

Introduction to JCIHE 16(3) 2024 Issue

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Dear Readers –

The *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* (JCIHE) presents the Summer Special Issue on *The Effect of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on International Mobility and Internationalization in Post-Soviet Eurasia and Beyond*. As JCIHE continues to broaden our inclusion of articles from throughout the world, an emphasis on Post-Soviet Eurasia covers many different contexts of importance for mobility, internationalization, and partnerships. Issue 16(3) 2024 also includes five Independent Submissions on innovative topics that deepen the understanding of international and comparative higher education in countries around the world.

The Summer Special Issue *The Effect of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on International Mobility and Internationalization in Post-Soviet Eurasia and Beyond* has as the guest editor, Aliya Kuzhabekova, from University of Calgary, Canada. In this Special Issue, articles explore the geopolitical, educational, and internationalization impacts from the war in Ukraine. This crisis has had widespread disruptions in international higher education impacting international research collaborations, institutional partnership, and mobility flows for both in-bound and out-bound. Refugee mobility and immigration are another outcome of the crisis. As shown in the articles, the crisis impacts countries throughout post-Soviet Eurasia, neighboring countries, and those countries in Europe and North America that are receiving immigrants and refugees.

JCIHE is an open access, independent, double-blinded peer-reviewed international journal publishing original contributions to the field of comparative and international higher education. The JCIHE is the official journal of the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Higher Education Special Interest Group (HESIG). The mission of the journal is to serve as a place to share new thinking on analysis, theory, policy, and practice, and to encourage reflective and critical thinking on issues that influence comparative and international higher education. JCIHE showcases new and diverse international research that uses rigorous methodology that focuses on theory, policy, practice, critical analysis, and development analysis of issues that influence higher education. JCIHE has as its core principles: a) comparative research; b) engagement with theory; and c) diverse voices in terms of authorship.

Four broad themes are found in the 16(3) articles and essays: International Student Learning, Faculty/Staff Learning, Institutional Policy, and Conflict from Russia-Ukraine War.

International Student Learning

Gibson, Grafa, Beament, Adama, Ferguson, Kirk, Muge-Sugutt & McCullough share that international students in a Nursing & Midwifery program have vulnerability in learning. **Huang** shares the ways in which international students from China, who are studying in Canada, experience racial discrimination, both direct and indirect and how that impacts their overall success. **Ammigan, Veerasamy, & Cruz** identify ways in which peer-to-peer mentoring can help international students transition easier to their university life in the United States. **Kaemmerer & Foulkes** gain insights into international student post-graduation employment location preferences.

Faculty & Staff Learning

Burnside, Wildermuth, & Rohach share what faculty learn when leading a short-term study abroad program. **Cho** shares insights into policy making related to internationalization of administrative staff development. **Langeveldt & Pietersen** show how Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) helps South African teacher education and can become a tool for in diverse and democratic efforts at sustainable development.

Institutional Policy

Veerasamy & Hofmeyr compare the macro-level develop of internationalization policy in the United States and in Japan. **Anafinova** explores the adoption of the Bologna standards in Kazakhstan through short-term and long-term educational borrowing.

Conflict from Russia-Ukraine War: Special Issue

Kuzhabekova shares how faculty at a Kazakhstan Higher Educational Institution feel about the continued conflict and sanctions on internationalization and international mobility. **Legusov & Antonenko** share insights from Ukraine refugees who settled in Canada and attend a community college. **Tishenina** shares insights from Russian students who participated in a virtual exchange program. **Sicka, de Ungo, & Gregory**, share the narratives of Indian international students studying in the Ukraine. **Smyslova** shares how Russian emigrants in exile transform their exiled consciousness to one of Hope-Making. **Merrill** examines the effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on internationalization in two universities located in the capital city in Kyrgyzstan. **Chankseliania & Belkina** examine the impact on Russia's academic sector, including academic exodus from Russia, interruption of ongoing research projects, and termination of international collaborations. **Adam** shares the (re)configuration of internationalization from student relocation and new forms of learning. **Zakharchuk** shares internationalization of Ukrainian Universities and the dynamics of European, national, and institutional dimensions. **Hwami** shares feedback from graduate students on internationalization in Kazakhstan, de-Russification, and modern development. **Almukhambetova, Sparks, Sergazina,& Ospanbek**, share STEM students' choice for mobility in Kazakhstan. **Tamtik & Felder** share how universities in Canada and Germany use geopolitics to shape internationalization from the host institution perspective.

Special Issue Articles

Aliya Kuzhabekova (University of Calgary, Canada & Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan). *Bearing the Woken Bear: Kazakhstani Educators Making Sense of the Russian Invasion in Ukraine and its Consequences for Internationalization of Higher Education in Kazakhstan*

This article explores how faculty in Kazakhstan perceive the current and potential effects of the Russia-Ukraine war and sanctions on internationalization and international mobility. Results show that these faculty interpret the impacts of the conflict in neoliberal terms with only some faculty members noting potential effects in terms of academic colonialism.

Oleg Legusov (Seneca Polytechnic, Canada) & **Oleksandr Antonenko** (Seneca Polytechnic, Canada). *Exploring the Impact of War on International Community College Students from Ukraine: A Case Study from Toronto.*

This article explores Ukrainians who migrated to Canada and who enrolled in community colleges to improve their labor-market skills and to facilitate their transition to life in Canada. The article identifies challenges, coping mechanisms, and college support. It also shows that participants experience stress, anxiety, helplessness, isolation, and concern for family in Ukraine.

Sofya Smyslova (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom) *Education in Exile as a Hope-making Practice: the Case of Russian Higher Education Projects.*

This article explores the self-conceptualization of higher education projects (HEPs) relocated out of Russia or created by Russian emigrants in exile after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The focus is on how HEPs manage to overcome 'exiled consciousness' and build a hope-making practice.

Bhavika Sicka (Old Dominion University, USA), **Nadiya de Ungo** (Old Dominion University, USA), & **Dennis Gregory** (Old Dominion University, USA) *Social Media Sanctuaries: A Discourse Analysis of Indian International Students' Agency and Liminality During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict.*

This article uses a social media discourse analysis approach to share narratives of Indian international students in Ukraine affected by the Russo-Ukrainian war. Students share how they navigate conflict, support each other, challenge hegemonic narratives, and (re)construct diasporic identities. This article shows how international students in non-Anglocentric, peripheralized European countries, negotiate power and navigate crises during war.

