility remains limited (Yessenbekova et al., 2025). The global nature of international student mobility also renders it highly sensitive to geopolitical and socioeconomic disruptions. Events such as the United Kingdom's (UK) withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit), restrictive immigration policies in the United States (US) (Ritter & Roth, 2021), the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Palestine have significantly influenced cross-border academic flows (Carlson et al., 2025).

In general, internationalisation policies are facilitated by central government agencies; HEIs implement plans aligned with local strategies at institutional levels through specific activities. In Brazil, HEIs are not often proactive; few take advantage of the opportunities to develop internationalisation processes" (Neves & Barbosa, 2020). There is also a distinct lack of funds to support the internationalisation process, which further reduces the potential to address internationalisation. The current federal government of Brazil has significantly scaled back resources allocated to internationalisation; in 2021, the total CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel) budget was 73.4% lower than in 2015. In a survey about student mobility, Robles & Bhandari (2017) reported a lack of financial resources for international initiatives. In addition, Tumenas (2021) highlighted that Brazilian universities are suffering a steady decrease in budget allocation and greater pressure to increase international research, foreign student and staff exchange, and their positions in international rankings. This combination has led to limited successful developments in internationalisation in Brazilian HEIs.

The development of internationalisation policies, however, is of significant importance to Brazilian Higher Education; they have been shown to have a demonstrable effect on entry, access, and enrolment rates in HEIs in Brazil (Amorim & Finardi, 2022). National mandatory tests for university entry are standardised in Brazil, but this is not the case in many countries with high inbound student mobility, such as Australia, Canada, Mexico, the UK and the US (Nusche, 2008). The Brazilian national exam for the assessment of undergraduate student performance (called ENADE in Portuguese) started in 2004 and assesses student performance against the syllabus of evaluated courses (Verhine et al., 2006). Internalisation policies, therefore, provide an alternative accessible route to entry for non-Brazilian undergraduate applicants, thereby increasing international student access and success.

A similar picture emerges for graduate programs in Brazil, which are overseen by a national assessment process (established by CAPES), where there is no evident assessment focusing specifically on international students who come to study in Brazil. The lack of evaluation is a prominent issue because it involves understanding diverse cultural, economic and social

dynamics linked to students' experiences and focuses on a specific type of international mobility. As Dorovolomo et al. (2022) argued, supporting international students to develop their social capital increases satisfaction and retention. Support services, therefore, inbound student mobility, enabling institutions to meet volume targets of internalisation plans. This approach favours commercialisation of HE as part of internationalisation, but it fails to account for several complications involving students, faculty and other stakeholders, as highlighted by Finn et al. (2021).

The Brazilian Internationalisation programmes have largely been characterised by inbound mobility. Accordingly, issues such as active and passive internationalisation, curriculum decolonisation, and academic and staff mobility have been placed on universities' agendas. According to Lima and Maranhão (2009), active internationalisation is characterised by the flow of programs and actions aimed at, for example, receiving international students and offering educational services abroad (Luce et al., 2016). This active mobility requires HEIs to respond to the educational needs of the globalised world, which includes the language barrier.

This paper reports on the perspectives of international students at Brazilian universities using a survey adapted from a UK questionnaire. The survey set out to:

1. Examine the profile of international students who study in Brazilian HEIs
2. Investigate the experience of the international students
3. Evaluate the support mechanisms provided to international students

The next section will focus on student mobility and the challenges associated with evaluating inbound mobility in Brazil.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Evaluating Inbound Mobility in Brazil: Challenges and Prospects

In a survey on student mobility in Brazil, Robles & Bhandari (2017) indicated that research should examine factors that attract international students to Brazilian HEIs. The authors concluded that "not enough is known about the student populations that enrol in Brazilian universities" (p. 13). As part of understanding this gap, universities in Brazil are investing in organising international offices.

The current structure of international offices in Brazilian universities is heterogeneous: from a single staff member facilitating all activities, to well-structured offices with highly qualified staff coordinating different services linked to a specific local agenda.

Most Latin American graduate students come to Brazil through the Partnerships for Education and Training Program (PAEC), which is the result of a cooperation between the International Cooperation Group of Brazilian Universities (GCUB) and the Organization of American States (OAS), with the support from the Educational Themes and Portuguese Language Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil (DELP/MRE) and the Pan American Health

Organization (PAHO/WHO). Launched in 2011, the PAEC Scholarship Program is one of the most important regional cooperation initiatives for the development of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean (GCUB, 2022). Its objective is to contribute to the integration and strengthening of the Americas region by granting scholarships for complete graduate courses (Masters and Doctorates) offered by the Brazilian universities associated with the GCUB to students from the 34 OAS member countries (except for Brazil itself).

Most undergraduate students come to Brazil through the Exchange Program for Undergraduate Students (Programa de Estudantes-Convênio de Graduação, PEC-G). PEC-G provides students from developing countries with which Brazil maintains educational, cultural, or scientific and technological agreements with the opportunity to pursue studies in Brazilian HEIs. PEC-G is managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRE) through the Division of Educational Themes (DCE) and the Ministry of Education (MEC), and in partnership with HEIs throughout Brazil and other countries in South America, Central America and Africa. Students from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Africa often receive scholarships from either Brazil or their home countries. Governmental programs, such as the PEC-G, have been ongoing for more than 50 years and have brought more than 9,000 foreign students to Brazil since 2000 (MRE, 2022).

The Brazilian MEC is responsible for administering PEC-G stipends. The scholarships honour the famous black geographer and educator Milton Santos, who advocated for Access to Higher Education (Promisaes). Developed by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education in partnership with public and private universities, PEC-G selects foreigners aged 18 or older, preferably up to 23, who have completed secondary education and have been admitted to undergraduate studies in Brazil. A selected foreign student attends the undergraduate course free of charge. In return, the candidate must meet criteria, such as a commitment to return to their home country and contribute to its development upon graduation. The grant is R$622,00 (around US$113 per month or US$3.70 per day) for undergraduate students. PEC-G still attracts the largest number of inbound international students.

International students are offered language support, including the opportunity to speak, study and conduct research in Portuguese. The Brazilian systems also offer opportunities for a rich array of research perspectives and regional epistemologies that are often not accessible outside Latin America. In addition, the Brazilian educational system offers opportunities to study the technical and practical aspects of a discipline, providing students with real-world experience.

Students' International Mobility

Over the last 15 years, research on students' experiences abroad has shown that personal development is a key feature of international academic mobility for students and staff (Amendola & Restaino, 2017; Knight, 2012). International Student Mobility (ISM) is defined in this paper as any form of international mobility that takes place within a student's program of study in higher education (HE) (King et al., 2010). ISM places are highly competitive, with recruitment processes becoming increasingly competitive and complex (Knight, 2012).

Insights from international students studying in Brazil

The internationalisation of HEIs is beneficial for students—both home and international, universities (Costa & Canen, 2022). For home students and HEIs, international students contribute to the higher education landscape through their wealth of experience, knowledge and insights to the classroom and wider university. The benefit for international students is that they can cross boundaries to study in programs that enhance their skills and opportunities. Such students tend to learn a new language or specific methodologies that are unavailable in their home country and/or seek to study in countries and institutions that are better resourced.

"Internationalisation at home" refers to activities aimed at internationalisation for home students. The concept refers to campus-based strategies, including the intercultural and international dimensions in the teaching, learning process, research, extracurricular activities, relationships with local cultural and ethnic community groups, as well as the integration of foreign students and scholars into campus life and activities (Knight, 2012). We agree with Knight (2012) that universities have the responsibility to integrate international, intercultural, and comparative perspectives into the student experience through campus-based activities. The Brazilian context involves cooperation between countries of the southern hemisphere, the so-called South-South cooperation, which is challenging because students in these partnerships do not have disposable income and need a stipend to live in Brazil.

When national students participate in internationalisation at home, Institutions gain valuable income and the rich epistemologies, knowledge and insights that international students bring. In addition, society benefits from the global exchange of ideas and experiences. However, as a group of mobile people, international students have been under-studied (Findlay, 2010).

As part of the Capacity Building & internationalization for HE—a Universities for the World Programme promoted by the British Council—we conducted a study on the experiences of international students studying in Brazilian universities. The study included policy analysis and a survey of international students across the country. International students are categorised as those whose primary residence is outside Brazil.

According to the Ministry of Education, Brazilian universities attracted 17,539 foreign students from 177 different countries in 2019. This number of students represents only 0.2% of the total enrolment in HE in the country (INEP, 2020). In other words, though there are no specific targets, the public funds spent on attracting international students to the country lead to very limited success. As such, it is first necessary to understand how international students evaluate their experience in Brazilian HEIs, with a view to identifying new strategies for attracting students based on what works.

When international students pursue a double degree in Brazil, their study plan includes an internship in a company or industry anywhere in the world. Most students prefer taking the internship in Brazil, particularly close to the city where they studied. In these cases, the international office also supports them through various approaches, mechanisms, and activities, such as preparing them for interviews, guiding them through clinical exams, and setting up travel plans to the company site.

The students in the survey responded positively to questions about the core educational components of their programme. The majority reported being satisfied with the learning materials (software, equipment, facilities) and indicated that they felt they were part of the learning community. Over 75% reported being satisfied with the quality of the courses they were on. Overall, the analysis of the modes of support and their inconsistency with respect to the provision indicates the need to evaluate and standardise interventions and support mechanisms.

In this paper, we evaluate the experience of international students in HEIs in Brazil. Data is collated from international undergraduate and graduate students.

MATERIALS, METHODS AND RESULTS

To examine the profile of international students coming to Brazil, the team conducted desk research, cross-examining the national census of HEIs in Brazil (INEP 2022), international students' offices, and MEC data.

To interrogate the international students' perspectives, the project team piloted a survey. The international student survey used by Coventry University, UK, was adapted for use by international students at Brazilian public universities. Three international students and three members of the UFES international team supported the adaptation and piloted the Brazilian version with six students. A few more changes were made before the national rollout. Then, we contacted the Association of the International Relations Representatives of the Brazilian Federal Higher Education Institutions (CGRIFES, in Portuguese) to expand our survey to students from other institutions. After presenting a summary of the results to the Colégio de Gestores de Relações Internacionais das IFES (CGRIFES), all public institutions with international offices were provided with the forms and guidance on how to support students in completing them. Created in 2011, CGRIFES, which is a strategic collegiate body within Brazil's federal higher education system, supports and coordinates internationalisation efforts across 50 federal universities in Brazil. We collated feedback and adjusted the form, resulting in eighteen multiple-choice and eight short-answer questions (see Appendix 1).

We agreed that each institution would collate data from its own students and alumni, while UFES would have the right to use the whole dataset for research purposes. Institutions were required to provide institutional consent. (Form available at https://linktr.ee/ufesinternational developed in three languages (English, Portuguese and Spanish) and sent to each institution. The international offices from each participating university then forwarded the link to their students and alumni. Officers reported students requiring support to complete the forms. This could be due to the novelty of the evaluation and their limited experience completing such forms. It is unlikely that there was any survey fatigue. Students' responses were overwhelmingly positive.

Before filling out the questionnaire, participants provided informed consent, which included information that the project had been registered with the Human Research Ethics Committee (Certificate #33365920.3.0000.5542) and that the data would be used exclusively for the

purposes outlined in the project. The forms were sent on the 30th of March 2021 and remained open until the 31st of May 2021.

We use the Evidencing Value Framework (EVP) developed by Smart, Cleaver, & Robertson (2020 to analyse survey results, integrating it with evidence from a census on students' behaviour and attitudes to studying in Brazilian HEIs. The EVP is designed to identify, map and evaluate intangible assets in higher education, such as personal development, sense of belonging in an institution and engagement with activities provided by HE within and beyond the classroom, with a view to supporting strategic planning that can improve outcomes for students.

The framework focuses on four domains: systems and structures—policies, procedures and organisational frameworks; resources—physical and digital resources available to students; core educational and support components—teaching quality, curriculum design and student support services; and ethos, cultures and Identities—institutional culture, values and community spirit.

We received 293 responses: 162 in Portuguese, 103 in Spanish, and 28 in English. This low return rate meant that only 2 to 5 students completed the form in many institutions. A majority of the students did not complete the demographic section. The data was consolidated into a single spreadsheet in English, where inconsistencies were adjusted (for example, upper versus lowercase letters, typos, alternate spellings, etc.) and answers in different languages were standardised to English. Sixteen responses were excluded because the respondents identified themselves as Brazilian citizens.

The Evidencing Value Framework was used to analyse the responses from the survey, interrogating the support mechanisms provided to students and how student feedback is processed and evaluated to enhance international students' experiences.

Figure 1: Profile of international students

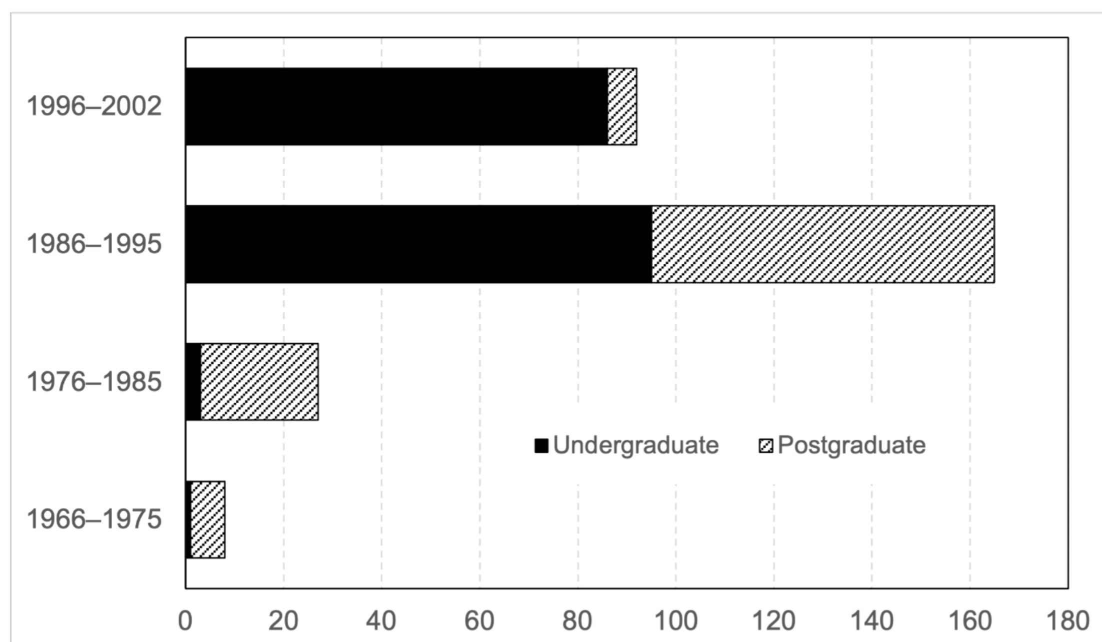
International student respondents to the survey came from 45 different countries (Figure 1): 42.9% from South America (24.5% were Colombian). When considering the North and South American continents, 61% of the respondents came from 17 countries in this region.

Fourteen per cent of the respondents came from 12 countries in Africa, while 17.4% came from eight countries in Europe, generating a diversity of 23 distinct native languages.

The mean age among undergraduate students was 27.5 years, and the median was 27. Among graduate students, the mean was 28.8 years, and the median was 33.5. In Brazil, the mean age of undergraduate students was 24.4 years (Andifes, 2018). For graduate students, the mean age for students on masters' programmes was 32.82 years and 36.97 years for PhD students (CGEE, 2020).

Regarding the overall evaluation (Figure 2), more than 82% of the international students reported being satisfied with the course ("definitely agree" or "mostly agree"), and almost 90% reported being satisfied with the support received from the international office. Moreover, 73.7% of the international students surveyed reported that they would actively recommend the university to others interested in applying, and 22.9% would recommend it if asked.

Figure 2: The perspectives of international students studying in Brazilian HEIs



Overall satisfaction with HE experience in Brazil

The majority of responses indicate that students are generally satisfied with their academic experience. For example, when combining the categories "definitely agree" and "mostly agree" (see Figure 3), 82.9% of students are satisfied with the course they are on, and 89.95% are content with the support received from the international office. In addition, 96.6% of the respondents would recommend the university to others, either actively or if asked. This high proportion of positive views raised concerns about the homogeneity of the responses. Homogeneity of results in surveys evaluating students' teaching experience is common; responses are often clustered (Kayas et al., 2022). Participants rarely respond about the entirety of their experience; often, the response is focused on a snapshot of the programme or module they are providing feedback on (Costa & Canen, 2022). In some countries, researchers argue that students are over-surveyed and thus respond passively, leading to random responses (Boring et al. 2016). There are also biases (MacNell et al., 2015) linked to gender, the mean age of participants, sample size, ethnicity/race, and perceptions of class or status, which generally contribute to homogeneity. However, our dataset did not allow for such comparisons.

French (2020) critiques the validity of student evaluations, arguing that student perceptions of teachers' teaching excellence, or otherwise, correlate across different gender and age groups, as well as with the social class of the lecturers. French proposes that it is important to consider how students perceive and respond to evaluative processes within the context of local institutional practices and support mechanisms. Students do not invest in responding to surveys for other reasons. First, they do not feel invested in the survey's goals, and second, they do not trust that the processes or mechanisms will lead to improvement (Winstone et al., 2021). Students are also concerned that survey results may influence their university's reputation, and can become increasingly fatigued by continuous surveying (Fosnacht et al., 2017). It is, therefore, important to ensure that surveys enhance international students' experiences in

tangible ways without eroding their confidence or fostering cynicism or fatigue (Murray Brux & Fry, 2010).

The value and effectiveness of international students' support mechanisms. The internationalisation of Brazilian HEIs needs to be effectively evaluated to ensure the goals and objectives of the programmes are adequately tracking with the needs of the sector and are effectively aligned to local policies and strategic aims. It appears there is scope to utilise the limited funds and to align the internationalisation strategy in a more comprehensive and integrated manner. In the next section, the paper examines key elements of the internationalisation programme using an Evidencing Value Framework.

DISCUSSION

Though the Brazilian government has made notable investments in both inward and outward mobility, the structural and systemic underpinnings of its internationalisation agenda reveal critical limitations that constrain its effectiveness and scalability. Brazil's approach to internationalisation does not centre on enriching students' experiences.

Systems and structures

Brazil's model of international student mobility, particularly from Latin America, is shaped by bilateral agreements such as the PAEC Program. Unlike European mobility schemes that often emphasise reciprocal exchange and institutional partnerships, Brazil's approach is more selective and academically merit-based. Students are typically chosen while still in their home countries, with academic excellence as a primary criterion. This model, while effective in attracting high-performing students, limits the diversity of international student profiles and may inadvertently exclude those with non-traditional academic trajectories or from less-resourced educational systems.

Furthermore, international students have access to the Política Nacional de Assistência Estudantil (PNAES), designed to democratise access to federal public education and reduce inequalities. However, students have a limited understanding of how to access these funds. Financial support (R$622 monthly) is available to subsidise meals, public health services and discounted transportation. Students from vulnerable backgrounds (including refugees) may also qualify for broader social welfare programs, such as Bolsa Família or Auxílio Brasil, provided they meet income thresholds and complete the CadÚnico registration process.

The complex, highly bureaucratic process for accessing these benefits creates frustration and apprehension. Students require a Social Identification Number (NIS) and often require the support of university social workers to navigate eligibility and documentation requirements. This creates a dependency on institutional actors and may delay or deter access to essential services, particularly for students unfamiliar with Brazilian administrative systems.

Linguistic isolation and limited inward mobility

Brazil's status as the sole Portuguese-speaking country in Latin America presents a unique linguistic barrier that significantly curtails inward student mobility. Unlike countries that benefit from English or Spanish as *lingua francas* in international education, Brazil's linguistic distinctiveness limits its attractiveness to a broader international student base. Although student satisfaction seems to indicate high levels of contentment due to accessible scholarships and tuition-free education, the language of instruction remains a persistent barrier to both academic integration and social inclusion (93.5% of respondents were from three regions: Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC, 59.9%), Europe (18.8%), and Africa (14.8%). More than 40% of respondents come from just three Latin American countries: Colombia (24.5%), Mexico (9.7%), and Argentina (7.9%).

Absence of standardised admission pathways

Brazilian HEIs predominantly rely on national entrance examinations (e.g., ENEM) for student admissions, a system that is largely inaccessible or irrelevant to international applicants. The absence of alternative, standardised pathways for international admissions results in a fragmented and opaque recruitment process. Consequently, the demographic and academic profiles of international students in Brazil remain poorly understood.

The interplay between cost-efficiency and quality assurance increasingly shapes international student mobility. As de Wit and Altbach (2021) observe, students globally seek the highest educational value at the lowest financial cost. In this context, Brazil's public universities consistently rank among the country's top institutions in global rankings, such as the Times Higher Education (THE) and Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), offering a compelling proposition. With tuition-free access for both domestic and international students, these institutions attract a diverse cohort seeking high-quality education without the financial burden typical of many global systems. However, this affordability masks deeper structural disparities in resource access and preparedness among international students, particularly when comparing European and Latin American cohorts.

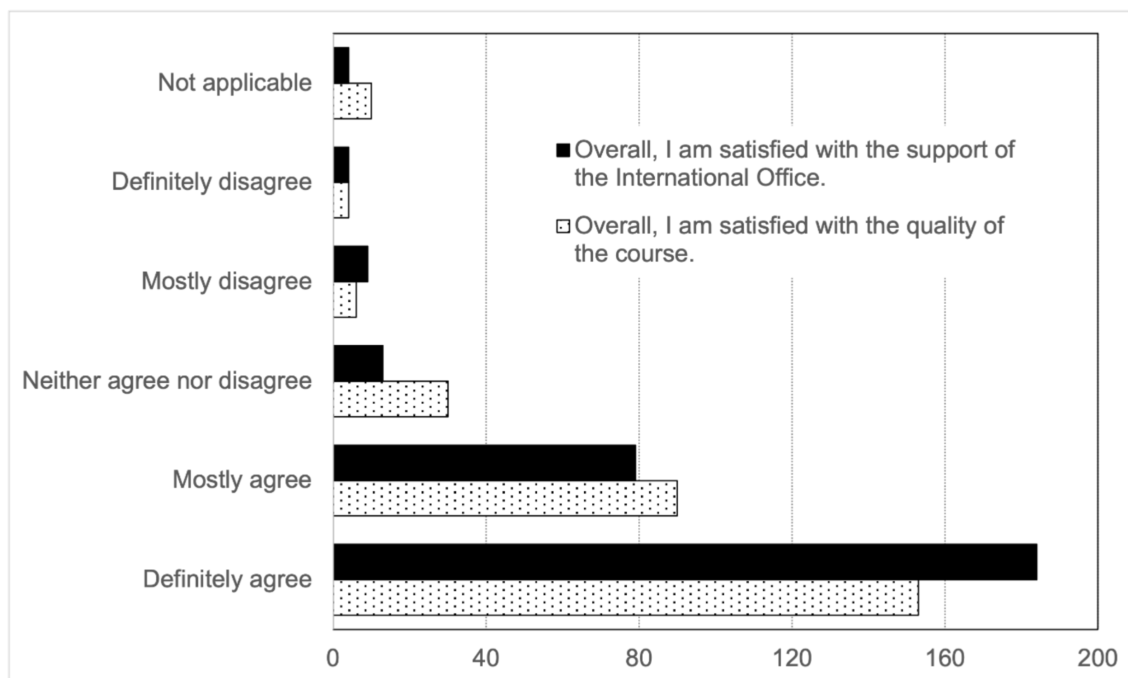
European students, particularly those enrolled in accredited engineering programs, benefit from a highly structured and resource-rich mobility framework. Verbyla et al. (2023) show that the global competencies of European STEM students improve in Latin America through field-based placements and the development of intercultural capabilities. These programs, governed by bodies such as the European Network for Accreditation in Engineering Education (ENAEE), embed international mobility as a core requirement. Students must complete at least one academic period abroad, typically 17 to 20 weeks, through study, internships, or research placements. This requirement is not merely aspirational but institutionalised through agreements with top-ranked global universities.

Moreover, European engineering education integrates the bachelor's and master's levels, with the final two years of undergraduate study classified as graduate-level education. This creates a misalignment in classification when these students enrol in Brazilian institutions, where they are treated as undergraduates despite their advanced academic standing.

Data deficiency and weak institutional coordination

Perhaps the most critical gap is the lack of a national database or monitoring system for international students. Without reliable data on student numbers, demographics, academic progression or post-study outcomes, Brazilian HEIs and policymakers are ill-equipped to evaluate the impact of internationalisation or to design responsive support services. Figure 3 shows students' satisfaction with mechanisms of support.

Figure 3: Effective mechanisms identified by students



CONCLUSION

Brazil's internationalisation agenda is at a pivotal juncture. While its commitment to educational equity and mobility is commendable, the current model lacks the structural coherence and strategic foresight seen in more mature systems. Addressing linguistic barriers, incentivising institutional engagement, standardising admissions and building robust data systems are not merely operational improvements; they are foundational to positioning Brazil as a competitive and inclusive player in the global higher education landscape. Strategically, government policies need to continuously align with context-sensitive approaches, which are reviewed within the broader educational and social mission of the only Portuguese-speaking country in Latin America (Spanish-speaking region). To avoid instrumentalising internationalisation, all global engagement ought to align with Brazilian local missions and societal needs (Labraña et al., 2024.

The findings reveal how understanding the profile of international students choosing Brazil as a destination for international mobility yields insights that can be used to tailor support mechanisms and services for the inbound student population. The novelty of the survey in Brazil and the lack of baseline data required to construct more evaluative studies of the

internationalisation programmes highlight the limited prioritisation of the student experience. Park (2022) highlighted that international students rely on support services at Australian universities, where there is an increasing focus on their significance. It is important to research what degree-seeking in-bound students need and expect from support services (Perez-Encinas & Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2017; Xu et al., 2025). In Brazil, in particular, the imperatives to use limited resources wisely should be underpinned by good evidence. Though there are many challenges in relation to the culture of evaluating programmes and giving feedback, the necessity of collating data and demonstrating value for money with respect to Brazilian taxpayers' limited resources is poignant.

To enhance its global appeal, Brazil must invest in multilingual academic offerings, including English-taught programs, and provide robust language support services. This would not only broaden its recruitment pool but also improve the academic and social experiences of international students. Holistic processes are needed to support the evaluation of internationalisation, as this paper has argued, to capture both tangible and intangible assets.

Developing a comprehensive national database is essential for evidence-based policymaking, and should be accompanied by institutional mechanisms for onboarding, ongoing support and post-study debriefing to ensure a holistic and high-quality international student experience. Such developments require cultural change that moves away from one-sided evaluation to one that enhances shared responsibility between educators and students (Nash & Winstone, 2017). Furthermore, establishing a centralised admissions framework for international students, complemented by clear and transparent criteria and recognition of foreign qualifications, would streamline recruitment and enable more strategic planning at both institutional and national levels.

Universities need to be proactive to enhance multilingual outreach and onboarding processes that demystify access to social benefits. Embedding social workers within international offices and developing pre-arrival guidance materials could significantly improve uptake and reduce administrative burdens on students. Such support mechanisms also require strengthening communication between Brazil and other Portuguese-speaking countries to support language development. Increasing contributions from The African Fund the Organization of American States to be earmarked for internationalisation activities will also improve pre-registration guidance and the overall student experience.

Limitations

Surveys offer integral insight into the priorities and perspectives of respondents. (Boring et al., 2016) because they gather participants' varied experiences within their perceived context, however, survey results can be biased due to survey fatigue and self-reported prejudices. While we can draw preliminary conclusions from this data, subsequent work should explore the extent to which these results remain valid after accounting for extraneous variables. The survey tool is an important starting point for enhancing systems and provision; however, they should not be the sole instigation for systemic or structural changes (Elliott & Shin. 2002).

REFERENCES

Amendola, A., & Restaino, M. (2017). An evaluation study on students' international mobility experience. *Quality & Quantity*, *51*(2), 525–544. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-016-0421-3

Amorim, G. B., & Finardi, K. R. (2022). The road(s) not taken and internationalization in Brazil: Journey or destination? *Acta Scientiarum. Education, 44*(1), e55211. https://doi.org/10.4025/actascieduc.v44i1.55211

Andifes, A. (2018). *V Pesquisa Nacional de perfil socioeconômico e cultural dos(as) graduandos(as) das IFES – 2018*. https://cristianoalvarenga.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/V-Perfil-dos-Estudantes_compressed.pdf

Beelen, J., & De Louw, E. (2020). *Internationalization at home: Past, present and future*. European Association for International Education.

Boring, A., & Ottoboni, K. (2016). Student evaluations of teaching (mostly) do not measure teaching effectiveness. *ScienceOpen Research*. https://doi.org/10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-EDU.AETBZC.v1

Carlson, S., França, T., Lomer, S., Resch, K., Roohi, S., & Budginaitė-Mačkinė, I. (2025). Social inequalities in international student mobility: Reviewing conceptual approaches. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1-20.

Costa, R. P., & Canen, A. G. (2022). Internationalization of higher education institutions: Perceptions of scholars. *Ensaio: Avaliação e Políticas Públicas em Educação, 30*(114), 94–115. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-403620210002903229

de Wit, H., & Hunter, F. (2015). 25 trends, issues and challenges in internationalization of higher education. In P. Ashwin & J. Case (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of international education and development* (pp. 302–303). Routledge.

de Wit, H., & Altbach, P. G. (2021). Internationalization in higher education: Global trends and recommendations for its future. *Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 5*(1), 28–46.

Dorovolomo, J., Laulaupea'alu, S., Rafiq, L. Z., Rodie, P., & Fito'o, B. (2022). Social capital is critical to perseverance at university during COVID-19: Pasifika students in Fiji, New Zealand and Solomon Islands universities. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 21*(2), 53–67.

Elliott, K. M., & Shin, D. (2002). Student satisfaction: An alternative approach to assessing this important concept. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 24*(2), 197–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080022000013518

Findlay, A. M. (2011). An assessment of supply and demand side theorizations of international student mobility. *International Migration, 49*(2), 162–190.

Finn, M., Mihut, G., & Darmody, M. (2021). Academic satisfaction of international students at Irish higher education institutions: The role of region of origin and cultural distance in

the context of marketization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153211027009

Fosnacht, K., Sarraf, S., Howe, E., & Peck, L. K. (2017). How important are high response rates for college surveys? *The Review of Higher Education, 40*(2), 245–265.

French, A. (2020). 'It's not what gets taught, or how well it may be taught, but who is doing the teaching': Can student evaluations ever deliver a fair assessment on teaching excellence in higher education? In J. Lea (Ed.), *Challenging the teaching excellence framework* (pp. 151- 178. Emerald Publishing.

Gao, C. Y. (2019). An integrated understanding of university internationalization across nations. In H. de Wit & J. J. Lee (Eds.), *Measuring university internationalization: Indicators across national contexts* (pp. 185–210). Routledge.

Garson, K. (2023). The unintended consequences of relying on economic rationales in Canadian internationalization. In H. de Wit & F. Hunter (Eds.), *Unintended consequences of internationalization in higher education* (pp. 246–265). Routledge.

GCUB. (2022). *Brazil Scholarships Program PAEC OAS-GCUB 2022* https://www.gcub.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Call-for-Application-Brazil-Scholarships-Program-PAEC-OAS-GCUB-2022.pdf

França, T., & Padilla, B. (2021). South–South student mobility: International students from Portuguese-speaking Africa in Brazil. In D. Cairns (Ed*.), The Palgrave handbook of youth mobility and educational migration* (pp. 235–246). Palgrave Macmillan.

Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (INEP). (2022, February 17). *Censo da Educação Superior 2019*. https://download.inep.gov.br/educacao_superior/censo_superior/documentos/2020/Apresentacao_Censo_da_Educacao_Superior_2019.pdf

Kayas, O. G., Assimakopoulos, C., & Hines, T. (2022). Student evaluations of teaching: Emerging surveillance and resistance. *Studies in Higher Education, 47*(1), 1–12.

King, R., Findlay, A., & Ahrens, J. (2010). *International student mobility literature review*. Report to HEFCE, and co-funded by the British Council, UK National Agency for Erasmus. HEFCE. http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/2010/rd2010/rd20_10.pdf .

Knight, J. (2012). Student mobility and internationalization: Trends and tribulations. *Research in Comparative and International Education, 7*(1), 20–33.

Kurek-Ochmańska, O., & Luczaj, K. (2021). 'Are you crazy? Why are you going to Poland?' Migration of Western scholars to academic peripheries. *Geoforum, 119*, 102–110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.12.001

Labraña, J., Henríquez, A., LaTorre, P., Puyol, F., Gómez, M. R., & López, N. (2024). New public management and internationalization in Latin American top-tier universities: A multiple case study. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 28*(4), 568–587.

Lee, J. J. (2021). International higher education as geopolitical power. In *US power in international higher education* (pp. 1–20). Routledge.

Lee, J. J., & Stensaker, B. (2021). Research on internationalization and globalization in higher education—Reflections on historical paths, current perspectives and future possibilities. *European Journal of Education, 56*(2), 157–168.

Lima, M. C., & Maranhão, C. M. S. D. A. (2009). O sistema de educação superior mundial: Entre a internacionalização ativa e passiva. *Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas), 14*, 583–610. https://doi.org/10.1590/S1414-40772009000300004

Luce, M. B., Fagundes, C. V., & Mediel, O. G. (2016). Internationalization of higher education: The intercultural dimension and the institutional support in the academic mobility evaluation. *Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas), 21*, 317–340. https://doi.org/10.1590/S1414-40772016000200002

MacNell, L., Driscoll, A., & Hunt, A. N. (2015). What's in a name: Exposing gender bias in student ratings of teaching. *Innovative Higher Education, 40*(4), 291-303.

Ministério das Relações Exteriores (MRE). (2022, February 17). *Programa de Estudantes Convênio de Graduação PEC-G*. https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br

Murray Brux, J., & Fry, B. (2010). Multicultural students in study abroad: Their interests, their issues, and their constraints. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 14*(5), 508–527. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315309342486

Nash, R. A., & Winstone, N. E. (2017). Responsibility-sharing in the giving and receiving of assessment feedback. *Frontiers in Psychology, 8*, 1519.