Edmund Adam (York University, Canada) *Power Paradigm Unleashed: The (Re)Configuration of International Higher Education Arising from the Russia-Ukraine Conflict and What it Means for Higher Education.*

This article shows how the war in Ukraine forced relocation of international students and faculty; and created special programs to accommodate transferring international students from Russian and Ukrainian universities. In turn, the war has triggered ideational change regarding the rationales, norms, and values that shape the behavior of states and other related actors.

Mariia Tishenina (Edge Hill University, United Kingdom). *Escaping The Acquiescent Immobility Trap: The Role of Virtual Mobility in Supporting Physical Study Abroad Aspirations among Students from Russia.*

This article explores the positive role that virtual student mobility plays in sustaining international education for Russian students. Findings show that virtual mobility can bolster Russian students' capacity as a 'rite of passage,' increasing language confidence, and challenging media portrayals of hostility towards Russian students.

Maia Chankseliania (University of Oxford, United Kingdom) & **Elizaveta Belkina** (University of Oxford, United Kingdom) *Academic Exodus from Russia: Unraveling the Crisis.*

This essay examines the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on Russia's academic sector. Outcomes include academic exodus from Russia, interruption of ongoing research projects, and termination of international collaborations. The Russia-Ukraine war serves as an important case study, shedding light on the vulnerabilities of academic sectors, interrupted by geopolitical strife, international sanctions, and curtailed academic freedoms.

Martha C. Merrill (Kent State University, USA) *Effects of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on the Internationalization of Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan*

This essay examines the effects of the war in Ukraine on two internationalized universities located in the capital city of Kyrgyzstan: the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University and the American University in Central Asia. Additional focus is on migrants and their families who depend upon employment in Russia and who choose to return to Kyrgyzstan to educate in Russian schools.

Nataliia Zakharchuk (University of Saskatchewan, Canada). *The Internationalization of Ukrainian Universities: European, National, and Institutional Dimensions.*

This article examines how European regionalization influences Ukrainian public universities with a case study on Ukrainian education strategy and institutional internationalization and marketing policies. The dynamics of the Bologna Reforms and Russian policies ground the study. Challenges to and supports for the implementation of these policies are also examined.

Munyaradzi Hwami (Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan) *Understanding the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Context of the War in Ukraine: Critical Conversations from Kazakhstan.*

This essay makes the claim that the War in Ukraine promotes and accelerates Westernization using Mignolo's (2011) geopolitics of knowledge as the theoretical framework. Findings show an acceleration of the de-Russification of Kazakhstan, using English as lingua franca and recognizing English credentials for global/Western competitiveness and modernity among graduate students in Kazakhstan. Higher education itself is a symbol of freedom from the Soviet system, de-Russification, and modern development.

Ainur Almukhambetova (Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan), **Jason Sparks**, (Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan), **Manat Sergazina** (Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan), & **Assylzhan Ospanbek** (Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan) *STEM Students' International Mobility in Kazakhstan in the Context of the Russia-Ukraine War Conflict.*

This article explores the changes in STEM students' intentions to pursue international mobility in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war and the push-pull factors in the context of geopolitical tensions of military conflict. Findings show that mobility choices, both on the receiving and domestic sides, are driven by safety, financial, and social tension concerns.

Merli Tamtik (University of Manitoba, Canada) & **Alina Jasmin Felder** (University of S. Gallen, Switzerland) *How Geopolitics Shapes Higher Education Internationalization: Institutional Responses to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*

This article uses a case study of higher educational institutions in Canada and Germany to see how three values affiliated with internationalization of higher education, peace, mutual understanding, and solidarity are impacted by the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine from a host institution perspective. Key finding suggests the dominance of the logic of appropriateness whereby a geopolitical rationale governs institutional responses in a context where widely shared democratic values are under attack.

Independent Empirical Articles

Kayli Elaine Burnside (Drake University, USA), **Cristina Wildermuth** (Barry University, USA), & **Maria Rohach** (Drake University, USA)

Jacks of All Hats: Role Complexity, Ambiguity, and the Experiences of Short-Term Study Abroad Faculty.

This article explores the experiences of short-term study abroad faculty from a university in the USA. The experiences of these faculty coincide with challenges in preparation and reentry, physical and mental health, and group dynamics. Benefits noted were cultural enrichment, professional growth, and the ability to enhance student lives.

Shinichi Cho (Kagawa University, Japan) *Realities and Challenges of Internationalizing Administrative Staff in Japanese Universities.*

This article explores the functions and roles of internationalizing administrative staff in Japanese universities before and after the implementation of mandatory staff development (SD) and reforms to the standards. This study details international nature, working and training overseas experience, and administrative staff's educational background.

Dean Collin Langeveldt (Sol Plaatje University, South Africa) & **Doniwen Pietersen** (University of South Africa, South Africa)

Pre-Service Teaching and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in A Diverse and Democratic South African School Setting: A Social Theoretical Perspective.

This article explores how Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is a form of experiential learning and is a vital component of South Africa's teacher education. The article shows that WIL effectively supports pre-service teachers and schools in diverse South African classroom and can become a way to promote education for sustainable development (ESD) and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Saule Anafinova (ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary). *Localization of the Bologna Process in Post-Soviet Context: The Case of Kazakhstan.*

This article uses a theoretical framework based on Acharya's (2004) norm localization theory to analyze educational borrowing and adoption of the Bologna standards in Kazakhstan. Both short-term and long-term outcomes are found that include adopting the Bologna-driven competence-based approach and the importance of domestic factors for educational policy borrowing.

Yovana S. Veerasamy (Independent Scholar, USA) & **Ana S. Hofmeyr** (Kansai University, Japan)

Sequencing Internationalization Policy in the 21st Century: A Comparative Analysis between Japan and the United States of America.

This article is a comparative analysis of internationalization policy in Japan and the USA. The focus is on how different policy-making processes at the macro-level impact internationalization policy in practice. The analysis shows the development of higher education internationalization policy efforts, sequencing events, factors, and rationales that impacted national policy. Findings show that there is more variation in internationalization policy in the U.S. than in Japan.