Neves, C. E. B., & Barbosa, M. L. D. O. (2020). Internationalization of higher education in Brazil: Advances, obstacles, and challenges. *Sociologias, 22*, 144–175. https://doi.org/10.1590/15174522-99656

Nusche, D. (2008). Assessment of learning outcomes in higher education: A comparative review of selected practices. *OECD Education Working Papers, No. 15*. https://doi.org/10.1787/244257272573

OECD. (2023). *International student mobility (indicator)*. https://doi.org/10.1787/4bcf6fc3-en

Park, E. (2022). Coping with diverse accented English: Comprehension strategies deployed by East Asian international students at an Australian university. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 21*(1), 1-19.

Perez-Encinas, A., & Rodriguez-Pomeda, J. (2017). International students' perceptions of their needs when going abroad: Services on demand. *Journal of Studies in International Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315317724556

Prada, T., & Garcia, M. L. T. (2022). Assistência estudantil na educação profissional, científica e tecnológica na Covid-19. In M. P. M. Silva, C. B. Fernandez, Y. Sassaki, & D. C. Rolim (Eds.), *Serviço Social, Formação Profissional e Políticas Sociais* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–232). EDUA; Alexa Cultural.

Ritter, Z. S., & Roth, K. R. (2020). International students need not apply: Impact of US immigration policy in the Trump era on international student enrollment and campus experiences. In K. R. Roth & Z. S. Ritter (Eds*.), Whiteness, power, and resisting change in US higher education* (Palgrave Studies in Race, Inequality and Social Justice in Education). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57292-1_5

Robles, C., & Bhandari, R. (2017). *Higher education and student mobility: A capacity building pilot study in Brazil*. Institute of International Education. https://faubai.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/IIE-High-Education-and-Student

Seggie, F. N., & Çalıkoğlu, A. (2021). Changing patterns of international academic mobility: The experiences of Western-origin faculty members in Turkey. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 53*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1868975

Smart, F., Cleaver, E., & Robertson, A. (2020). Beyond the metrics: The importance of intangible assets in the HE context. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice, 8*(2), 3–6.

Tumenas, F. (2021). Financiamento das universidades líderes nos rankings internacionais, um caminho para as universidades públicas brasileiras? *Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas), 26*, 270–287.

Verbyla, M. E., Vernaza-Hernandez, V., & Feldman, A. (2024). International Research Experiences and Global Competency Development for Graduate Students in Engineering and Science. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 28*(2), 221-239

Verhine, R. E., Dantas, L. M. V., & Soares, J. F. (2006). From the national course exam (Provão) to ENADE: A comparative analysis of national exams used in Brazilian high school. *Ensaio: Avaliação e Políticas Públicas em Educação, 14*, 291–310.

Winstone, N. E., Ajjawi, R., Dirkx, K., & Boud, D. (2021). Measuring what matters: The positioning of students in feedback processes within national student satisfaction surveys. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–13.

Xu, X., Chong, P. Y., Bulut Şahin, B., Ceydilek, E., & Bos, N. A. (2025). How International Students Perceive the International Learning Environment in the Netherlands, Türkiye, and Malaysia*. Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10283153251343129.

Xu, X., Braun Střelcová, A., Marini, G., Huang, F., & Cai, Y. (2022). International academics in mainland China: What do we know and what do we need to know? *European Journal of Higher Education, 12*(S1), 416–433.

Yessenbekova, K., Hajar, A., & Hernández-Torrano, D. (2025). Global south mobility: A case study on the motivations and language practices of Indian international students in Kazakhstan. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2025.2512824

APPENDIX

Free and Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in the research "Evaluation of the experience of foreign students in university education offered in Brazil." The work aims to "Evaluate the training offered by public universities in Brazil at the undergraduate and graduate levels". Filling out the online questionnaire takes between 20 and 25 minutes. The reason for this invitation is that you meet the inclusion criteria of the research - to be a foreign student in academic mobility in Brazil. To participate in this study, you will have no cost, nor will you receive any financial advantage.

The predicted risk is the possible embarrassment or discomfort for sharing the difficulties faced during the pandemic. If you feel uncomfortable with a question, we ask you not to answer it. We are available for any clarifications you need, at any time.

You are assured: a) Secrecy - you will not be identified in any publication that may result from this study; b) Guarantee of privacy; c) You can withdraw consent at any stage of the survey. Participation is voluntary and the refusal to participate will not entail any penalty or change in the way you can be addresses by the researcher; d) No cost to participate in this research; e) Right to seek indemnity in the event of any damage resulting from it.

We commit to: 1) Use the data available exclusively for the purposes contained in the project; 2) Not allow, for any reason, unauthorized persons or institutions to have access to data or individuals; 3) Not disclosure - by any means of communication - of data or information that identifies the research subjects and other variables in the databases that allow the identification of individuals; and 4) Not practice and not allow any action that compromises the integrity of the individuals or the available databases.

We inform that the project has been registered at UFES Human Research Ethics Committee (via Plataforma Brazil) and has the Certificate of Presentation of Ethical Appreciation (CAAE) number 33365920.3.0000.5542 and we commit to forward it (if necessary).

Any questions or information about this research, you can contact Prof. Dr. Arinola Adefila. The Research Ethics Committee should be contacted in case of denunciation and/or complications in the research. The contact can be made by telephone (27) 3145-9820, email or mail by the address: Av. Fernando Ferrari, 514, Campus Universitário, sala 07 do Prédio Administrativo do CCHN, Goiabeiras, Vitória - ES, CEP 29.075-910. Considering this information, we ask you to indicate below whether you agree or not to participate in this research. *Obrigatório

1. Do you agree to participate in this research by answering the following online questionnaire?

Yes or No.

Questionnaire: assessment of the international experience at a Federal University

Please, assess your international experience at a Brazilian Federal University regarding its professors, classes, and the International Office. Your information will be used for statistical purposes only.

1. About the Federal University where you study or have studied at

1.1. Which region in Brazil is the federal university located at?

AC AL AP AM BA CE DF ES GO MA MT MS MG PA PB PR PE PI RJ RN RS RO RR SC SP SE TO

1.2. Which state in Brazil is the federal university located at?

1.3. Acronym of the federal university

1.5. Program you are/were enrolled at the federal university Undergraduate Postgraduate

1.6. Degree level you are/were enrolled at the federal university:

1.7. Year you first enrolled at the federal university:

1.8. Year of entry 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021

Year you left the federal university: 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021, Still enrolled.

2. Information about yourself

2.1. Year of birth:

2.2. Country of birth

2.3. Country of nationality

2.4. Country where you studied before arriving in Brazil.

2.5. First language

Questions 3 - 12

* Definitely agree *Mostly agree *Neither agree nor disagree *Mostly disagree *Definitely disagree *Not applicable

3. Evaluation of teaching during my experience Professors are good at explaining subjects.

Professors made the subjects interesting.

The course is intellectually exciting.

My course has challenged me to achieve my best performance.

4. Evaluation of Learning Opportunities

My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth.

My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different areas.

My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt.

5. Evaluation of Grading System and Feedback

Criteria used in grading have been presented since the beginning of my experience. Grading and assessment have been fair.

Feedback on my works has been timely.

I have received helpful comments on my work.

6. Evaluation of Academic Support

I have been able to contact the International Office staff when needed.

I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.

Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices about my course I have been able to contact the International Office staff when needed.

7. Evaluation of Organization and Management

The course is well organized and runs smoothly.

The timetable works efficiently for me.

Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.

8. Evaluation of Learning Resources

Provided IT resources and facilities have supported my learning well enough.

Library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well enough.

I have been able to access course specific resources (e.g., equipment, facilities, software, collections) when needed.

9. Evaluation of the Learning Community

I feel part of a community of staff and students.

I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course.

10. Evaluation of Student Opinion

I have had opportunities to provide feedback on my course.

Professors value students' views and opinions about the course

It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been implemented.

The students' union (association) effectively represents students' academic interests.

11. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course

12. Overall, I am satisfied with the support of the International Office.

13. Would you recommend the Federal University where you study/studied to other people interested in applying to this university?

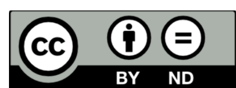
*I would actively encourage people to apply If asked

*I would encourage people to apply

*I would neither encourage nor discourage people to apply If asked

*I would discourage people from applying

*I would actively discourage people from applying



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Authors and readers are free to copy, display and distribute this article with no changes, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives (IEJ: CP), and the same license applies. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at. The IEJ: CP is published by the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (formerly ANZCIES) and Sydney Open Access Journals at the University of Sydney. Articles are indexed in ERIC, Scimago Journal (SJR)Ranking / SCOPUS. The IEJ:CP is a member of the Free Journal Network: Join the IEJ: CP and OCIES Facebook community at Oceania Comparative and International Education Society, and Twitter: @OceaniaCIES

The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 24, No 2, 2025
http://iejcomparative.org

Living out global mindedness? A meta-analysis of qualitative empirical accounts of study abroad experiences[1]

Haoming Tang
Trinity Western University, Canada

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8775-4101

DOI: https://doi.org/10.70830/iejcp.2402.20413

As study abroad activities regain their popularity in a post-pandemic world, questions and debates continue regarding the value of a study abroad experience. Focusing on the development of global mindedness, understood as a desirable goal of global education that encompasses qualities such as intercultural sensitivity, sense of global connectivity and responsibility, this qualitative meta-analysis explores university students' experiences of study abroad. Drawing on data from 22 primary qualitative studies, the findings reveal that while many participants demonstrated enhanced self-awareness, expanded worldviews and renewed perspectives, others showed limited growth, underscoring the nuanced and complex nature of global mindedness. Commonly reported experiences influencing its development include navigating emotional distress, confronting discrimination, overcoming language barriers and engaging in immersive learning and intercultural interactions. While confirming the valuable learning opportunities that study abroad can offer, this study also raises concerns about the limitations and problematic assumptions associated with these experiences, highlighting the need for a deeper examination of study abroad practices. These findings offer valuable insights for educators involved in designing, coordinating and evaluating study abroad programs, as well as for researchers who are interested in the values, potential and impacts of study abroad on students.

Keywords: study abroad; global mindedness; student experience; higher education; meta-analysis

INTRODUCTION

Travelling and staying overseas for educational purposes has a long history that goes far beyond modern times (Bufmack, 2013). Over the past decades, the rise of globalisation has fuelled steady growth in study abroad interest and activities (Dietrich, 2018; Goel et al., 2010). This growing trend was interrupted by the global COVID outbreak in 2020, as universities worldwide were forced to suspend study abroad programs (Gibbs, 2022) and replace them with online learning activities (Liu & Shirley, 2021). As education resumes in a post-pandemic world and interest in study abroad resurges, questions have been raised concerning the future of study

[1] This paper is adopted from a chapter in a doctoral dissertation (Tang, 2023). Substantial revisions and updates have been made to the original text.

abroad (Glass & Gesing, 2021; di Giovine & de Uriarte, 2020; Xiao & Nie, 2023), prompting a re-examination of the learning outcomes of such programs and activities.

Widely used in literature and often without being clearly defined, 'study abroad' has become a rather generic term that may cause confusion. In this study, I am in favour of using the broader term 'study abroad experiences' over the narrow sense of study abroad as a form of (institutionalised) activities that lead to obtaining a degree or gaining credits (The Forum of Education Abroad, 2011). It refers to any learning experience through educational endeavour "that occurs outside the participant's home country" (p. 12). While this article focuses on student experiences of study abroad within the higher education domain, a more inclusive definition could allow for examining a wider range of study abroad experiences from a more diverse student population.

While high educational institutions praise the value of study abroad, questions and concerns also abound. Some critiques focus on the ideological level, pointing out the neoliberal zeitgeist and market-driven nature of the popular study abroad or international mobility discourse (Courtois, 2020; Tarc, 2013). As far as the value of experience is concerned, a most notable challenge comes from Gaudelli and Laverty (2015). Drawing on Dewey's conceptualisation of experience, they contend that despite the widely held belief that study abroad experience can "increase awareness and cross-cultural competence . . . such beliefs are not yet empirically supported" (p. 15). In a similar critical note, Doerr (2019) calls for more "rigorous analytical frameworks" (p. 4) to understand the learning in a study abroad experience.

Considering the lingering questions and debates over the value and benefits of study abroad experiences, I conduct this study to deepen the understanding of the processes and impacts on university and college students. However, instead of interviewing yet another group of study abroad participants, I take a step back to (re)examine the existing evidence in recent literature (from the past 10 years) by employing a qualitative meta-analysis approach. The following questions guided the inquiry:

- How do the student narratives in the selected primary studies characterise and explain the notion of global mindedness?
- What significant experiences, factors and processes reported in these narratives impact the development of global mindedness among study abroad participants?

GLOBAL MINDEDNESS

The central analytical lens for this study is *global mindedness*, a term frequently invoked in international education discourse but often under-theorised in empirical research. In this study, global mindedness is approached as both a pedagogical aspiration and a culturally situated process, shaped by the lived experiences of learners in diverse transnational contexts.

Earlier efforts to define global mindedness include Hett's (1993) *Global-Mindedness Scale*, which conceptualises it as a combination of three key aspects: intercultural sensitivity, personal responsibility and global interconnectedness. While influential, this measurement-oriented framework reflects one particular conceptualisation rather than a settled consensus. Prior to Hett (1993), Schmidt (1975) and Hanvey (1982) articulated related ideas, highlighting attributes such as open-mindedness, perspective consciousness and awareness of global dynamics. Building on these foundations, more recent work situates global mindedness within

broader constructs such as *global citizenship education* (OECD, 2018), *cosmopolitan learning* (Rizvi, 2009), and *international mindedness* (IBO, 2017).

Rather than adopting a rigid definition, this study treats global mindedness as an emergent, contested and flexible category, shaped by the voices and reflections of study abroad participants themselves. This approach is informed by naturalistic, qualitative meta-synthesis methodologies (Timulak, 2014), which prioritise allowing conceptual categories to emerge inductively from qualitative data rather than imposing predefined frameworks. Meanwhile, I take a slightly critical stance in my interpretation. In alignment with scholars such as Tarc (2013) and Doerr (2019), this study is attentive to how discourses of personal transformation, global citizenship, internationalisation and *becoming global* may obscure persistent inequalities and unexamined assumptions within study abroad programs.

Importantly, this study also positions students not merely as recipients of global education but also as meaning-makers who negotiate the tensions between personal, institutional and ideological framings of their international experiences. Global mindedness here is thus treated not as a static trait but as a processual and relational development, situated in context and often marked by ambivalence, contradiction or even regression.

To deepen this inquiry, the following sections draw upon 22 primary qualitative studies, highlighting how global mindedness is interpreted, challenged or reimagined by students navigating linguistic, emotional and cultural transitions abroad.

METHODS OF INQUIRY

This study employs a qualitative meta-analysis, which refers to the secondary analysis of findings from original qualitative studies to generate new interpretive insights. The term meta-analysis is more commonly associated with quantitative research synthesis (Dixon-Woods et al., 2005). In qualitative research, it denotes a form of thematic and conceptual integration across studies. As defined by Timulak (2014), qualitative meta-analysis involves “a secondary analysis . . . of the primary, original, studies addressing the same research questions” (p. 481), with the aim of generating broader conceptual understanding. The term *meta-analysis* is often distinguished from *meta-synthesis*. Typically, meta-synthesis emphasises the reinterpretation of study findings at a higher level of abstraction.

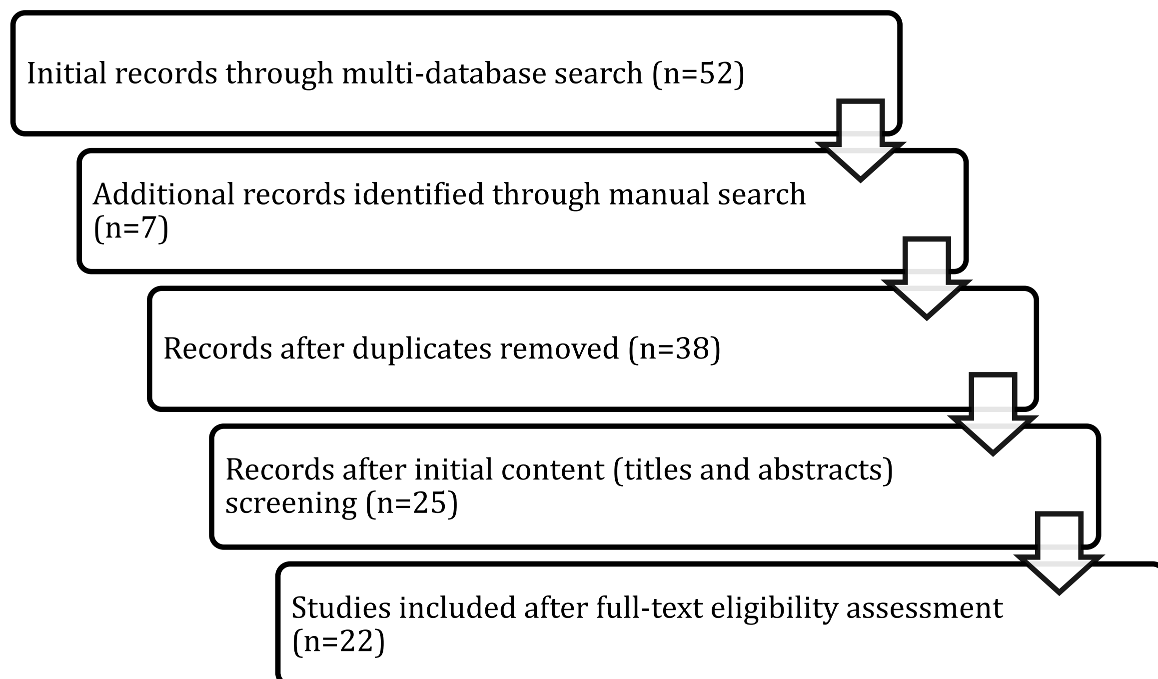
In contrast, qualitative meta-analysis often retains closer alignment to the original study’s aim and purpose (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). In this study, I adopt Timulak’s usage of qualitative meta-analysis, which offers a systematic yet interpretive lens suited to exploring participant voice, contextual nuance and meaning-making across cases. Timulak’s view aligns with Irwin’s (2013), who defines “qualitative secondary analysis” as “the use of already produced data to develop new social scientific and/or methodological understandings” (p. 295). Given the study’s focus on identity, reflection, and the construct of global-mindedness, meta-analysis provides a robust and appropriate framework.