Nick Gibson (Edith Cowan University, Australia), **Amanda Graf** (University of Notre Dame, Australia), **Tania Beament** (Edith Cowan University, Australia), **Esther Adama** (Edith Cowan University, Australia), **Neil Ferguson** (Edith Cowan University, Australia), **Deborah Kirk** (Edith Cowan University, Australia), **Joyce Muge-Sugutt** (Edith Cowan University, Australia), & **Kylie McCullough** (Edith Cowan University, Australia).

"It Was Difficult to Understand the System": Developing A Coordinator role to support international nursing students- A qualitative study.

This article explores the vulnerability of international students in terms of academic expectations, language proficiency, and socio-cultural integration in a Western Australian School of Nursing and Midwifery. Four themes emerge: stress, incorrect and/or late enrollments, lack of guidance and support, system navigation nightmares.

Xin Huang (McMaster University, Canada) *Visible but Invisible: Chinese International Students' Experience of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Academic Institutions' Support.*

This article applies the hermeneutical phenomenological approach, guided by Critical Race Theory, to see how Chinese international students who study in Canada and their racial identity shape the challenges that they faced during the pandemic. The study shows pervasive anti-Asian racism that directly and indirectly builds negative experiences for these students. There is also a lack of support from academic institutions to address this discrimination.

Ravichandran Ammigan (University of Delaware, USA), **Yovana S. Veerasamy**, (Independent Scholar, USA) & **Natalie I. Cruz** (Emory University, USA) *"It is always hard at the beginning:" Peer-to-peer Advice for International Students Transitioning to University Life in the U.S.*

This article examines formal and informal peer-to-peer support to help international students acclimate and cope with their transition to a new campus and county. The article analyzes essays written by 400 international students from 2013-2021. Students identified that there needs to be new ways for addressing their adjustment to university life.

James Kaemmerer (Kent State University, USA) & **Matt Foulkes** (University of Missouri, USA) *An Exploratory Survey of Post-Graduation Employment Location Preferences Among International Students in Missouri, USA.*

This article examines the post-graduation employment location preferences of international students in their final semesters who are preparing to participate in the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program in the United States. Findings show that preference of geographies are country-bound rather than state-bound.

JCIHE Support

There are many individuals who volunteer their time to support Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education leadership, copyediting, and production of each issue. I want to thank several individuals who are instrumental in the publication of Issue 16(3) 2024. First, I want to thank the senior JCIHE Board: JCIHE *Senior Associate Editor*, Hayes Tang, the *Senior Consultant*, Bernhard Streitwieser, *Social Media Editor*, Andrea Lane, *Book Review Editor*, Shinji Katsumoto, *Communications Editor*, Angel Oi Yee Cheng, and STAR Journals Communications Editor, Bo Zhang. I want to sincerely thank the *Associate and Managing Editor*, Yovana S. Veerasamy, who helps to keep JCIHE running and whose contribution is essential to making the journal succeed.

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The entire JCIHE volunteer managing and editorial team is so very important to the quality of production of this and every issue. It is their dedication that helps keep the standards and integrity for the journal. Finally, JCIHE is dependent on the volunteer efforts of many scholars in the field of comparative and international higher education. I want to give special thanks to the *JCIHE Copyeditors* for the 16(3) Issue. Thank you for your time and copyediting skills that enhance the flow of the articles.

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Finally, I want to thank everyone who downloads the JCIHE articles, reads them, and then are inspired by the articles for their own future research.

Editor in Chief, Rosalind Latiner Raby
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Introduction to the Special Issue Military Conflict and Internationalization of Higher Education: Lessons from the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT or other support technologies.

Two years have passed since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The invasion has started a new era in the development of international relations and in the transformation of the dependent states formed following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Millions of people have been affected in Ukraine and Russia itself. Thousands of civilians and soldiers have died on both sides of the conflict and over a million have had to leave their home countries or have been internally displaced. The military conflict has transformed the production and supply channels throughout the larger Europe-Asia region, and broader regional and global economic effects are still unfolding.

On a less visible level, the invasion has produced ripple effects on the ethnic and national identities of the former Soviet peoples, the corresponding countries' ideologies, and, inevitably, on education and ways of thinking about its purposes, content, methods, and structure. There are emerging discussions of decoloniality and reconceptualization of the Soviet past, of the fate of the Russian language, and the future relations with the West on the one hand, and China and its neighbors on the other. Considerations of alternative pathways, inspirations, and models of educational reform are also part of this discourse.

The idea of this special issue was prompted by the predictable changes in the process of internationalization of higher education and in patterns of international mobility because of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Internationalization has been a prominent mechanism of educational transformation in the post-Soviet area since the collapse of the USSR.

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Over the more than thirty years of their independence, many republics of the former Soviet Union have relied on models and ideas from abroad in search of existing solutions to emerging educational issues; increasingly, republics are comparing their performance on education-related indicators with their counterparts in other regions of the world, joining a variety of international competitiveness indices and rankings; they have sent cadres of professors and researchers abroad for training and have engaged in partnerships with institutions in Asia and the West, trying to supplement limited domestic resources, expertise and access to facilities; additionally, they have consulted with international experts from around the world to assist with introducing teaching innovations and research capacity building. Some countries, such as Kazakhstan, have invested in the creation of international universities and regional education hubs. The key question of this special issue is this: *How has the Russian invasion of Ukraine affected internationalization processes at higher education institutions in the region and beyond?*

The team of contributors to this special issue explore changes in the process of internationalization and in patterns of international mobility, which are taking place far beyond the borders of the two countries involved in the conflict. Some of the authors follow Ukrainian students, who left their own country prior or during the war, to see how their lives are affected by the conflict and how they are adjusting in Canada and Germany, while others analyze the exodus of Russian students and academics from their home country and the experiences of Russian scholars in exile. One team engages with an online community of Indian students, who were studying in Ukraine and faced the choice of continuing their education in a conflict zone or withdrawing from their Ukrainian host universities; some of these displaced Indian students experienced discrimination and significant challenges in the process of evacuation and transition to new host universities outside Ukraine. Three articles in the issue explore how the invasion affected the aspirations for international mobility of Kazakhstani faculty and students, revealing their disillusionment and increasing questioning of the value of the Russian language, education, and research collaboration. Two pieces analyze the broader effects of the conflict on internationalization in a given country. One of these pieces focuses on novel challenges and innovative approaches to internationalization in Ukraine, while the other explores changing patterns of student and faculty mobility, plans for opening of branch campuses, and the development of international partnerships in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, one of the authors analyzes the broader effects of the conflict on internationalization in the entire post-Soviet region.