DATA SELECTION

To ensure the quality and relevance of data, the following criteria were used in the literature search and screening process. First, only primary qualitative research studies were considered. Studies based on qualitative interviews, focus groups, reflection papers or journal entries were included if the data foregrounded participants’ lived experiences. Second, as an additional validity-ensuring feature (Creswell & Miller, 2000), eligible studies needed to contain first-person, *thick description* of personal experiences from study abroad participants, with studies

required to present direct quotes from participants and rich narrative excerpts. Third, the selection was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in reputable academic databases such as EBSCO, ERIC and ProQuest Education. As Major and Savin-Baden (2010) noted, the credibility of a meta-analysis depends on the integrity of its included studies. Applying a peer-reviewed, database-indexed filter served as a practical and consistent quality-assurance mechanism. Fourth, to ensure relevance of topic, selected studies must have addressed international student mobility in higher education contexts, with a focus on participants' lived experiences. Finally, data selection focused on literature from the past 10 years (2014–2024) to ensure contemporary relevance.

Figure 1: Flow diagram for study selection.



Identifying suitable data began with the most common strategy of keyword search (Swift & Wampold, 2018). Using terms, including *study abroad*, *student experience*, *higher education,* and *qualitative* as keywords. The initial search yielded over 50 results. These results were then expanded using backward and forward searching (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018) and hand-searched key journals for more recent publications not yet included in the databases.

During the screening process, repetitive results were dropped, as were the research papers that did not meet the quality-control criteria listed above.

At the end of the screening process (Figure 1), 22 studies were chosen for the analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Selected literature

Selected papers	Number of participants	Student origins	Study abroad destinations
Vatalaro et al., 2015	5	USA	Italy
Dai & Garcia, 2019	7	China	Australia
Sato & Hodge, 2015	8	Japan	USA
Yang, 2020	13	USA	China
Lee & Green, 2016	4	USA	South Africa
Onosu, 2021	15	USA	Multiple countries
Jaeger & Gram, 2016	18	China & Denmark	Denmark &China
Oh & Nussli, 2014, (2021)	5	USA	South Korea
Young & Snead, 2017	11	Saudi Arabia	USA
Lickteig et al., 2019	2	USA	Finland & Indonesia
Fukuda & Nishikawa Chávez, 2021	6	USA	Japan
Huffman et al., 2020	50	Japan	Multiple countries
Hsiao et al., 2021	14	Taiwan	Australia
Conceição et al., 2021	33	Brazil	USA
Rybo-LoPresti & Rhein, 2021	22	USA	Thailand
Sobkowiak, 2019	12	Poland	Multiple European countries
Prieto-Arranz et al., 2021	8	Spain	Multiple European countries
Moon et al., 2020	6	China & South Korea	USA
Medina et al., 2015	16	USA	Germany
Baker et al., 2022	14	Thailand	Multiple countries
Chang, 2024	1	Vietnam	Taiwan
Witt, 2024	12	USA	Multiple countries

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis followed the qualitative meta-analysis procedures outlined by Timulak (2014) and Levitt (2018), using an inductive, interpretive approach to extract, compare and synthesise meaning across studies. The process involved four main stages:

1) Data extraction: From each study, narrative findings and verbatim participant quotes were compiled into a central dataset. Where available, data were drawn from results sections, appendices and illustrative vignettes. Both first-order (participants' voices) and second-order data (researcher summaries) were collected to ensure comprehensiveness.

2) Initial coding: Each unit of text was examined line-by-line using open coding informed by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Codes were created inductively, capturing emotional tones, cognitive shifts, metaphors and intercultural experiences. This process

was conducted iteratively and documented in analytic memos to preserve emergent patterns.

3) Thematic synthesis: Codes were grouped into preliminary thematic categories using axial coding techniques. These categories were refined through constant comparison across studies, attending to both recurring patterns and outlier cases. Redundant or overlapping codes were collapsed, and categories were merged or split as needed to enhance conceptual clarity.
4) Critical alignment: Emergent themes were aligned with the study's two research questions, particularly focusing on how participant narratives articulated or challenged key dimensions of global mindedness. Themes were tested for coherence, relevance, and analytic saturation, ensuring they captured variation across cultural, institutional and geographic contexts.

Throughout this process, the voice of participants was prioritised over researcher commentary wherever possible. This emphasis was critical to capturing authentic reflections of global engagement and identity negotiation. Longitudinal data were used where available (Oh & Nussli, 2021) to identify sustained impacts and deferred meaning-making over time. Coding and synthesis were managed manually and were reviewed through multiple iterations to maintain transparency and reflexivity in interpretation (Finfgeld-Connett, 2018; Levitt, 2018).

NOTABLE FINDINGS

Global mindedness unpacked: Nuanced change in participants

While study abroad is often celebrated for fostering global mindedness through broadened perspectives and cross-cultural immersion (Paige et al., 2009), the qualitative evidence analysed in this study suggests a far more complex and uneven process. Participant narratives reflect a spectrum of outcomes, from increased openness and reflexivity to persistent cultural biases and discomfort. This section presents three interrelated themes, demonstrating how students engage with, resist or reinterpret global mindedness in practice.

Reflexive self-awareness and intercultural perception

A key facet of global mindedness involves the capacity to view oneself through the eyes of others (Skolnick et al., 2004) – developing reflexive self-awareness within unfamiliar sociocultural contexts. Across several studies, participants reported newfound understandings of how their national, racial or religious identities were perceived abroad.

Some participants reflected on how collective identity labels such as "American" (Medina et al., 2015), "white woman" (Onosu, 2021), "Spaniard" (Prieto-Arranz et al., 2021) and "Muslim" (Young & Snead, 2017) were perceived in study abroad contexts. The study abroad experience heightened their self-awareness and provided insight into how their identities were understood in different cultural settings, fostering a renewed understanding of themselves and their social labels. A participant in Lee and Green (2016) observed, "Biologically there's no reality of race, but there is a political reason to be Black" (p. 71). These reflections frequently emerged through moments of intercultural comparison, as a student in Lickteig et al. (2019) noted, "Through those differences [I experienced in Indonesia,] I learn more about the system I am familiar with" (p. 12).

Others articulated an emerging reflexivity about their cultural positioning. One participant in Witt (2024) acknowledged, “I kind of forgot other countries and [their] histories” (“Role of global experience in understanding global leadership,” para. 1). A student in Onosu (2021) remarked, “We talk about American issues as if they are worldwide issues”; and through the experience abroad, “[you] can now look at things from an outsider’s perspective, and you see yourself and the bubble you grew up in from a different lens” (p. 8). Similarly, a student in Huffman et al. (2020) noted, “This program exposed me to foreign cultures and made me aware that I had previously lived in such a narrow world” (p. 58).

In these cases, participants could also be said to have acquired “perspective consciousness” (Hanvey, 1982) and enhanced “intercultural awareness” (Baker, 2015; Dasli, 2011), foundational elements of global mindedness.

Open-mindedness and new perspectives

Global mindedness also entails an evolving openness to alternative worldviews, cultures and systems of meaning. Many participants expressed significant shifts in how they perceived cultural others and questioned the biased and limited views they had formed in their home environments.

One participant in Baker et al. (2022) stated, “I used to be quite conservative and quite nationalist, but now . . . my mind has opened, and I learned a lot of things from that” (p. 10). In Medina et al. (2015), a student who had previously judged minority groups in the US acknowledged, “It’s a lot harder to fit into a society than Americans think it is” (p. 85).

Participants described a growing attentiveness to nuance and a recognition of shared humanity across cultural divides. One student in Sobkowiak (2019) reflected, “I used to judge people in a very shallow and superficial way, [but now] I try to pay attention to nuances concerning what people are doing and saying” (p. 701). This growing awareness was often accompanied by a deeper sense of global interconnectedness. As one student in Baker et al. (2022) observed, “Nationalities and languages are just a shell of who we are” (p. 10). Similarly, a participant in Yang (2020) noted, “At the deepest level . . . we are really not all that different after all” (p. 116).

Other students recognised common emotional and social concerns as transcending national boundaries. A participant in Huffman et al. (2020) shared, “I used to think that foreigners and foreign countries were very different from Japan . . . [A]fter the experience, I realized that they worry about things and cry about things just like me” (p. 58). Echoing this insight, a Brazilian student in Conceição et al. (2021) commented, “Formerly I thought that just Brazil had problems. But now I [can] see that all places have problems” (p. 138).

These narratives reflect a shift toward what Byram (1997) calls intercultural empathy—the ability to suspend judgment and seek deeper understanding across cultural lines.

Counter examples of global mindedness

Despite the prevalence of positive shifts, the data also revealed ambivalent or regressive trajectories. Some participants retained or reinforced cultural stereotypes even after immersive experiences, complicating the assumption that study abroad inherently leads to global mindedness.

In Prieto-Arranz et al. (2021), a participant stated, “I had the perception prior to departure . . . that Spaniards showed no respect for language issues and Catalan. And going to Venice helped me check it out for myself” (p. 10).

Others expressed discomfort or intolerance. In Young and Snead (2017), a Saudi student remarked, "I don't like when women wear [shorts] and short dresses . . . A university should be a place to learn [and] not to show your body off" (p. 43). In Medina et al. (2015), a US student studying in Germany described that when she "received a new roommate from a Middle Eastern country," her initial thought was, "Could he be like a terrorist?" (p. 83).

National stereotypes also persisted in Sobkowiak (2019), where Spaniards were described as "spending a lot of time in cafes" (p. 693), Portuguese as "often late and very loud", and Belgians as "quite reserved and withdrawn" (p. 694). One Danish student in Jaeger and Gram (2016) commented, "it is very Chinese that things change every other minute" (p. 41). Similar generalisations appeared in Fukuda and Nishikawa Chávez (2021), where a student noted, "Japanese people would stand by themselves quietly, they would not want to sit next to me" (p. 836).

These examples illustrate that global mindedness is not a guaranteed outcome, but a contingent process shaped by personal readiness and sociocultural context.

The journey to global mindedness: Significant experiences, processes and factors

While internal reflection and openness are central to the development of global mindedness, participants' narratives also reveal that external experiences, emotional responses and contextual dynamics profoundly shape this process. These encounters are often disorienting, complex and emotionally charged, underscoring global mindedness as a negotiated process and context-bound journey rather than a linear development. The following themes illustrate the pathways and obstacles participants encountered.

Emotional disruption as a catalyst for critical reflection

Emotional discomfort was frequently the first rupture in participants' expectations. Initial encounters with cultural unfamiliarity often triggered anxiety, awkwardness, self-doubt and inner insecurity—what Mezirow (2008) calls "disorienting dilemmas" and Jarvis (2012) describes as "disjunctures". These moments, though unsettling, often opened spaces for deeper and critical reflection.

A participant in Rybo-LoPresti and Rhein (2021) shared, "I was kinda freaked out in the beginning," while another in Sobkowiak (2019) expressed discomfort at being kissed on both cheeks by "a complete stranger" (p. 696). Feelings of alienation were also common. As one student in Prieto-Arranz et al. (2021) put it, "[Y]ou are not German . . . you're a Spaniard studying in Germany. No, no, you're not one of them" (p. 8). Similar feelings were reported in other studies, such as in Fukuda and Nishikawa Chávez (2021), where a participant "felt so out of place" (p. 837) and a student teacher in Oh and Nussli (2014) who "truly felt like an outsider" (p. 80).

Though distressing, some students reframed these emotions as learning moments. A participant in Onosu (2021) reflected on her shift "from the feeling of anger and discomfort" to the realisation that she could "learn from the situation" (p. 8). These narratives suggest that emotional disruption, when coupled with reflexivity, can support the development of global mindedness.

Discrimination and marginalisation

Several students encountered exclusion, racism or Islamophobia during their time abroad, highlighting the structural inequalities embedded in global mobility. These experiences challenge the assumption that cross-cultural encounters are inherently positive or transformative.

One participant in Sato and Hodge (2015) reported, “There was no way to join in the discussion. Group members did not care about me,” adding, “This type of experience made me feel lonely and I do not think my study abroad is a success” (p. 217). Similar experiences were reported in Moon et al. (2020), where some Chinese and Korean students felt their native English-speaking classmates questioned their intelligence: “They might not think I am the same level” (p. 38).

Some participants recalled incidents of racism and Islamophobia, such as in Young and Snead (2017): “Some people don’t like me because I wear hijab,” said one female Saudi student (p. 42), while another recounted, “A white male spit at my wife” (p. 42). In Prieto-Arranz et al. (2021), a student described feeling hyper-visible due to her skin colour: “Every time I went to class . . . everyone [was] staring at me, even the teachers” (p. 8).

These accounts highlight how the pursuit of global mindedness often occurs within unequal and exclusionary systems, requiring not only empathy but also critical consciousness.

Language as both a barrier and a bridge

Language emerged as a major axis of both limitation and growth. For many, linguistic barriers disrupted academic engagement and social integration. A student in Moon et al. (2020) confessed, “My biggest difficulty in the U.S. is language” (p. 35), while students in Hsiao et al. (2021) found that limitations in English fluency impeded their learning.

Such challenges often produced feelings of inadequacy or frustration. In Sato and Hodge (2015), a Japanese student spoke of losing linguistic confidence after becoming a minority speaker (p. 213), while a participant in Huffman et al. (2020) shared the emotional strain of “trying to speak but not getting the words right” (p. 59). A Saudi student in Young and Snead (2017) remarked, “Before I came here, I understood some words, but I was surprised when I started learning academic English” (p. 42), highlighting the inadequacy of pre-departure preparation and the gap between conversational and academic language demands.

On the other hand, many students described proactive strategies for language learning. A Saudi student in Young and Snead (2017) stated, “I listen to the radio and read in English as much as I can” (p. 41), while a Brazilian student in Conceição et al. (2021) reflected, “Speaking in English obliged me to rethink my first language in order to speak correctly” (p. 135). Many participants also took the opportunity to interact with English speakers through questioning and frequent communication practice, as highlighted by students in Sato and Hodge (2015, p. 213) and Huffman et al. (2020, p. 58).

Overcoming language barriers not only enhanced participants’ linguistic proficiency but also fostered greater self-confidence and intercultural understanding. One participant in Chang (2024) proudly remarked, “I started to think, maybe I’m able to learn English or maybe any foreign language faster than others” (p. 816). Such narratives illustrate how the process of confronting and navigating language challenges can cultivate intercultural resilience and linguistic self-efficacy, both of which are key dimensions of global mindedness.

Interacting with people from diverse backgrounds

Study abroad provided opportunities for intercultural contact, but students varied in their willingness or ability to engage beyond familiar circles. Some participants intentionally sought diverse interactions. One student in Baker et al. (2022) described "spending time . . . with students and lecturers who have different cultural backgrounds and speak different first languages" (p. 9).

Others spoke of the value of stepping outside their comfort zones. As an American student in Yang (2020) noted, "I was able to ask [my Chinese peers] questions and not feel awkward or ashamed not knowing . . . They really provided the support I needed" (p. 117).

At the same time, many reported gravitating toward linguistic or cultural peers. A participant in Medina et al. (2015) recalled, "We just sorta self-segregated so most American students sit with each other" (p. 5). In Sato and Hodge (2015), a Japanese student said, "There are many benefits when I hang out with Japanese students" (p. 216). Similarly, one participant in Prieto-Arranz et al. (2021) noted the tendency for Spanish students to stick together so they can "always speak Spanish among themselves" (p. 8).

These patterns illustrate that intercultural learning is not automatic. Instead, it requires deliberate effort from the learner, as well as careful preparation, guidance and institutional support. As Onosu (2021) observed, "Transformative learning during cultural immersion depends on the willingness and the intensity with which the participants engage" (p. 7).

Immersion and homestay as transformative contexts

Immersive settings, such as a homestay, offered participants vivid, embodied insights into cultural life. A student in Lee and Green (2016) emphasised the power of "being in that space and learning" (p. 71), while another in Onosu (2021) noted, "once your [host] family accepts you, the community accepts you" (p. 7).

Two telling examples come from essays written by two students in Fukuda and Nishikawa Chávez (2021). In one instance, a student recounted a moment when her host mother confided that she worried her son would struggle in adulthood due to his emotional challenges. Initially, the student found this perspective extreme, but later understood it as a reflection of a broader cultural concern in Japan. Eventually, as the authors explain, the student "learned the hidden meaning of her host mother's comments [by] connecting them to the concept of 'giri'" (p. 838), or social obligation, as opposed to 'ninjo' (human feelings): "According to conventional Japanese thought, when *giri* declines and *ninjo* escalates, social harmony is threatened" (pp. 838–839). Another student from the same study shared a critical moment when his host father played an old guitar with visible damage. When the student asked about it, the father explained that despite its imperfections, it was irreplaceable. "This moment", the student reflected, "was a breakthrough in my understanding of how the Japanese mind works in relation to my own Western views" (p. 839). Through this incident, he "discovered the exact sensation of how the Japanese appreciated beauty in imperfection" (p. 838).

However, not all homestay experiences were positive. In Oh and Nussli (2014), three out of five participants reported rewarding relationships with their host families, but the other two described significant discomfort stemming from cultural misunderstandings, language barriers, and mismatched expectations. One participant shared, "I just felt like such an inconvenience to them" (p. 74), even though she acknowledged that her host family "was really nice". This tension reveals how feelings of burden and alienation can persist despite outward hospitality,

especially in the absence of effective communication. Similarly, in Yang (2020), a student described feeling repeatedly pressured by her host family to eat unfamiliar food: "Sometimes I would sit with the host dad and he would make me eat all this food that I just didn't want to eat . . . but I just was horrible at communicating" (p. 114). These experiences suggest that the quality of intercultural engagement during homestays depends not only on the host context but also on students' communicative readiness and cultural sensitivity. Without adequate pre-departure preparation, even well-intentioned immersion can result in frustration and missed learning opportunities.

Yet even these challenging moments, when reflected upon, contributed to intercultural awareness. As Onosu (2021) observed, participants who engaged more openly tended to report more transformative outcomes. A typical example comes from a student who initially expressed deep frustration with her Colombian host family's early morning routines, but through guided reflection, "was able to understand the reason" behind the household dynamic and ultimately shifted her perspective (p. 6). Homestay, then, can serve as a powerful context for fostering global mindedness, but only when accompanied by careful preparation, ongoing support, guided reflection, as well as the student's willingness to learn and to adapt.

DISCUSSION

This section revisits the two research questions that guided the study and addresses them in light of the findings from the qualitative meta-analysis. It also explores the study's contributions to the field, outlines its limitations and discusses implications for both educational practice and future research on global learning.

Reframing global mindedness through student narratives

In this section, I return to the first research question: *How do the student narratives in the selected primary studies characterise and explain the notion of global mindedness?* This study contributes to a more situated, participant-centred understanding of global mindedness by examining how students articulate their evolving sense of self and others in intercultural settings. Across the included studies, participants described becoming more reflexive, critically aware of their own cultural lenses and empathetic toward other ways of being. These processes align with dimensions emphasised in adjacent constructs such as *perspective consciousness* (Hanvey, 1982), *intercultural competence* (Byram, 1997), and the "epistemic virtues" of cosmopolitan learning (Rizvi, 2009). However, as clarified earlier, none of these concepts and similar theoretical frameworks can be treated as synonymous with global mindedness. Rather, global mindedness in this study is defined as an integrative, reflexive disposition and a learning journey, rooted in meaning-making, critical awareness of global interdependence and openness to complexity.

The findings affirm that global mindedness is not a pre-designed or automatic outcome of studying abroad, but an ongoing, negotiated process. Student narratives revealed dynamic, diverging and sometimes contradictory learning trajectories, shaped by experiences of dissonance, marginalisation, and critical self-reflection. These accounts highlight the non-linear and context-dependent nature of global mindedness, and they complicate narratives that frame study abroad as inherently transformative.

The study underscores the value of centring student voices in global education research. Through their own words, participants conveyed moments of cognitive, emotional, and ethical shift, offering insights into how global mindedness is lived, resisted or gradually formed. In

contrast to standardised outcome measures, these qualitative accounts illustrate how global mindedness and its various aspects are embedded in daily life, lived tensions and emergent understanding.

Recent studies on international-mindedness and global citizenship education reinforce this view. Hacking et al. (2018), for instance, argue that international-mindedness should not be reduced to Western-centric ideals, but instead be constructed through inclusive school cultures, sustained reflection and context-sensitive pedagogy. They emphasise the importance of school-wide ethos and leadership in promoting global understanding. Similarly, Metli (2021) found that while *International Baccalaureate* (IB) programs aim to cultivate international-mindedness, students' growth is mediated by institutional context and opportunities for authentic intercultural engagement. These studies reinforce the idea that global mindedness is best developed not through prescriptive curricula but through environments that allow for plural perspectives and self-inquiry.

This meta-analysis thus contributes to a deeper conceptualisation of global mindedness, grounded not in pre-defined indicators but in students' evolving narratives and the tensions they navigate. It also strengthens the case for qualitative approaches to global education research, where meaning-making and lived experience remain central to understanding complex learning outcomes (Gaudelli & Laverty, 2014; Young, 2010).

Conditions, contradictions and the "discourse of experience"

The second research question asked: *What significant experiences, factors and processes reported in these narratives impact the development of global mindedness among study abroad participants?* The analysis identified five recurring influences: emotional disruption, marginalisation and discrimination, language and communication challenges, intercultural interaction, and immersive settings such as homestays. These factors do not act in isolation, and their impact depends heavily on how students interpret and respond to them, as well as the support they receive from their host institutions and communities.

One of the study's key insights is the discrepancy between students' actual experiences abroad on the one hand, and the expectations they carried into study abroad on the other, which are often shaped by idealised institutional or popular cultural narratives. I refer to these narratives as the *discourse of experience*. It constitutes a set of popularised tropes that frame the study abroad experience, often packaged and decorated for sale, as inherently "life-changing," "authentic" or "transformative". While not a term drawn from previous literature, it resonates with critiques by scholars such as Doerr (2019) and Moreno (2021), who highlighted the neoliberal packaging of international experiences and the problematic assumptions embedded in such representations.

Participant narratives show how this discourse influences perceptions and leads to disillusionment when reality falls short. For instance, in Baker et al. (2022), a Thai student expressed disappointment that people in Malaysia "didn't speak proper English" and that it was not the "purer English-speaking community" they had expected (p. 9). Similarly, in Rybo-LoPresti and Rhein (2021), a participant lamented the absence of a homestay option, imagining that staying with a local family would offer a more authentic or "real" Thai experience (p. 5). These examples reveal how students' expectations, shaped by institutional or cultural narratives, can limit openness to actual intercultural encounters if left unexamined.

Even well-intentioned programmatic framings can inadvertently reinforce shallow or uncritical understandings of global concepts. In Baker et al. (2022), for example, a participant was asked, “Do you now see yourself as a global citizen?” Reflecting on activities such as tree-planting with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the student responded, “Therefore, I am quite certain that I am now one of the global citizens” (p. 9). While this suggests a sense of personal growth, the global citizenship discourse encompasses much more than participation in multicultural activities. Simply self-identifying as a global citizen without articulating a deeper understanding of the term may reflect a superficial engagement rather than a meaningful transformation.

Educators can play a critical role in addressing these patterns. Structured reflection and critical questioning can help students surface and interrogate unexamined beliefs. For example, “What do you mean by a ‘real’ Thai life?”, “What would a ‘pure English-speaking’ environment be like?”, “What assumptions are embedded in your notion of fluency?”, or “What does being a global citizen mean to you?” Without such guidance and support, study abroad risks reinforcing stereotypes or (re)producing uncritical, surface-level learning.

Institutional context, strategy and coordinated support also matter. As Zhang and Chan (2023) argue in their study of Australian schools, meaningful intercultural learning requires not just student openness, but institutional readiness to support cultural, linguistic and emotional adaptation. While their work focuses on international students in the K–12 sector, the principles, such as culturally responsive pedagogy and relational care, are equally relevant to higher education. As findings in Section 4 show, global mindedness is fostered by more than mere exposure. This process of learning is shaped by, and can equally be constrained by, not only student agency but also the programs and environments into which students are placed.

Limitations and implications

This study offers a grounded rethinking of global mindedness through the lens of qualitative meta-analysis. By centring the voices of study abroad participants across 22 peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2024, the analysis highlights how global mindedness is constructed through student experiences in situated contexts. While this focus ensures analytical rigour, data quality and contemporality, it also limits the scope by excluding grey literature, older publications and potentially valuable perspectives from underrepresented sources or underreported contexts. Additionally, the variation in methodological designs and reporting styles among the selected studies introduces challenges for consistent cross-study comparison.

Despite these limitations, the study makes several important contributions to the field of global education. First, it affirms that global mindedness is not a fixed or inevitable outcome of international mobility but an emergent, ongoing process—a journey shaped by emotional disruption, contextual complexity and critical reflection. Second, it demonstrates the value of placing student voice at the centre of inquiry, revealing aspects of critical understanding, resistance, transformation and negotiation of identity that might otherwise remain invisible. Third, it underscores the importance of comparing and contrasting the various perspectives and expectations students carry into study abroad, which are often shaped by idealised narratives and popular (yet misleading) discourses rather than focusing solely on the experiences themselves.

These insights have significant implications for educational practice. Pre-departure preparation should move beyond procedural orientation and information sessions to include opportunities for students to critically examine and question their assumptions about “authentic” experiences,

linguistic fluency or cultural norms. Post-return programming also deserves greater attention. Rather than overly relying on informal conversations or reflective essays, institutions can develop more structured, dialogic frameworks that support students in processing their experiences abroad, unpacking dissonance, disappointment and discomfort in a safe environment, and facilitating reintegration and long-term meaning-making.

In line with the insights of Zhang and Chan (2023) and Porter and Porter (2020), I argue that the success of international education depends not only on where students go or how far they travel from home but also on how well institutions are prepared to recognise and support the psychological, cultural and relational dimensions of their experience. Similarly, Beckwith's (2022) discussion of global citizenship education reminds us that conceptual ambiguity can weaken educational coherence. Education for global mindedness must be grounded in clear, context-sensitive practices rather than abstract ideals. Echoing the concerns of earlier scholars about popular and market-oriented study abroad discourses (Doerr, 2019; Tarc, 2013), the findings of this study suggest that meaningful global learning is most effectively supported not by decontextualised ideological standards but by practices rooted in the complexities of lived experience.

Beyond practice, this study also has implications for future research on study abroad and global learning. Most notably, it reveals a critical gap in long-term engagement with returned study-abroad participants. Oh and Nussli (2021) provide a rare example of longitudinal inquiry, revisiting preservice teachers nearly a decade after their overseas practicum (Oh & Nussli, 2014). Their follow-up study demonstrates how early study abroad experiences continued to shape participants' teaching practices and educational worldviews. Similarly, by adopting a longitudinal design, Kiely (2004) found that while students often experienced significant perspective transformation through international service-learning, they also struggled to translate this awareness into sustained action after returning to the US. Future research could build on these models by tracking students at multiple points over time to better understand how global mindedness is sustained, reinterpreted or disrupted.

In cases where longitudinal research is not feasible, alternative approaches such as life story analysis (see Tang, 2023) could offer valuable insights into how students retrospectively interpret and narrate their study abroad experiences. This could shed light on both the persistence and re-interpretation of global learning across different life stages.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I employed a qualitative meta-analysis to investigate how students in existing empirical research articulate and make sense of their study abroad experiences, with particular attention to the construct of global mindedness. This approach allowed for a re-examination of diverse qualitative accounts across 22 peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2024. Methodologically, qualitative meta-analysis offers a rapid and cost-effective means of engaging with existing data without compromising analytic depth or interpretive rigour. While limited by what is available in published reports, it provides a valuable avenue for theory-building and comparative insight. As a relatively underused methodology in higher education research (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010), its potential for expanding the understanding of student experience remains significant.

The meta-analysis produced several key findings. First, global mindedness was revealed as a dynamic and negotiated process shaped by emotional complexity, cultural dissonance and

critical reflection. Second, the findings suggest that student expectations and assumptions, often influenced by institutional or cultural (including mainstream or social media) narratives, play as important a role as lived experiences in shaping learning outcomes. Third, the study identified a series of significant factors that contribute to or constrain the development of global mindedness, including emotional vulnerability, societal pressures, language and communication, immersion and homestay, as well as the availability of relational and institutional support.

Taken together, these findings challenge simplistic narratives of transformation and call for a more student-centred and critically informed approach to global learning. They also point to several areas for future research, particularly the need for longitudinal or life story methodologies that can capture how students sustain (or struggle to sustain) their intercultural learning and awareness over time.

Global mindedness is not something students simply "gain" through travel or study abroad. It is a never-ending process of becoming, a capacity that learners continually construct, negotiate, and reconfigure in response to disorientation, unmet expectations and complex encounters. It involves learning to hold multiple perspectives, to question one's own identity and sense of place in the world, and to navigate uncertainty with humility and care. This "journey" is where education meets learners—not by offering easy answers or predefined outcomes, but by providing the conditions, tools, and reflective spaces they need to engage, interpret, integrate and grow from the complexity of their experiences.

REFERENCES

Baker, W. (2015). Research into practice: Cultural and intercultural awareness. *Language Teaching*, *48*(1), 130-141. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444814000177

Baker, W., Boonsuk, Y., Ra, J. J., Sangiamchit, C., & Snodin, N. (2022). Thai study abroad students as intercultural citizens: Developing intercultural citizenship through English medium education and ELT. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2022.2096569

Beckwith, V. J. (2022). Conceptualisations of global citizenship and global citizenship education: Does lack of clarity impact global citizenship education in Aotearoa New Zealand? *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *21*(2), 85-99.

Bufmack, J. (2013). Understanding the value of a study abroad experience and closing the gender gap. *Regis University Student Publications*. 582.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Calleja, C. (2014). Jack Mezirow's conceptualisation of adult transformative learning: A review. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, *20*(1), 117-136. https://doi.org/10.7227/jace.20.1.8

Chang, Y. C. (2024). Multilingual development through study abroad in multilingual Asian universities: A case study of a Vietnamese international student in Taiwan. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *27*(6), 809-820. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2023.2271121

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.

Conceição, S. C., Mina, L., & Southern, T. (2021). Brazilian students studying in the United States: Perceptions of their lived experiences 6 months after returning home. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 19(2), 127-146. https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344620944640

Courtois, A. (2020). Study abroad as governmentality: The construction of hypermobile subjectivities in higher education. *Journal of Education Policy*, *35*(2), 237-257.

Creswell, J. W. & Miller, D. L. (2000) Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2

Dai, K., & Garcia, J. (2019). Intercultural learning in transnational articulation programs: The hidden agenda of Chinese students' experiences. *Journal of International Students, 9*(2), 362-383. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1222489

Dasli, M. (2011). Reviving the moments: From cultural awareness and cross-cultural mediation to critical intercultural language pedagogy. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *19*(1), 21–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2011.527118

Di Giovine, M. A., & de Uriarte, J. B. (2020). Questioning the future of study abroad in a post-COVID-19 world. In J. B. de Uriarte & M. A, Di Giovine, (Eds.) *Study abroad and the quest for an anti-tourism Experience* (pp. 325-345). Lexington Books.

Dietrich, A. J. (2018). History and current trends in US study abroad. In Sanz & Morales-Front (Eds.). *The Routledge handbook of study abroad research and practice* (pp. 544-558). Routledge.

Dixon-Woods, M., Agarwal, S., Jones, D., Young, B., & Sutton, A. (2005). Synthesising qualitative and quantitative evidence: A review of possible methods. *Journal of health services research & policy*, *10*(1), 45-53.

Doerr, N. M. (2019). *Transforming study abroad: A handbook*. Berghahn Books.

Finfgeld-Connett, D. (2018). *A guide to qualitative meta-synthesis*. Routledge.

Fukuda, M., & Nishikawa Chávez, K. (2021). Summer study abroad in Japan: Maximizing intercultural competency development through self-guided cultural exploration and reflection tasks. *Foreign Language Annals*, 54(3), 823-846. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12556

Gaudelli, W., & Laverty, M. J. (2015). What is a global experience? *Education and Culture*, *31*(2), 13-26.

Goel, L., De Jong, P., & Schnusenberg, O. (2010). Toward a comprehensive framework of study abroad intentions and behaviors. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, *21*(4), 248-265.

Gibbs, B. (2022). Coronavirus and study abroad: A detailed account of the suspension of a program. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 34(1), 192–200. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v34i1.755

Glass, C., & Gesing, P. (Eds.). (2021). *Critical perspectives on equity and social mobility in study abroad: Interrogating issues of unequal access and outcomes*. Taylor & Francis.

Hacking, E. B., Blackmore, C., Bullock, K., Bunnell, T., Donnelly, M., & Martin, S. (2018). International mindedness in practice: The evidence from International Baccalaureate schools. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *17*(1), 3-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240918764722

Hadis, B. F. (2005). Why are they better students when they come back? Determinants of academic focusing gains in the study abroad experience. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *11*, 57-70.

Hanvey, R. G. (1982). An attainable global perspective. *Theory into practice*, *21*(3), 162-167.

Hett, E. J. (1993). *The development of an instrument to measure global-mindedness* [Doctoral dissertation, University of San Diego]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Hsiao, P., Lin, C., Han, C., Wang, L., & Chen, L. (2021). An enjoyable involvement: A qualitative study of short-term study abroad for nursing students. *PloS one*, 16(4).