This special issue provides a comprehensive investigation of the effects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on higher education and the patterns of internationalization in the post-Soviet region and beyond. This collection of timely articles might offer important insights into understanding future trends and potential issues that should be considered by scholars of educational reform and internationalization in the region, as well as higher education policymakers in the post-Soviet countries. The articles in this issue provide useful examples of how the effects of war on education can be understood methodologically as these studies utilize a variety of approaches ranging from content analysis of policy literature and official media to the examination of social media communities and more conventional interviews and focus groups. They also offer some theoretical frameworks that can be potentially utilized for designing new studies and interpreting results. At the same time, it is important to recognize that this special issue provides only a snapshot of the developing situation in the affected region, limited by the data from individual countries and having failed to provide an analysis of the situation in the Caucasus, Belarus, some of the countries of Central Asia, and importantly, Russia.

The scholarly importance of this *JCIHE* special issue goes beyond the region and the specific conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This special issue is one of few attempts at an in-depth exploration of the effects of war on internationalization and international mobility in higher education. Unfortunately, with increasing geopolitical polarization in different parts of the globe, this issue might set an example for similar explorations of emerging conflicts. While the effects of conflicts on education and internationalization are important to understand, our world would be a better place if the need never emerged. Our hope is that this special issue will foster awareness of the negative consequences of military conflicts and help to uncover the transformative, peace-building potential of internationalization and international mobility in higher education.

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Aliya Kuzhabekova, PhD., is an Assistant Professor at Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, Canada. She conducts research on international higher education and educational reform in post-Soviet contexts. Most of her work focuses on understanding the experiences of internationally mobile faculty and graduate students, research capacity building and equity in higher education.

Bearing the Woken Bear: Kazakhstani Educators Making Sense of the Russian Invasion in Ukraine and its Consequences for Internationalization of Higher Education in Kazakhstan

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This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT or other support technologies.

Abstract

This paper explores how faculty in Kazakhstan perceive the current and potential effects of the Russia-Ukraine war and sanctions on internationalization and international mobility in higher education in the Central Asian country. The purpose of the study was to provide some initial insights into the perceived effects of the conflict on international mobility and higher education in the country, which has the longest border with Russia. The study uses grounded theory as an approach to research design. The data was collected via semi-structured interviews whereby the participants were selected from among faculty of Kazakhstani universities using a combination of snowball and maximal-variation sampling approaches. The results of the analysis revealed that the participants interpret the impacts of the conflict predominantly in neoliberal terms with only some faculty members noting potential effects in terms of academic colonialism. Identified themes are best interpreted in terms of the conceptual construct of capital. We suggest a combination of several capital theories as a potential theoretical framework for understanding perceptions of the effects of war on internationalization and international mobility in higher education.

Keywords: higher education, internationalization, Kazakhstan, post-Soviet, Russian invasion in Ukraine

Abstract Translated to Kazakh

Бұл жұмыс Қазақстандағы профессорлық-оқытушылар құрамының Ресей-Украина соғысының және санкциялардың Орталық Азия еліндегі жоғары оқу орындарындағы интернационализация мен халықаралық

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ұтқырлыққа қазіргі және ықтимал әсерлерін қалай қабылдайтынын зерттейді. Зерттеудің мақсаты Ресеймен ең ұзын шекарасы бар елдегі халықаралық ұтқырлыққа және жоғары білімге қақтығыстың әсер етуі туралы кейбір бастапқы түсініктерді беру болды. Зерттеу зерттеу дизайнына көзқарас ретінде негізделген теорияны пайдаланады. Деректер жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар арқылы жиналды, оның барысында қатысушылар Қазақстан университеттерінің профессорлық-оқытушылар құрамы арасынан қарлы және максималды вариациялық іріктеу тәсілдерінің комбинациясы арқылы таңдалды. Талдау нәтижелері көрсеткендей, қатысушылар қақтығыстың әсерін негізінен неолибералдық терминдермен түсіндіреді, тек кейбір оқытушылар академиялық отаршылдық тұрғысынан ықтимал әсерлерді атап өтті. Анықталған тақырыптар капиталдың концептуалды құрылымы тұрғысынан жақсы түсіндіріледі. Біз соғыстың интернационализацияға және жоғары оқу орындарындағы халықаралық ұтқырлыққа әсерін қабылдауды түсіну үшін әлеуетті теориялық негіз ретінде бірнеше капитал теорияларының комбинациясын ұсынамыз.

Түйін сөздер: интернационалдандыру, посткеңестік Қазақстан, жоғары білім, Ресейдің Украинаға басып кіруі

Abstract Translated to Russian

В статье приводится анализ мнения профессорско-преподавательского состава Казахстанских вузов относительно текущего и возможного влияния войны между Украиной и Россией и антироссийских санкций на интернационализацию и международную мобильность в высшем образовании в этой Центральноазиатской стране. Целью исследования было выявление воспринимаемого воздействия конфликта на интернационализацию высшего образования в стране, имеющей наиболее протяженную границу с Россией. В статье используется обоснованная теория в качестве исследовательского дизайна. Сбор данных осуществлялся посредством полуструктурированных интервью с использованием комбинации максимально-вариативной и сетевой выборки. Результаты исследования показывают, что большинство преподавателей интерпретируют последствия войны с точки зрения неолиберализма с незначительным количеством преподавателей, отмечающих потенциальное воздействие в свете академического неокOLONIALИЗМА. Выявленные темы лучше всего объясняются различными концептуализациями капитала. Мы предлагаем совокупность нескольких теорий капиталов в качестве потенциальной теоретической рамки, которая может быть использована для объяснения существующих мнений о воздействии войны на интернационализацию и международную мобильность в высшем образовании.