Huffman, J., Inoue, M., Asahara, K., Oguro, M., Okubo, N., Umeda, M., . . . & Shimoda, K. (2020). Learning experiences and identity development of Japanese nursing students through study abroad: A qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Medical Education*, *11*, 54. https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.5e47.cf1b

IBO (2017). *What is an IB education?* International Baccalaureate Organization. https://ibo.org/globalassets/what-is-an-ib-education-2017-en.pdf

Irwin, S. (2013). Qualitative secondary data analysis: Ethics, epistemology and context. *Progress in Development Studies*, *13*(4), 295-306.

Jæger, K., & Gram, M. (2017). “Totally different standards”: Consumer orientation in study abroad contexts. *Higher Education, 74*(1), 33-47. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0026-8

Jarvis, P. (2009). Learning from everyday life. In P. Jarvis (Ed.). *The Routledge international handbook of lifelong learning* (pp. 19-30). Routledge.

Kiely, R. (2004). A chameleon with a complex: Searching for transformation in international service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *10*(2), 5-20.

Lee, J. A., & Green, Q. (2016). Unique opportunities: Influence of study abroad on Black students. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *28*(1), 61-77. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v28i1.380

Levitt, H. M. (2018). How to conduct a qualitative meta-analysis: Tailoring methods to enhance methodological integrity. *Psychotherapy Research*, *28*(3), 367-378.

Lickteig, A. D., Rozell, J., & Peterson, A. (2019). Here is the place to begin your explorations: An autoethnographical examination into student teaching abroad. *Educational Considerations*, *45*(1), 4.

Liu, Y., & Shirley, T. (2021). Without crossing a border: Exploring the impact of shifting study abroad online on students’ learning and intercultural competence development during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Online Learning*, *25*(1), 182-194.

Major, C. H., & Savin-Baden, M. (2010). Exploring the relevance of qualitative research synthesis to higher education research and practice. *London review of education*.

Medina, A., Hathaway, J., & Pilonieta, P. (2015). How preservice teachers’ study abroad experiences lead to changes in their perceptions of English language learners. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad,* *25*(1), 73-91. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v25i1.346

Metli, A. (2021). Assessment of international-mindedness in International Baccalaureate Diploma Program schools: A comparative study in different school contexts in Turkey. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 20*(1), 20–40.

Mezirow, J. (2008). An overview on transformative learning. In K. Illeris (Ed.) *Lifelong learning* (pp. 40–54). Routledge.

Moon, C. Y., Zhang, S., Larke, P., & James, M. (2020). We are not all the same: A qualitative analysis of the nuanced differences between Chinese and South Korean international graduate students' experiences in the United States. *Journal of International Students*, *10*(1), 28-49. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i1.770

Moore, I., Torgerson, C., & Beckmann, N. (2021). Systematic review measuring the efficacy of study abroad in undergraduate language learners on linguistic proficiency gains. *Review of Education*, *9*(3), e3306.

Moreno, R. (2021). Disrupting neoliberal and neocolonial ideologies in US study abroad: From discourse to intervention. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *33*(2), 93-109.

OECD. (2018). *Global competency for an inclusive world*. PISA 2018 Global Competence. https://www.oecd.org/education/Global-competency-for-an-inclusive-world.pdf

Oh, K., & Nussli, N. (2014). Challenging, eye-opening, and changing US teacher training in Korea: Creating experiences that will enhance global perspectives. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. *14*(4). 67-87. https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v14i4.12769

Oh, K., & Nussli, N. (2021). Does short-term international immersion have a sustainable impact on teachers' cultural competence? Follow-up interviews eight years after a teaching experience in South Korea. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *21*(3). https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v21i3.31069

Onosu, G. (2021). The impact of cultural immersion experience on identity transformation process. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(5), 2680. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052680

Paige, R. M., Fry, G. W., Stallman, E. M., Josić, J., & Jon, J. E. (2009). Study abroad for global engagement: The long-term impact of mobility experiences. *Intercultural Education*, *20*(sup1), S29-S44.

Porter, R., & Porter, N. (2020). Japanese college students' study abroad decisions: From the perspectives of Japanese study abroad administrators. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives, 19*(2), 54-71.

Prieto-Arranz, J. I., Juan-Garau, M., & Mesquida-Mesquida, F. (2021). "Open your mind, sharpen your wits": A narrative approach to the benefits of study abroad as perceived by erasmus+ students. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1871352

Rizvi, F. (2009). Towards cosmopolitan learning. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, *30*(3), 253-268.

Rybo-LoPresti, B., & Rhein, D. (2021). A qualitative analysis of academic and cultural adjustment: American students in Thailand, what can be done for them? *SAGE Open*.

Sandelowski, M., & Barroso, J. (2007). *Handbook for synthesizing qualitative research*. Springer.

Sato, T., & Hodge, S. R. (2015). Japanese exchange students' academic and social struggles at an American university. *Journal of International Students, 5*(3), 208-227. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v5i3.402

Schmidt, N. (1975). *Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students' global orientations: A descriptive study*. (ISBN: 9798659793879) [Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles]. ProQuest LLC.

Skolnick, J., Dulberg, N., Maestre, T., & Stokes, S. (2004). *Through other eyes: Developing empathy and multicultural perspectives in the social studies* (Vol. 43). Pippin Publishing Corporation.

Sobkowiak, P. (2019). The impact of studying abroad on students' intercultural competence. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 9(4), 681-710. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2019.9.4.4

Tang, H. (2023). *Global Mindedness and its Development Across Space And Time: Illumination of Lived Experiences from Study Abroad Students and Global Educational Scholars* [Doctoral dissertation, Western University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Tarc, P. (2023). Encyclopedia entry – K-12 global/international education: Dancing with "diversity, democracy, and social justice" (Vol: Diversity, democracy, and social justice in education). In R. Tierney, F. Rizvi, K. Ercikan, & G. Smith. *International Encyclopaedia of Education* (4th Ed.). Elsevier.

Tarc, P. (2013). *International education in global times: Engaging the pedagogic*. Peter Lang.

Tarc, P., Mishra Tarc, A., & Di Paolantonio, M. (2024). Upholding "the educational" in education: Schooling beyond learning and the market. *Prospects, 54*(3), 301-306.

The Forum on Education Abroad. (2011). *Glossary*. https://forumea.org/resources/glossary/

Timulak, L. (2014). Qualitative meta-analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 481-495). SAGE Publications.

Vatalaro, A., Szente, J., & Levin, J. (2015). Transformative learning of preservice teachers during study abroad in reggio emilia, italy: A case study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 15*(2), 42-55. https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v15i2.13191

Witt, E. (2024). Exploring undergraduate students' understanding of global leadership through short-term study abroad leadership courses. *Journal of Leadership Education*. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOLE-02-2024-0046

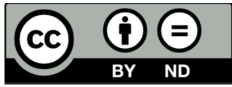
Xiao, F., & Nie, K. (2023). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on American students' willingness to study abroad. In D. Zhang & R. T. Miller (Eds.), *Crossing boundaries in researching, understanding, and improving language education* (Vol. 58, pp. 257-270). Springer.

Yang, J. (2020). American students' cultural adjustment in China: Experiences and coping strategies. *Journal of International Students*, *10*(1), 106-123. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i1.764

Young, J. M. (2010). Problems with global education: Conceptual contradictions. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, *56*(2).

Young, B. N., & Snead, D. (2017). Saudi Arabian international graduate students' lived experiences at a U.S. university. *Journal of Learning in Higher Education, 13*(2), 39-44.

Zhang, H., & Chan, P. W. K. (2023). Understanding and supporting international students learning: Perspective of teachers. *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, *22*(1), 74-90.

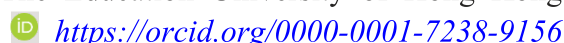
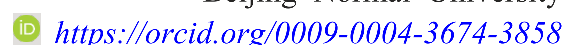
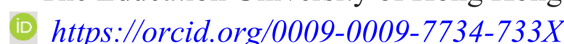


This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Authors and readers are free to copy, display and distribute this article with no changes, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives (IEJ: CP), and the same license applies. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at. The IEJ: CP is published by the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (formerly ANZCIES) and Sydney Open Access Journals at the University of Sydney. Articles are indexed in ERIC, Scimago Journal (SJR)Ranking / SCOPUS. The IEJ:CP is a member of the Free Journal Network: Join the IEJ: CP and OCIES Facebook community at Oceania Comparative and International Education Society, and Twitter: @OceaniaCIES

The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives Vol. 24, No 2, 2025
http://iejcomparative.org

Relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout: Differences between regular and vocational high schools

Kwok Kuen Tsang
The Education University of Hong Kong

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7238-9156
Xiaoyu Wang*
Beijing Normal University

https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3674-3858
Yunfei Yan
The Education University of Hong Kong

https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7734-733X

DOI: https://doi.org/10.70830/iejcp.2402.21389

Burnout significantly undermines teacher well-being and effectiveness, with external accountability identified as a key contributor. Although regular and vocational high school teachers face comparable stressors, their distinct workplaces lead to different patterns in the relationship between external accountability and burnout. However, current studies concerning these differences have been inadequate. Therefore, using Labour Process Theory, this study explored how external accountability influences teachers' emotional labour and consequent burnout across different school contexts. This study recruited 395 high school teachers to complete questionnaires measuring external accountability, emotional labour (surface acting, deep acting and the expression of naturally felt emotions) and burnout. The results show that external accountability positively predicts teacher burnout, which is significantly mediated by the expression of naturally felt emotions. Additionally, school type moderates the mediating effect of surface acting, with vocational high school teachers significantly impacted. The findings also highlight the need for differentiated support strategies, particularly for vocational teachers' pedagogical training.

Keywords: external accountability; emotional labour; teacher burnout; vocational high school; regular high school

* Corresponding author.

INTRODUCTION

Maslach et al. (1996) define burnout as a psychological syndrome characterised by emotional exhaustion (being emotionally overextended and drained), depersonalisation (being cynical and detached from work and other people) and reduced personal accomplishment (decreased sense of competence, efficacy and achievement). Other studies suggest that burnout is a pervasive issue among teachers worldwide, with detrimental consequences for teachers' well-being (Madigan et al., 2023), instructional quality and student outcomes (Madigan & Kim, 2021). To find effective strategies to prevent burnout, education researchers have investigated its antecedents (Agyapong et al., 2023). Among the antecedents is external accountability, defined as formal systems and measures that pressure individuals to explain and justify their decisions and actions to others (Tsang, et al., 2023). Wright (2020) identified this antecedent as a key contributor to teacher burnout, particularly through its deskilling effects.

Labour process theory is often used in studies to examine the relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout because it explains how external accountability results in deskilling, work intensification, and the erosion of professional autonomy regarding the technical aspects of teaching (Li & Tsang, 2023; Tsang, 2018; Wright, 2020). However, the theory does not factor in the emotional dimension of teaching. Education researchers (e.g., Benesch & Prior, 2023; Horner et al., 2020; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006) argued that teaching is an inherently emotional labour, positioning emotion management as a fundamental aspect of teachers' work. Therefore, Labour Process Theory may provide an incomplete framework for studying the impact of external accountability on teacher burnout.

Moreover, existing studies have predominantly treated teachers as a homogenous group, potentially obscuring contextual differences. For instance, although regular and vocational high schools constitute distinct contexts that shape teachers' lived experiences and well-being (Barnová et al., 2023), the differential effects of such settings are underexplored. In numerous societies, including mainland China, vocational high schools predominantly serve academically underperforming students who have lower self-efficacy and weaker learning motivation (Chu et al., 2015; Hansen & Woronov, 2013). This student population can create more challenging teaching conditions for vocational high school teachers than those encountered by regular high school teachers. In addition to equipping students with occupation-specific knowledge, skills, and competence for direct workforce entry, vocational high school teachers need to prepare students for pursuing higher education at universities in mainland China (Hansen & Woronov, 2013). However, they may receive insufficient support to achieve such educational goals and are subjected to evaluation and inspection of their work (Agyapong et al., 2023). These conditions potentially create different patterns in how external accountability relates to burnout between regular and vocational high school teachers. Examining the difference between regular and vocational high school teachers

will deepen our understanding of how external accountability influences teacher burnout across diverse school settings.

This research examines the difference by first extending Labour Process Theory to include emotional labour as a mediating factor in teacher burnout. Secondly, it conducts a comparative analysis using school type (regular versus vocational) as a moderator to determine whether school setting is a significant factor. The study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of teacher burnout under external accountability pressure across diverse school settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

External accountability and teacher burnout

Teacher burnout has been widely investigated in the context of external accountability (Wright, 2020). In these studies, Labour Process Theory is widely used to explain the relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout (Wang, 2025). The theory states that external accountability implies institutional mistrust of teacher professionalism, leading to the imposition of external measures, such as key performance indicators and report cards to monitor and control teachers' work (Dworkin & Tobe, 2014; Hardy et al., 2019). Thus, in the context of external accountability, teachers are likely to lose professional autonomy and authority when deciding what, when, why and how to do their work, leading to a sense of deskilling or deprofessionalisation (Wright, 2020). Deskilled teachers tend to be restricted to executing tasks assigned by external authorities, such as policy-makers and school administrators. Even when they perceive these tasks or work procedures as meaningless, they tend to be powerless to challenge or refuse them, resulting in work intensification (Thompson et al., 2021; Tsang & Kwong, 2016; Ji et al., 2024). This condition tends to make teachers prone to stress, exhaustion and depersonalisation and, ultimately, to burnout (Dworkin & Tobe, 2014).

As in other education systems, mainland China has adopted external accountability structures to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of school education, increasing the system's formalisation and bureaucratisation (Green, 2023), including educational inspections and teacher performance evaluations (Rasmussen & Zou, 2014). Teachers are held accountable for student test scores, with their salaries often tied to standardised assessment outcomes (Zhang & Liu, 2021). This system tends to constrain teachers' professional autonomy, narrowing their focus to test-aligned instruction and encouraging teaching to the test, as pedagogies are primarily driven by their efficiency in boosting scores (Wang, 2025). Thus, teachers in mainland China often face deskilling and work intensification (Wong, 2006), which generate negative emotional experiences and lead to burnout (Yang et al., 2019).

The following hypothesis is derived from this review:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *External accountability is positively related to teacher burnout.*

Emotional labour as a mediator

Labour process theory is typically concerned with the impacts of social structures on the technical dimension of teachers' work; that is, the power to exercise control over the definition and design of assigned tasks. But it ignores the emotional dimension. Hargreaves (2001) noted that teachers often engage in intensive emotion management for instructional purposes. For example, to maintain classroom order and ensure effective teaching, teachers may stop students' misbehaviours by displaying anger even if they do not genuinely feel it, or they may strive to be humorous with students in an effort to create a positive classroom climate that motivates them and engages them in learning, even if they are not naturally funny (Horner et al., 2020). Thus, researchers have integrated such emotion management performed for work goals into the theory, referring to it as emotional labour (e.g., Hu & Du, 2022; Wang & Bian, 2022).

From the perspective of Labour Process Theory, emotional labour involves forced emotion management because occupational or professional rules prescribe teachers' feelings and their display in teaching (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). Hochschild (1983) states that numerous occupations, especially service-oriented professions, commodify employees' emotions, imposing rules and regulations on their emotional expressions to maximise profits in post-industrial societies. Although school education is a public enterprise, not driven by profit, teachers' working conditions are increasingly mirroring those of service-sector professions due to the imposition of external accountability measures in the education system (Whitty, 2002). In mainland China, for example, teachers increasingly feel under surveillance by students, parents, and the community in the context of external accountability (Lo et al., 2015). Stakeholders, including students, parents and the community, often make requests of teachers, intervene in their work, and criticise them, especially when they perceive that teachers fail to meet their needs or expectations (Guo & Kilderry, 2018). Under these conditions, teachers are positioned as frontline service workers and are expected to cater unconditionally to stakeholders, who are perceived as consumers, to maintain satisfaction, minimise discontent and pre-empt conflicts or complaints (Lo et al., 2015). As a result, teachers in mainland China are held responsible for expressing their emotions professionally in interactions with stakeholders, such as showing passion for teaching, avoiding negative emotions, maintaining positive emotions and using emotions instrumentally (Yin & Lee, 2012). In other words, external accountability can be a structural driver, compelling teachers to perform emotional labour (Tsang at el., 2023; Tsang & Wu, 2025; Hu & Du, 2022; Wang & Bian, 2022).

To respond to external accountability demands, teachers may manage their emotions via various emotional labour strategies, including surface acting, deep acting and the expression of naturally felt emotions. Surface acting involves simulating unfelt emotions or suppressing inappropriate emotions. Deep acting involves cognitive

reframing to align emotional displays with professional expectations. By contrast, the expression of naturally felt emotions is the spontaneous display of genuine emotions (Yin, 2012). Horner et al. (2020) noted that the expression of naturally felt emotions does not imply that teachers can display emotions spontaneously; however, it involves significant effort to modulate these genuine emotions in a controlled and professional manner. According to Labour Process Theory, efforts of forced emotion management can lead to emotive dissonance; that is, the separation of feelings and displays, which is positively associated with burnout (Na¨ring et al., 2006).