Ключевые слова: интернационализация, пост-советский, Казахстан, высшее образование, Российское вторжение на Украину

Introduction

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has brought unexpected and radical changes to all countries of the former Soviet Union. Kazakhstan, as a country with 30 percent of the Russian-speaking and ethnic Russian population, which neighbours Russia along its longest international border, has been affected by the destabilization in the geopolitical situation in the region more than any other post-Soviet state. Some effects of the conflict include the influx of Russian refugees and, to a lesser extent, Ukrainian refugees to Kazakhstan, disruption of global and regional supply chains, interruption of cross-border transit and financial transactions with Russia (Domoulin, 2023). In the realm of higher education visible short-term implications include an increase in the number of applications for study and employment at Kazakhstani universities from current and potential international students and faculty from both Ukraine and Russia. There has also been a decline in the number of applications to Russian and Ukrainian universities from Kazakhstani students (ICEF Monitor, 2023). Other effects are yet to be seen and understood. For example, it is not yet clear how the conflict will affect longer-term patterns of higher education internationalization, cross-border research collaboration and international mobility.

Importantly, some of the most radical changes have been occurring in the minds of people living in post-Soviet states. Many of them are trying to make sense of the new reality and envision what the conflict may mean for their

individual and collective future. On a large scale, this meaning-making has strong repercussions for social cohesion and the future of fragile peace in the whole Eurasian region (Heyneman, 2003). In addition, the new meanings, and attributions, the newly emerging and evolving existing discourses, especially meanings created by academics, will inevitably affect education, including the processes of internationalization, mobility, and exchange (Oleksiyenko, 2023). Hence, understanding how educators in the post-Soviet neighborhood are making sense of the conflict and construct new visions of the future in the reality of the ongoing conflict is important for scholars exploring the process of educational reform and, more specifically, higher education internationalization in the region.

Despite the importance of understanding the effects of the war and sanctions on higher education, as well as the process of new meaning-making among educators in the post-Soviet space, scholarly interest in the topic is still relatively nascent. We are aware of only a couple of studies on this topic. Most papers have thus far focused on the actual or perceived effects of war on higher education in Ukraine. Suchikova et al. (2023) analyzed the effects of the war on research and scientists at Ukrainian universities. Oleksiyenko, Shchepetylnykova, & Furiv (2023) explored Ukrainian academics' perceptions about the challenges, opportunities, and approaches to internationalization in the context of war, revealing "the transformative power of crisis-driven internationalization in redefining the ontological and axiological foundations of universities" (p.1103). Gharaibeh, Ahmad, and Malkawi (2023) explored the effects of the war on international students, who continue to study or have left Ukrainian universities, as well as implications of the conflict for international research collaborations of Ukrainian universities. Outside the field of higher education research, Kurapov et al. (2023) and Limone, Toto, and Messina (2022) conducted studies, that revealed the negative effects of the war on the mental health of academic personnel and university students in Ukraine, whereas Sritchawla et al. (2022) explored the broad implications of the war on the experiences of Ukrainian students at medical universities and Roy, Shubhajeet, and Ozair (2022) analyzed the experiences of overseas medical students in Ukraine during the war. In addition to the early explorations of the effects on Ukrainian higher education, Zavadskaya and Gerber (2023) revealed the impact of the conflict on academic freedom in Russian higher education. studies have not been conducted, on the actual or perceived effects of the war on other countries of the post-Soviet region. This could be due to the fact that the immediate effects are still unfolding, and the longer-term implications are yet to be seen.

This study will make one of the first contributions to the scholarship on the effects of Russo-Ukrainian war on higher education in general and on internationalization and international mobility in higher education in the region more specifically via a focused exploration of Kazakhstani higher education faculty and researchers' perceptions and anticipations with respect to the effects of the war and sanctions on higher education internationalization in their native country. Our paper is exploratory in nature and its general research question is: How do Kazakhstani academics conceptualize the effect of the Russo-Ukrainian war on internationalization and mobility in Kazakhstani higher education in the short and long term?

Methodology

To achieve the purpose of the study we used a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory, pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is an interpretive research approach that seeks to induce theory from empirical data, in contrast to deducing from preconceived hypotheses. This approach is particularly appropriate to use for understanding emergent phenomena, where it may aid in understanding of its underlying patterns and processes (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, it is effective in understanding diverse perspectives and experiences related to a specific topic (Glasser, 1978). Finally, the approach is particularly useful for generating mid-range theories—those that are more specific and contextual than grand theories but still offer explanatory power (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The decision to employ the approach was driven by the exploratory nature of our endeavor—unveiling emerging and diverse university academics' perceptions regarding the near-and long-term repercussions of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the internationalization of higher education in the post-Soviet region. Grounded theory seemed well-suited for this endeavor, as it allowed for the development of insights through the systematic engagement with complex data without being restricted by predetermined theoretical frameworks, which we had not been able to identify for the object of our inquiry from the limited available research. We started our exploration from the ground allowing the data to bring us to a theory appropriate for interpretation.

The data was collected via semi-structured in-depth interviews. In-depth interviewing is invaluable when the aim is to delve into participants' lived experiences (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002), understand complex phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2011), and explore qualitative nuances (Seidman, 2013). They offer a means of gathering in-depth, contextualized data that contributes to a rich and multifaceted understanding of the research topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Compared with the more structured approaches, the unstructured approach to the interviews allows for flexibility in questioning, enabling researchers to adapt and follow up on responses to gain deeper insights (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Given the emerging complex, multifaceted nature of the war and its repercussions for education, as well as diverse views on the implications of the war for higher education, we thought that semi-structured in-depth interviewing would be well founded.

More specifically, we conducted extended online interviews with higher education faculty and researchers in Kazakhstan. The participants included 10 individuals (see Table 1) selected via purposeful sampling from among faculty and full-time scholars at various public and private universities in the country. We used a combination of a maximal variation and snowball approaches, whereby we selected some participants based on their profile descriptions on their employing university websites trying to include faculty varying on such parameters as (1) age; (2) sex; (3) institutional type; and (4) discipline. These parameters were shown as relevant by prior studies of factors affecting faculty views about and engagement in internationalization (Shwartz, 2014). This approach was aimed to ensure the representation of various perspectives (Creswell, 2013). We also asked the participants to indicate some other potential candidates and to provide their contacts, approaching some of the suggested individuals if they could provide additional diversity to the sample based on the desired parameters of variation indicated above.

Each participant was requested to take part in one interview, which lasted for approximately one hour. The interviews were conducted online to increase participation rates and to ensure greater confidentiality for the participants. Our prior experience shows that Kazakhstani faculty are more willing to participate in interviews online because they have very busy schedules at work and find it more compelling to answer questions from the comfort of their own home outside the working hours and without the risk of being accidentally overheard by a colleague in a shared office or a packed university canteen/library.