Therefore, emotional labour may be affected by external accountability and can, in turn, influence teacher burnout. In this sense, emotional labour—including surface acting, deep acting, and the expression of naturally felt emotions—should mediate the relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Surface acting plays a mediating role between external accountability and teacher burnout.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Deep acting plays a mediating role between external accountability and teacher burnout.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *The expression of naturally felt emotions plays a mediating role between external accountability and teacher burnout.*

School type as a moderator

Teaching contexts in regular and vocational high schools can differ in mainland China. The public considers vocational education to be inferior to general education (Xiong, 2010). This is because they generally believe that vocational education is used to prepare students for low-skilled and manual labour, whereas general education aims to foster students' intellects for high-skilled and mental labour (Stewart, 2015). This lower social status has resulted in vocational high schools in mainland China enrolling a greater proportion of underperforming students who exhibit low learning motivation, confidence and self-efficacy (Chu et al., 2015; Hansen & Woronov, 2013). These students are also more likely to engage in disruptive, antisocial and other high-risk behaviours at schools (Yi et al., 2018). Teaching this population can be challenging for vocational high school teachers as most do not receive sufficient teacher training, leading to insufficient pedagogical knowledge, skills and competence (Gao & Yu, 2020). Owing to the lack of effective and efficient teaching strategies, they are more likely to rely more heavily on emotion management than teachers in regular high schools to maintain classroom order and student motivation in accordance with stakeholder expectations, such as by demonstrating passion and enthusiasm while carefully controlling expressions of anger and frustration (Yilmaz et al., 2015). According to Xue and Li (2022), student and teacher quality issues pose greater administrative challenges in vocational high schools in mainland China than in regular

high schools in achieving high-quality education. Therefore, there is a growing societal demand for enhanced supervision, regulation, evaluation and guidance in vocational high schools in mainland China (Li, 2004). For this reason, vocational high school teachers may also experience increasing demand for external accountability for their work.

This literature review suggests that school type (regular versus vocational high schools) may moderate the relationship between external accountability and teachers' emotional labour. In mainland China, due to the disadvantaged student population and inadequate teacher training, vocational high school teachers appear to rely more heavily on emotional labour to compensate for their pedagogical limitations while simultaneously confronting heightened external accountability demands than regular high school teachers do. Therefore, the relationship between external accountability and teachers' emotional labour is likely stronger in vocational high schools than in regular high schools. As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed:

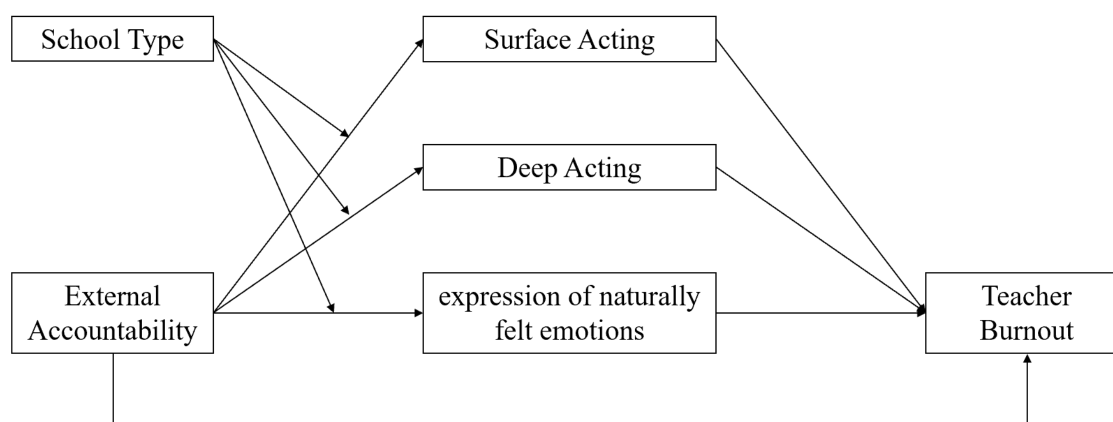
Hypothesis 5 (H5). *School type moderates the relationship between external accountability and surface acting, indicating a school type difference in that relationship.*

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *School type moderates the relationship between external accountability and deep acting, indicating a school type difference in that relationship.*

Hypothesis 7 (H7). *School type moderates the relationship between external accountability and the expression of naturally felt emotions, indicating a school type difference in that relationship.*

Figure 1 provides a conceptual framework of the hypotheses to be tested in this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework: proposed moderated mediation model.



MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The participants in this study were high school teachers recruited from the Chinese mainland via http://wjx.com and invited to complete a questionnaire. A total of 435 teachers participated in the study. After incomplete questionnaires and those that did not meet the necessary criteria were excluded, 395 valid responses were retained, resulting in a valid response rate of 90.80%.

Among the respondents, 229 (57.97%) were female; he mean age and teaching years were 38.66 (*SD*=9.71) and 14.48 (*SD*=10.67), respectively; 156 (39.49%) teachers held a bachelor's degree; 152 (38.48%) held a master's degree; 84 (21.27%) held a doctorate; 66 (16.71%) teachers had no professional titles; 126 (31.90%) teachers had intermediate professional titles; 107 (27.09%) teachers had senior or higher professional titles; 185 (46.84%) teachers worked in regular high schools; and 210 teachers (53.16%) worked in vocational high schools, with 165 teachers serving as *banzhuren* (homeroom teachers).

Measures

External accountability

External accountability was measured using the Chinese version of the Personal Accountability Measure (PAM-Ch) (Tsang et al., 2023). Six items were used to measure teachers' perceptions of external accountability, for example, "Give school management a report on the extent to which you reached your goals at work". All the items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The external accountability scale showed good reliability (Cronbach's alpha=0.921).

Teacher emotional labour

Teacher emotional labour was measured using the 13-item Teacher Emotional Labour Strategy Scale (TELSS) (Yin, 2012). This scale contains three subscales assessing different emotional labour strategies: surface acting (6 items), deep acting (4 items), and the expression of naturally felt emotions (3 items). Each item was answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Sample items included, "I put on an act in order to deal with students or their parents in an appropriate way" (surface acting), "I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display towards students or their parents" (deep acting), and "the emotions I express to students or their parents are genuine" (expression of naturally felt emotions). In this study, the Cronbach's alphas for surface acting, deep acting, and expressing naturally felt emotions were 0.949, 0.880 and 0.917, respectively, indicating good reliability.

Teacher burnout

Teacher burnout was measured using the 15-item Chinese version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (Li & Wang, 2009). This scale had 15 items assessing three dimensions of teacher burnout: emotional exhaustion (5 items), depersonalisation (4 items), and reduced personal accomplishment (6 items). Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). Sample items for each dimension were "I feel emotionally drained from my work" (emotional exhaustion), "I doubt the significance of my work" (depersonalisation), and "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job" (reduced personal accomplishment). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.842, indicating good reliability.

Demographic variables

Previous research shows that several individual factors (such as teaching years, gender and teacher educational level) influence teachers' emotional labour outcomes (e.g., Wang et al., 2023) and burnout (e.g., Lau et al., 2005). In addition, studies in the Chinese context examined the impact of being a homeroom teacher on teachers' job burnout (e.g., Zhao & Bi, 2003). Therefore, in the present study, gender, educational level, teaching years and homeroom teachers were controlled for in the data analysis. School type (regular high schools vs. vocational high schools) was treated as a moderator variable.

Data analysis

In this study, SPSS 26.0 was used to analyse the data. First, Harman's single-factor test and variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined to ensure that there was no serious common method deviation or multicollinearity concern. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis were subsequently conducted to provide a preliminary analysis. Moreover, three steps were performed to test our hypotheses: (1) linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the effect of external accountability on teacher burnout; (2) PROCESS Model 4 was performed to test the mediating effect of emotional labour between external accountability and teacher burnout; and (3) PROCESS Model 7 was used to further examine the moderating effect of school type on the aforementioned indirect relationships.

RESULTS

First, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to assess common method variance. The results suggested that six characteristic roots were greater than 1, and the first factor explained only 29%, which is below the common threshold of 40%, indicating no serious common-method bias (Harman, 1967). In addition, the variance inflation factor (VIF) for the study variables was below 4, indicating that collinearity was not a problem in this study.

Descriptions and correlations

The mean values, standard deviations, and correlation results among all study variables are shown in Table 1. The results revealed that external accountability was significantly and positively associated with deep acting, the expression of naturally felt emotions, and teacher burnout, but was not associated with surface acting ($p>0.05$). Surface acting was significantly and positively correlated with deep acting, the expression of naturally felt emotions and teacher burnout. In addition, both deep acting and the expression of naturally felt emotions were significantly and positively related to teacher burnout (see Table 1).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	EA	SA	DA	NF	TB
EA	3.808	0.708	1				
SA	2.755	1.018	0.093	1			
DA	3.408	0.835	0.323***	0.581***	1		
NF	3.654	0.822	0.364***	0.108*	0.530***	1	
TB	4.420	0.716	0.130**	0.447***	0.286***	0.189***	1

Note: EA represents external accountability; SA represents surface acting; DA represents deep acting; NF represents the expression of naturally felt emotions; and TB represents teacher burnout. *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

Mediating effect of emotional labour

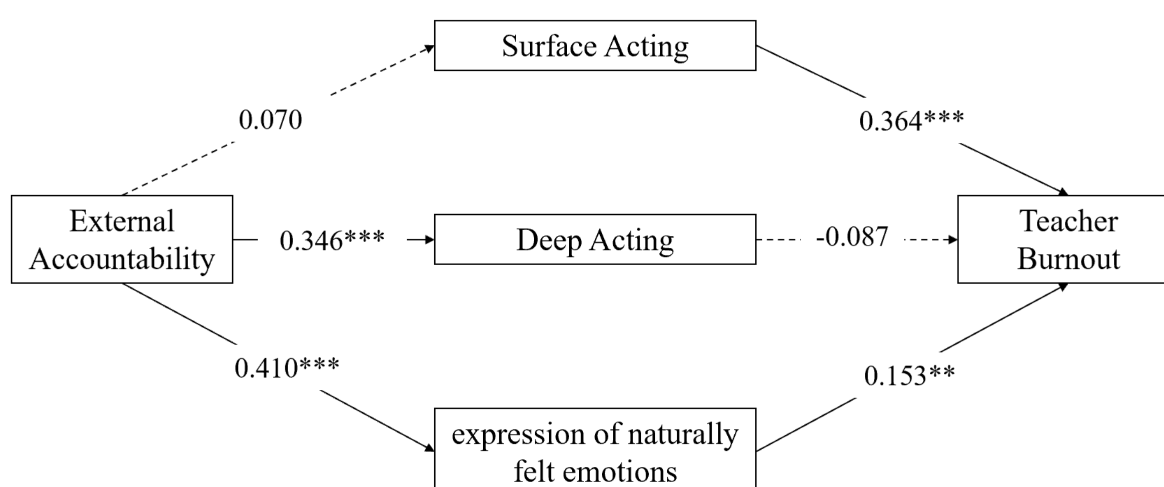
First, taking demographic information as a control variable, external accountability as an independent variable and teacher burnout as the dependent variable, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The results showed that the overall model fit was adequate ($F = 2.17$, $R^2 = 0.03$). External accountability had a significant effect on teacher burnout ($\beta = 0.120$, $t = 2.347$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1.

The mediating effect of emotional labour was subsequently examined using SPSS. After controlling for demographic variables, the mediating effects of surface acting, deep acting, and the expression of naturally felt emotions on the relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout were examined. Specifically, as shown in Table 2, the expression of naturally felt emotions mediated the effect of external accountability on teacher burnout (β=0.063, 95% CI = [0.020, 0.114] range did not include 0). However, surface acting and deep acting did not mediate the effect of external accountability on teacher burnout (β=0.025, -0.030, 95% CI = [-0.033, 0.082] and [-0.072, 0.002] range included 0). In addition, the mediation model revealed that the direct effect of external accountability on teacher burnout was not significant (β=0.062, t=1.255, p>0.05). Therefore, H4 was supported, whereas H2 and H3 were not supported (see Figure 2).

Table 2. The mediating effect of emotional labour.

	Effect	SE	95%CI	
			Lower	Upper
Total Effect	0.120	0.051	0.019	0.220
Direct Effect	0.062	0.049	-0.035	0.159
Indirect Effect				
EA-SA-TB	0.025	0.029	-0.033	0.082
EA-DA-TB	-0.030	0.019	-0.072	0.002
EA-NF-TB	0.063	0.024	0.020	0.114

Figure 2. The mediation model



Moderating effect of school type

Model 7 of PROCESS was further used to test the moderation effect of school type. The results revealed that the interaction effect of external accountability and school type was significantly related to surface acting (*β*=0.413, *SE*=0.133, *p*=0.002<0.01) and the expression of naturally felt emotions (*β*=0.264, *SE*=0.110, *p*=0.017<0.05) but was not significantly related to deep acting (*β*=0.119, *SE*=0.111, *p*>0.05). The difference between the two regression coefficients derived from two separate samples (teachers from regular high schools and those from vocational high schools) was subsequently examined. As shown in Figure 3, in the regular high school group, the effect of external accountability on surface acting was -0.145, *SE*=0.092, *p*=0.118>0.05, 95% CI = [-0.327, 0.037]. In the vocational school group, the effect of external accountability on surface acting was 0.269, *SE* = 0.095, *p*<0.01, 95% CI = [0.081, 0.456]. For the expression of naturally felt emotions, as shown in Figure 4, in the regular high school group, the effect was 0.285, *SE*=0.076, *p*<0.001, 95% CI = [0.135, 0.435]. In the

vocational school group, the effect was 0.549, SE = 0.079, p<0.001, 95% CI = [0.394, 0.703]. Overall, the results indicated a significant difference between the two samples.

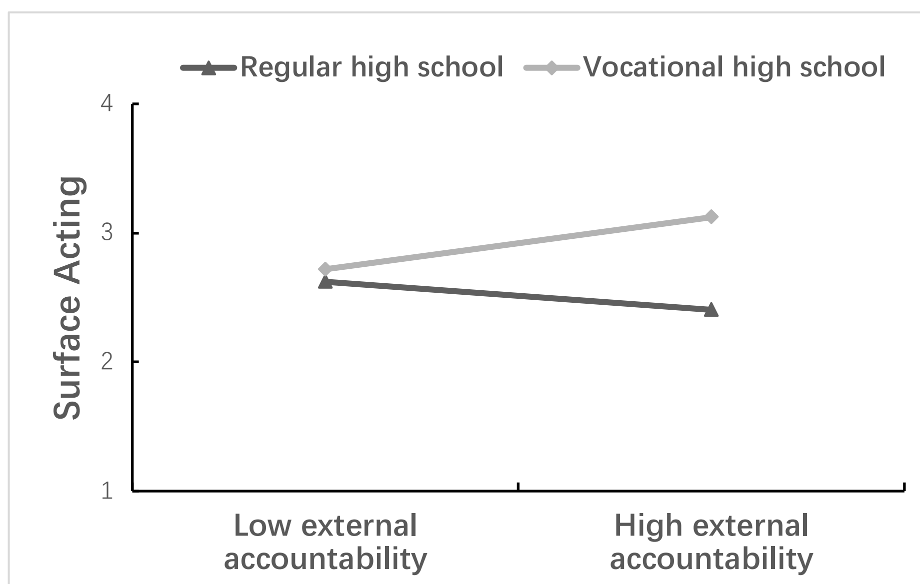


Figure 3. Moderating effect of school type on the relationship between external accountability and surface acting.

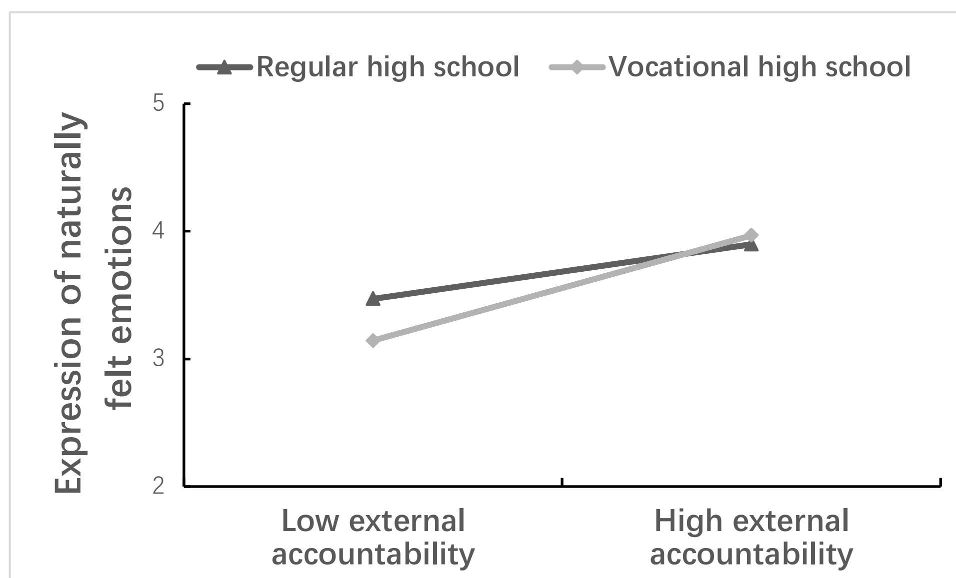


Figure 4. Moderating effect of school type on the relationship between external accountability and the expression of naturally felt emotions.