The interviews were conducted and analyzed in Russian with resulting themes and quotes translated into English in preparation of this manuscript. The analysis process commenced with thorough familiarization with the collected data. Initial open coding was performed, involving a line-by-line examination of the data to identify meaningful concepts, incidents, and ideas. These codes were generated inductively, allowing emerging patterns and themes to surface organically from the data. Following open coding, axial coding was undertaken to explore relationships between codes and to develop categories. In the subsequent stage, selective coding was carried out to further refine the core categories. Through iterative cycles of data comparison, the theoretical framework was eventually refined.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Characteristics

ID	Age	Sex	Institutional type	Discipline
Participant 1	30	M	Public, national level*	Political Science
Participant 2	42	M	Private, state level	Physics
Participant 3	35	F	Public, state level	Biology
Participant 4	40	M	Private, state level	Psychology
Participant 5	50	M	Private, state level	Computer science
Participant 6	39	M	Public, national level	History
Participant 7	38	F	Public, state level	Education
Participant 8	52	F	Private, national level	Sociology
Participant 9	58	F	Public, national level	Chemistry
Participant 10	27	F	Private, national level	International Relations

(*) In the context of Kazakhstan “national-level” means that this university admits students from around the country, conducts research important at the national scale, and receives more funding given the role. “State-level” universities tend to attract students from a specific “oblast” (comparable to a state in the US) in the country and devote their research efforts to topics of the oblast’s importance.

Results

This section reports the main results of the study. One of the key findings is that most of the participants of the interview anticipated that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and sanctions imposed on Russia would create mostly positive changes for higher education internationalization and international mobility in Kazakhstan. The majority of faculty and researchers mentioned that the geopolitical changes had disrupted some long-established patterns and might create some new opportunities, which, in the long term, would have positive effects on Kazakhstani higher education. These opportunities were frequently conceptualized in terms of (1) occupying the place previously taken by Russia in higher education provision for international and Russia-bound domestic students; (2) benefiting from the exodus of Russian academics escaping from the current political regime and mandatory conscription; (3) becoming more attractive as potential international collaborative research partners as a replacement for previously attractive Russian scholars/institutions given the emerging centrality of the country in the post-Soviet region; and (4) greater diversification of educational and research connections as a result of breaking from overdependence on Russian academia in the past.

The key emerging themes representing academics’ views about the anticipated impacts of the war and sanctions on internationalization and mobility in higher education in Kazakhstan are summarized below. In the subsequent section, we provide a possible theoretical interpretation for the themes emerging from the data.

Novel Approaches to Performing Research, Teaching, and Administrative Tasks Related to Internationalization

The trade and cross-border transportation disruptions have created some complications for Kazakhstani faculty and scholars in the process of teaching and research. Some research labs had closely collaborated with Russian scholars before the war with experiments conducted in laboratories abroad or equipment being supplied or repaired by Russian companies. The old approaches to collaboration led to underutilization of domestic equipment, as well as to occasionally questionable publication practices, where Kazakhstani grant recipients would pay Russian scholars for conducting and publishing the studies in exchange for co-authorship on the resultant publications. After the beginning of the war, these labs had to reconsider their supply routes and had to come up with ways to run independent experiments and to make better use of the equipment at home. This has led to some innovative solutions to conducting research (including collaborative ones) with faculty purchasing a 3D printer to print broken parts or using Russian immigrant scholars to show domestic teams how to properly use the existing equipment or underutilized software. Most of our participants believe that the short-term challenges will eventually lead to more independence and better approaches to running experiments and labs, to better utilization and care about domestic equipment, and to improvements in the processes of procurement and repair contracts with supplying companies from abroad. In the long run, improved quality of the research infrastructure and skills in using it by domestic scholars might strengthen the ability of Kazakhstani scholars to diversify international research collaborations.

Our team was affected by sanctions at the beginning of the war, so we had to change some of our old approaches to purchasing equipment and replacing broken parts in our new projects. In one of the ongoing projects, a machine we use for our testing had broken a month before the war and we had ordered a replacement from Russia. The new machine has not yet been delivered. We tried to be creative, figured which part of the machine needed to be replaced and printed the broken part with a 3D printer (Participant 2).

Prior to the war, given the poor skills of many Kazakhstani faculty in speaking and writing in foreign languages, some Kazakhstani academics relied on publications in Russian journals and had minimal experience with international peer-reviewed journals. The questionable publication practices mentioned above were one of the attempted solutions to the lack of language and publication skills. Due to moral concerns about the Russian aggression on Ukraine, some scholars have made a conscious choice to reduce the number of articles they send to Russian journals and to redirect their

efforts to producing manuscripts for international journals. Some faculty and researchers anticipate that this will increase interest among scholars to learn English and will improve the publication skills of academics. Others indicated that the changes might also contribute to the development of local journals.

For some of my colleagues, it was just easier to continue to rely on their Russian partners in their research and publication. The war has pushed them to start learning English or to start exploring collaborations with universities in Turkey and China (Participant 5).

Student Mobility Changes

Two key changes have been noted by the participants concerning student mobility. First, as has been noted earlier, the faculty members believed there was an increase in the number of international students at Kazakhstani universities. This change was perceived as largely positive. The majority of the participants felt that the short-term change would improve the capacity of universities to serve international students, will make universities more attractive to international clients in the long term, will bring additional profits, and will improve the quality of education for both international and domestic students, thus enhancing the competitiveness and the position in international rankings of some Kazakhstani institutions.

There is an increasing interest of students from Russia to get admitted to KZ universities as a mechanism to escape military conscription and, potentially, as a pathway for immigration to the country. The issue is that there is no clarity about mechanisms yet. There are Kazakhstani scholarships for international students, there are grants for hosting Russian students coming on short-term mobility, but there is lack of information about these opportunities and Russian students have difficulty getting access to it (Participant 1).

In the long term, Central Asian students will start to consider KZ because of the departure of Russia from the Bologna process. This will increase inbound mobility, and this will have positive effects on our education. This will lead to an increase in the quality of education and will improve self-expectations from the faculty, will help people to wake up from inertia, and to focus on good teaching and advising practices (Participant 2).

We have an increasing interest from Mongolian students. In the past, they chose Russia to be able to study in Russian. After a visit to our university, they started to consider sending students to Kazakhstan. There was an increase in the number of applications from Russia and Belarus from what I heard. This will be all beneficial in the future. Our university has started to take international students more seriously and tries its best to support the ones, who are coming now (Participant 7).

Another change, which was observed with respect to student mobility patterns was a reorientation of domestic student flows from Russia to other countries. Several faculty members noted that they had noticed more youth choosing to go to Turkey, South Korea, China, and Western countries for their education after the beginning of the conflict. In the past, Russia attracted a significant share of internationally bound Kazakhstani students, which created an imbalance in the distribution of the mobility flows. Most of our participants thought that emerging patterns would bring positive changes by diversifying the knowledge, skills, linguistic repertoire, and cultural experiences of Kazakhstani youth and by enriching the pool of ideas for reform in the future with expertise from a greater variety of countries.

Russians left the Bologna process. Individual decision-making students would no longer be interested in degrees in Russia because their diplomas are not recognized in KZ any longer. Their system at the level of Baccalaureate is now going to be very different. In the past, our students went there, got their Bachelor's and came back to KZ to continue with Master's. Now students are not interested because they cannot continue in KZ (Participant 2).

I can see in our university that more parents are interested in sending their children to Turkey now, even ethnic Russians. I am glad to see this. We need people with an understanding of different cultural contexts and neighbors other than Russia (Participant 7).

Some positive changes have happened not only in research but also in approaches to teaching and supporting international students. Four faculty members (Participants 1,6,8,10) reported an increase in the number of international students at their institutions. This increase was linked to (1) the transfer and new applications from young Russian males, who are trying to escape mandatory military conscription; (2) the transfer and new applications from Asian and African international students, who were previously interested in pursuing their degrees in Russia and Ukraine; as well as to (3) a small increase in the number of applications from Central Asian students, who have reconsidered Russia as an attractive destination for higher education. The participants believed that the need to accept a growing number of international students has created some unanticipated challenges for universities, such as a lack of dormitories and facilities, English-speaking personnel, and novel issues in processing student visas. When dealing with these issues, universities may have come up with various creative approaches and may improve their capacity to deal with international students and to provide proper support and accommodations. Most faculty believe that this will benefit the process of internationalization in the long run.

Faculty Mobility Changes

In parallel to the student flows, two key changes were observed by the participants in the patterns of faculty mobility. First, almost all participants talked about an influx of Russian scholars to Kazakhstani universities. Some of the scholars sought an escape from military mobilization. Others were abandoning their positions at Russian universities for ideological reasons, unwilling to comply with the changes in the political discourse and the regime. Several participants reported that their universities have hired some Russian intellectuals in full-time and part-time faculty and researcher positions. The influx of Russian scholars is largely perceived as beneficial for the Kazakhstani higher education in the long run. Many domestic faculty believe that those who would stay in the country after the end of the war would enrich the academic environment with their knowledge and skills, while those who would leave – would most likely continue international collaborations with Kazakhstani partners.

We have this new faculty member who was hired from among Russian professors, who trained our scholars to use an international plant and animal biodiversity database. In the past, nobody in KZ knew how to do this. After this training, we have launched our own system and have started digitalization of our species...The Institute of Zoology in Almaty has accepted many scholars from Russia trying to escape mobilization. They have started a conference, started to push the initiative for Kazakhstan's joining Global Biodiversity Digitalization initiative. We are also planning to bring another person from Russia, who is an expert on plant physiology. We have lots of equipment, but we don't know how to use it. The expert promised to teach us how to use the equipment (Participant 3).

I know of at least 10 Russians who moved to work in Kazakhstani universities after the beginning of the war... I am actually actively attracting Russian scholars to my projects myself. They have much greater research skills and capacity in my particular discipline. They now cost more in terms of hiring. They also do not have a choice. So, I am hiring them. We are also trying to help the best, most promising scholars, sometimes at the request of our senior Russian colleagues (Participant 6).

The war has also modified international mobility and international collaboration preferences of Kazakhstani scholars. At least five respondents mentioned that there was some sort of inertia among their colleagues in the past, whereby they had relied on the path of least resistance and tended to collaborate and visit predominantly Russian universities due to shared linguistic and research training backgrounds. The war, ideological disagreements with Russians, and concerns about potential aggression on Kazakhstan in particular, have pushed many to overcome the inertia and to start exploring mobility and collaborative opportunities with universities from far abroad, as well as to consider learning a foreign language.

I studied in Russia and had many colleagues there. My English was also weak. So, I used to collaborate mostly with Russian scholars in the past. It was a safe zone. After the war, I have reconsidered some of my relations. I just can no longer work with people, who share different beliefs about the war. I have stopped publishing with Russians and started to work more with Turks. They have expressed interest and I have supported this (Participant 5).

Most faculty saw the development in a positive light. They expected that the change in the faculty mobility orientation would contribute to the strengthening of the research potential of the domestic faculty, would push local scholars to attend international conferences, to expand the basis of their international partners, and pursue independent research instead of resorting to the current practice of paying Russian collaborators for a place in the list of co-authors on a publication from projects funded by the Kazakhstani government.

New Roles in International Research Collaboration

Several interviewees noted the changing nature of international research collaborations. Two types of changes were noted. The first way in which international collaboration changed is that Kazakhstani scholars became more attractive as collaborators for Russian scholars. Due to the change in geopolitical situation, the Russian government has reoriented its international research funding to Central Asia encouraging Russian scholars to pursue more collaborations with scholars from the “stans”.

Russians, not all of them, but most progressive ones for sure, have started to reconsider how they engage in work with Kazakhstani researchers and how they look at Central Asia in general. For example, in one of the partner universities, the head of postdoctoral studies is a Central Asian person now... There has been a change in the requirements of the key grant giving agency in Russia. Scholars are now being awarded points for engaging scholars from Central Asia in PI and co-PI capacities. The expectation is that projects must be led by a regional scholar. (Participant 1).

While this is not widely spread, but it seems that the younger generation of scholars, who are not as infected with the imperial discourse, are starting to look at Kazakhstani scholars and collaboration with Kazakhs in more positive ways. They are also becoming more open to the idea of exploring the ideas of orientalism and reconsidering the role of Russia as a colonial state (Participant 6).