The moderated mediation effect was tested, showing that the mediating effect of surface acting was moderated by school type, suggesting a significant difference in the indirect effect from external accountability to teacher burnout via surface acting in the regular high school and vocational high school groups. Specifically, in regular high schools,

surface acting did not mediate the relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout (β=-0.053, 95% CI = [-0.133, 0.021]). In contrast, the indirect effect was significant in the vocational high school group (β=0.098, 95% CI = [0.006, 0.184]).

In addition, the results also suggested that school type did not moderate the mediating effect of the expression of naturally felt emotions; that is, there was no significant difference in the indirect effect from external accountability to teacher burnout via surface acting in the regular high school (β=0.044) and vocational high school groups (β=0.084), 95% CI = [-0.004, 0.097]. Therefore, H5 was supported, whereas H6 and H7 were not supported.

DISCUSSION

Teaching is considered one of the most stressful occupations in the world, making teachers prone to burnout (Agyapong et al., 2023). Labour Process Theory proposed that external accountability can lead to teacher burnout because of its deskilling effects (Dworkin & Tobe, 2014), which not only disempower teachers to do their work (Wright, 2020) but also restricts their autonomy to feel and display emotions spontaneously (Tsang et al., 2025). While extended to the emotional dimension of teaching, this logic would suggest that external accountability forces teachers into inauthentic emotional displays by performing surface and/or deep acting, generating emotive dissonance and, in turn, burnout (Hu & Du, 2022; Wang & Bian, 2022).

The research findings confirm, to a certain extent, the overall positive relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout, providing support for the premise of Labour Process Theory and refining its application to emotional labour. Contrary to what a straightforward extension of the theory might predict, the study indicates that when both regular and vocational high school teachers are considered as a whole, external accountability can contribute to teacher burnout by encouraging the expression of naturally felt emotions rather than surface acting and deep acting.

These findings are similar to those of the study conducted by Tsang et al. (2025), which showed that surface acting and deep acting do not significantly mediate the relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout, but the expression of naturally felt emotions does. However, the previous studies found that external accountability can reduce teacher burnout by encouraging the expression of naturally felt emotions. Indeed, numerous studies suggest that the expression of naturally felt emotions should be negatively associated with teacher burnout (Yin et al., 2019). Therefore, the positive effects of expressing naturally felt emotions on teacher burnout may remain an open question. As Kariou et al.'s (2021) systematic review suggests, some studies have reported a positive association between the expression of naturally felt emotions and teacher burnout. According to these studies, the expression of naturally felt emotions does not mean displaying genuine emotions spontaneously; rather, it is about the modulated expression of authentic emotions (Horner et al., 2020). In other words,

teachers still intentionally regulate and adjust their emotional displays in a controllable and professional manner rather than allowing their emotions to flow freely. Therefore, as Zhang et al.'s (2020) study implies, this emotional labour strategy may also create emotive dissonance that can significantly lead to burnout (Na¨ring et al., 2006). Accordingly, when teachers feel the demands of external accountability, they may become more aware of modulating their genuine emotional displays to demonstrate their professionalism as prescribed by stakeholders (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Yin & Lee, 2012), thereby increasing their level of burnout.

A further analysis indicates that the mediating effect of surface acting is more significant in vocational high schools than in regular high schools. This suggests that teachers in vocational settings may face greater pressure to regulate their emotions while also encountering high external demands for accountability. Their reliance on surface acting, that is, pretending to have prescribed emotions, may stem from insufficient instructional skills and competence. As other studies suggest, vocational high school teachers receive sufficient teacher training (Gao & Yu, 2020), but they need to face a large proportion of low-performing students with behavioural problems (Chu et al., 2015; Hansen & Woronov, 2013) while also being held accountable for improving academic outcomes (Li, 2004). In this context, they might resort to surface acting, that is, superficially displaying prescribed emotions, in an attempt to motivate or engage students in learning, because they may lack sufficient pedagogical skills and knowledge to achieve these instructional goals. Teachers in regular high schools in mainland China face similar student populations but likely possess better pedagogical knowledge and the ability to employ diverse strategies (Ke et al., 2019), including different emotional labour strategies, to manage and guide students towards their instructional goals effectively (Yilmaz et al., 2015). These findings may explain why vocational high schools have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between external accountability and surface acting, whereas regular high schools do not.

This study has several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the use of nonprobability sampling may restrict the generalizability of the results, as the participant pool may not fully represent the broader population of regular and vocational high school teachers in mainland China. Future studies should adopt probability sampling methods to strengthen the external validity of the findings. Second, its cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences regarding the relationships among external accountability, emotional labour, teacher burnout, and school type. Longitudinal research could help clarify the temporal and directional dynamics, for instance, between external accountability, emotional labour, and teacher burnout across school contexts. Finally, the study focuses exclusively on mainland China's educational context, limiting the applicability of the findings to other sociocultural settings, where differing societal expectations, educational policies, and teacher–student dynamics could yield distinct emotional labour patterns and burnout

outcomes. Therefore, researchers can consider conducting comparative research to identify sociocultural differences in the relationships among these variables.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationship between external accountability and teacher burnout through the mechanism of emotional labour and tested whether this relationship differs between regular and vocational high schools in mainland China. The research findings show a complex picture. Although the study confirms a positive overall association between external accountability and teacher burnout, it indicates that expression of naturally felt emotions serves as a significant mediator rather than surface acting and deep acting. In addition, the findings indicate that the path through surface acting is significant only for vocational high school teachers, not for regular high school teachers, suggesting their distinct vulnerability under external accountability.

The results both align with and refine existing findings. On the one hand, they support the premise of Labour Process Theory that external accountability is a control mechanism negatively associated with teacher well-being (Benesch & Prior, 2023; Wright, 2020). On the other hand, the findings challenge a simplistic extension of Labour Process Theory to emotions by demonstrating that the primary emotional pathway to teacher burnout involves the managed performance of authenticity, rather than inauthenticity. These findings represent a significant contribution to the literature by suggesting that teacher burnout arises not from faking emotions but from the exhaustion of modulating genuine emotions in response to external accountability. Furthermore, by demonstrating the moderating role of school type (regular vs. vocational) in the relationship between external accountability and surface acting, the study challenges the notion of a homogeneous teaching force and identifies specific school contexts in which emotional labour processes are critical.

Therefore, the findings underscore several actionable steps to alleviate teacher burnout in mainland China. For vocational high schools, where teachers often rely on surface acting due to limited pedagogical skills, targeted professional development is critical. Training programs should focus on evidence-based classroom management strategies, differentiated instruction for low-performing students, and adaptive emotional regulation techniques. This would reduce dependence on superficial emotional displays while equipping teachers with tools to address behavioural and academic challenges effectively. For all teachers, emotional labour training should distinguish between harmful suppression and constructive emotional modulation. Schools may implement mentorship programs or peer support networks to help teachers navigate accountability pressures without resorting to emotive dissonance. At the policy level, accountability frameworks should be redesigned to avoid incentivising authentic emotional performance. Instead, evaluations could incorporate measures of pedagogical

adaptability and student engagement, allowing teachers greater autonomy in determining appropriate emotional responses.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research is funded by General Research Fund of Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (project no.: 18608324)").

REFERENCES

Agyapong, B., Brett-MacLean, P., Burback, L., Agyapong, V. I. O., & Wei, Y. (2023). Interventions to reduce stress and burnout among teachers: A scoping review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *20*, 5625. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20095625

Barnová, S., Gabrhelová, G., Krásna, S., Hasajová, L., & Barna, D. (2023). Teacher resilience and coping with teacher stress in vocational schools. *Societies*, *13*(9), 204. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13090204

Benesch, S., & Prior, M. T. (2023). Rescuing "emotion labor" from (and for) language teacher emotion research. *System*, *113*, 102995. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.102995

Chu, X., Li, Z., Yan, B., Han, J., & Fan, F. (2015). Comparative study of regular and vocational high school students on family socioeconomic status, social support, self-efficacy and well-being. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, *3*(8), 61-68. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2015.38006

Dworkin, A. G., & Tobe, P. F. (2014). The effects of standards based school accountability on teacher burnout and trust relationship: A longitudinal analysis. In D. Van Maele, P. B. Forsyth, & M. Van Houtte (Eds.), *Trust and school life: The role of trust for learning, teaching, leading, and bridging* (pp. 121-143). Springer.

Gao, Z., & Yu, T. (2020). Research on the development of higher vocational education in China in the 21st century. In I. Rumbal, T. Volodina, & Y. Zhang (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Culture, Education and Economic Development of Modern Society (ICCESE2020)*. Atlanits Press.

Green, B. (2023). *How China's system of higher education works: Pragmatic instrumentalism, centralized-decentralization, and rational chaos*. Routledge.

Guo, K., & Kilderry, A. (2018). Teacher accounts of parent involvement in children's education in China. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *69*, 95-103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.09.018

Hansen, M. H., & Woronov, T. E. (2013). Demanding and resisting vocational education: A comparative study of schools in rural and urban China.

Comparative Education, *49*(2), 242-259. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2012.733848

Hardy, I., Reyes, V., & Hamid, M. O. (2019). Performative practices and 'authentic accountabilities': Targeting students, targeting learning? *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 18 (1), 20-33.

Hargreaves, A. (2001). Emotional geographies of teaching. *Teachers College Record*, *103*(6), 1056-1080.

Harman, D. (1967). A single factor test of common method variance. *Journal of Psychology*, *35*, 359-378.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. University of California Press.

Horner, C. G., Brown, E. L., Mehta, S., & Scanlon, C. L. (2020). Feeling and acting like a teacher: Reconceptualizing teachers' emotional labor. *Teachers College Record*, *122*(5), 050302. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812012200502

Hu, P., & Du, S. (2022). The managed body and heart: An empirical study on school management and teachers' emotional labor in Chinese Counties. *Beijing International Review of Education*, *4*(1), 94-117. https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-04010001

Isenbarger, L., & Zembylas, M. (2006). The emotional labour of caring in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *22*(1), 120-134. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.07.002

Ji, G. X., Chan, P. W. K., & Kalogeropoulos, P. (2024), Teacher workload and intensifying demands: Lessons from the Chinese double reduction policy. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 23 (2), 77-92. https://doi.org/10.70830/iejcp.2302.20358

Kariou, A., Koutsimani, P., Montgomery, A., & Olga, L. (2021). Emotional labor and burnout among teachers: A systematic review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *18*(23), 12760. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182312760

Ke, Z., Yin, H., & Huang, S. (2019). Teacher participation in school-based professional development in China: Does it matter for teacher efficacy and teaching strategies? *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *25*(7), 821-836. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1662777

Lau, P. S. Y., Yuen, M. T., & Chan, R. M. C. (2005). Do demographic characteristics make a difference to burnout among Hong Kong secondary school teachers? *Social Indicators Research*, *71*, 491-516. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-004-8033-z

Li, C., & Wang, H. (2009). Relationship between time management and job burnout of teachers. *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *17*(1), 107-109. https://doi.org/10.16128/j.cnki.1005-3611.2009.01.042 (in Chinese)

Li, G., & Tsang, K. K. (2023). Does accountability aggravate the risk of teacher burnout? Evidence from the Chinese education system. *Behavioral Sciences*, *13*, 772. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13090772

Li, J. (2004). Practices and explorations in teaching supervision at higher vocational colleges. *Journal of Yellow River Conservancy Technical Institute*, *16*(4), 56-57. https://doi.org/10.13681/j.cnki.cn41-1282/tv.2004.04.025 (in Chinese)

Lo, L. N. K., Lai, M., & Wang, L. (2015). The impact of reform policy on teachers' work and professionalism in Chinese mainland. In G. Gu (Ed.), *The work and lives of teachers in China* (pp. 42-62). Routledge.

Madigan, D. J., Kim, L. E., Glandorf, H. L., & Kavanagh, O. (2023). Teacher burnout and physical health: A systematic review. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *119*, 102173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102173

Madigan, D., & Kim, L. E. (2021). Does teacher burnout affect students? A systematic review of its association with academic achievement and student-reported outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *105*, 101714. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101714

Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Schacht, R. (1996). *Maslach burnout inventory: Manual* (3rd ed.). Counsulting Psychologists Press.

Na¨ring, G. r., Brie¨t, M., & Brouwers, A. (2006). Beyond demand-control: Emotional labour and symptoms of burnout in teachers. *Work and Stress*, *20*(4), 303-315. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370601065182

Rasmussen, P., & Zou, Y. (2014). The development of educational accountability in China and Denmark. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *22*(121), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v22.1693

Stewart, V. (2015). *Made in China: Challenge and innovation in China's vocational education and training system*. Natioanal Center on Education and the Economy.

The structural causes of teacher burnout in Hong Kong. *Chinese Education and Society*, *51*(6), 449-461. https://doi.org/10.1080/10611932.2018.1570797

Thompson, G., Mockler, N., & Hogan, A. (2021). Making work private: Autonomy, intensification and accountability. *European Educational Research Journal*, *21*(1), 83-104. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904121996134

Tsang, K. K. (2018). Tsang, K. K., & Kwong, T. L. (2016). Emotional experience of *caam*[2] in teaching: Power and interpretation of teachers' work. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *7*, 1400. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01400

Tsang, K. K., & Wu, H. (2025). Emotional labor as alienated labour versus self-actualized labour in teaching: Implications of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic for the debate. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *57*(4), 297-301. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2108399

Tsang, K. K., Zhang, W., Teng, Y., & Song, H. (2023). Validating the Chinese version of the Personal Accountability Measure for assessing teachers' perceptions and experiences of teacher accountability in China. *Behavioral Sciences*, *13*(2), 145. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13020145

Tsang, K. K., Zhang, Y., Li, G., & Song, H. (2025). Moving the debate forward: A cross-sectional study examining Marxist and internactionalist perspective of emotional labor in teaching. *European Journal of Education*, *60*(1), e12814. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12814

Wang, G. (2025). Teaching autonomy and teachers' turnover intentions under the labor process theory perspective: A moderated mediation model of work alienation and professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *159*, 104981. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2025.104981

Wang, H., Chiu, M. M., & Hall, N. C. (2023). Teacher anger as a double-edged sword: Contrasting trait and emotional labor effects. *Motivation and Emotion*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-023-10027-0

Wang, X., & Bian, F. (2022). Teachers' emotional labor in the context of new college entrance exam reform in Mainland China. *Beijing International Review of Education*, *4*(1), 77-93. https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-bja10014

Whitty, G. (2002). Quasi-Markets in Education. In D. L. Levinson, P. W. Cookson, & A. R. Sadovnik (Eds.), *Education and sociology: An encyclopedia* (pp. 473-484). Routledge.

Wong, J. L. N. (2006). Control and professional development: Are teachers being deskilled or reskilled within the context of decentralization? *Educational Studies*, *32*(1), 17-37. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690500415910

Wright, A. M. (2020). Historical view of accountability and teacher labor. *Communication Education*, *69*(1), 105-134. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2019.1679381

Xiong, J. (2010). Understanding higher vocational education in China: Vocationalism vs Confucianism. *Frontiers of Education in China*, *6*(4), 495-520. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11516-011-0143-1

Xue, E., & Li, J. (2022). Exploring the type-based vocational education system: Insights from China. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *54*(10), 1670-1680. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2021.1934668

Yang, R., You, X., Zhang, Y., Lian, L., & Feng, W. (2019). Teachers' mental health becoming worse: The case of China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *70*, 102077. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.102077

Yi, H., Li, G., Li, L., Loyalka, P., Zhang, L., Xu, J., . . . Chu, J. (2018). Assessing the quality of upper-secondary vocational education and training: Evidence from China. *Comparative Education Review*, *62*(2), 199-230. https://doi.org/10.1086/696920

Yilmaz, K., Altinkurt, Y., Güner, M., & Şen, B. (2015). The relationship between teachers' emotional labor and burnout level. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, *59*, 75-90. https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2015.59.5

Yin, H. (2012). Adaptation and validation of the teacher emotional labor strategy scale in China. *Educational Psychology*, *32*(4), 451-465. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2012.674488

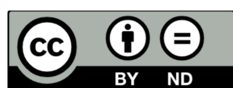
Yin, H., & Lee, J. C. K. (2012). Be passionate, but be rational as well: Emotional rules for Chinese teachers' work. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *28*, 56-65. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.08.005

Yin, H., Huang, S., & Chen, G. (2019). The relationships between teachers' emotional labor and their burnout and satisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Educational Research Review*, *28*, 100283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2019.100283

Zhang, L., Yu, S., & Jiang, L. (2020). Chinese preschool teachers' emotional labor and regulation strategies. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *92*, 103024. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103024

Zhang, Y., & Liu, S. (2021). Re-professionalisation or de-professionalisation: How do Chinese high school teachers respond to the new professionalism? *Professional Development in Education*. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2021.1959382

Zhao, Y., & Bi, C. (2003). Job burnout and the factors related to it among middle school teachers. *Psychological Development and Education*, *01*, 80-84. (in Chinese).



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Authors and readers are free to copy, display and distribute this article with no changes, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and the International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives (IEJ: CP), and the same license applies. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at. The IEJ: CP is published by the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (formerly ANZCIES) and Sydney Open Access Journals at the University of Sydney. Articles are indexed in ERIC,

Scimago Journal (SJR)Ranking / SCOPUS. The IEJ:CP is a member of the Free Journal Network: Join the IEJ: CP and OCIES Facebook community at Oceania Comparative and International Education Society, and Twitter: @OceaniaCIES