The second way in which international collaboration changed is that Kazakhstani scholars became more attractive for Western scholars. The frequently provided explanation was that Russia had stopped being attractive for the Western partners as the main co-applicant, who had coordinated data collection from the whole post-Soviet region, where Kazakhs had played a minor supportive role. Consequently, some scholars anticipate that Kazakhstan may become more attractive as the key regional collaborator to replace Russian scholars in the capacity. This effect may be restricted to some disciplines, however, because Kazakhstani scholars in some fields may lack the research capacity to sustain large collaborative research programs.

In the past, much Western funding was directed to Russia because they have research capacity and more interesting sites for research into nuclear ecology. Now, our region and scholars became more attractive for exploration and collaboration because access to Russian nuclear sites is closed (Participant 2).

The interviewees believed that the new roles of Kazakhstani scholars in international partnerships are there to stay. There was an optimism that Kazakhstan would become a more attractive partner in international research partnerships. In addition, the participants believed that both changes would bring positive developments for Kazakhstani research. Domestic scholars would be better positioned to shape research agendas and to conduct research, which meets the interest of the country and Kazakhstani people. They would be empowered to determine research questions and

design. They would have a better capacity to support graduate students and to train the next generation of scholars, as well as to develop their own research capacity.

Income Flow Changes

When asked about the potential effects of the war on funding redistribution in higher education about internationalization the participants noted both potential financial gains and losses for Kazakhstani higher education. Among the gains was the increase in access to research funding from the Russian government and from international donors, which resulted from the exclusion of Russian scholars from international funding schemes and partnerships, as well as from the reorientation of the Russian research funding priorities from the West to Asia and Africa, including Central Asia.

Ministry of Education in Russia must have given the order to engage more with post-Soviet Central Asia in terms of research...Russian universities used to spend their grant funding on interaction with Western scholars. However, they can no longer do this. So, they have to find new ways to internationalize and to engage in partnership research, they need to reorient and strengthen their relationships with scholars in Kazakhstan and other countries of Central Asia now (Participant 1).

One of my doctoral students is in Russia now. She was allowed to go to Russia by the Kazakh government, and I quickly learned that the Russian side understands now that they have to turn to post-Soviet Central Asia, in particular Kazakhstan. This has become a reality. They started to discuss collaborative projects with me and my students. They have provided free housing and a meal plan to her. Seems like they do not know where to redirect their resources and Kazakhstan is one of their few choices now (Participant 2).

Another gain was connected to the changing patterns of domestic student international mobility. Several faculty members noted that due to the decline in the attractiveness of Russia for outward-bound domestic students, they would be more likely to invest in their education at home and this will increase the tuition income for Kazakhstani universities. Similarly, the influx of international students would bring additional revenue for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

I am glad that our students are staying home now. We saw an increase in applications this year and would benefit from the heightened competition for admission both in terms of quality of students and tuition income (Participant 7).

In parallel with the income gains, the war has brought some inevitable economic losses. Some participants were concerned that the economic decline, and global inflation would have negative consequences for the government funding of international mobility and research, as well as, to some extent, for the demand for international student mobility. If the economic conditions continue to worsen, fewer students will endeavor to go abroad or to come to Kazakhstan in the context of shrinking funding, dwindling job prospects, and lowering family incomes. One of the main concerns was about the potential negative effects of secondary sanctions if those were to be applied towards Kazakhstan.

Local Capacity Effects

One of the themes in the interviews was concerned with the potential effects of the war on the development of the local capacity. Some faculty members were optimistic about the potential effects. They believed that the influx of highly qualified Russian academic cadre and previously unavailable external funding might have a transforming impact on the development of the capacity of local researchers and universities. These faculty anticipated that the Russian scholars would share their expertise with the local researchers, would raise the quality of teaching of the young generation of scholars, and would create healthy levels of competition, which would push the local faculty members to work harder and to develop their skills in both teaching and research. Similarly, positive effects were predicted from the increase in external research funding, as well as from the repositioning of Kazakhstani scholars in international research

collaborations. Several respondents thought that this would stimulate research activity and the emergence of new international collaborations with both Russia and other countries.

On the other hand, some of the participants anticipated negative effects from the influx of Russian scholars. They were concerned that the arrival of the Russian counterparts would reduce chances for local researchers due to the age-long beliefs in the higher research capacity of the Russians. As a result, government money will be invested in the foreigners, whereas local capacity development will not be sufficiently supported.

This is like in sports. We have news all over now about Russian sportsmen and sportswomen coming to compete for Kazakhstan. However, some Kazakh athletes are saying that this deprives them from opportunities and potential funding from the government. The same is with scholars. In some ways, the quality of our scholars will improve since the competition will be greater, but then we always have this obsession with everything foreign and some of our scholars may not get hired or paid because they will be considered less qualified than Russians (Participant 3).

Changes in Dependency Status

An overarching theme for many of the predictions was related to the expected change in the dependency status of Kazakhstani research and higher education. Russian aggression in Ukraine has undermined the previously unshakable belief of many Kazakhstani in the “eternal friendship” with the Northern neighbor. Most of our participants became critical of the previously held interpretations of the benefits and losses arising from collaboration with Russian colleagues, in the equal distribution of the benefits in particular; as well as of the potential losses in terms of developing local capacity, meeting local needs, and preserving the Kazakh identity, language and culture. In this sense, the participants implied positive changes in Kazakhstani higher education and research becoming less dependent on the influence of the Russian academia. They thought that with “the leash from Russia getting loose” (Participant 6), Kazakhstani scholars would finally overcome its inertia, the tendency to rely on old post-Soviet connections with Russians and on the knowledge of the Russian language, and would start to explore other possibilities, to learn other languages and to seek new partners. In the long term, this will lead to greater diversification of ideas, better opportunities for self-determination, and greater sustainability.

There is a window of opportunity. In the past, we used to be too integrated into Russia in many senses. Now we have the opportunity to collaborate with other countries, which can give us better technologies and better knowledge. In the past, we continued collaborating with Russians due to inertia. We shared the language. We were a part of the old system. We just continued existing ties. Now, the world has turned upside down. A new generation of scholars will come, and they will reorient themselves (Participant 5).

I think that breaking up with Russia will open more opportunities for collaboration with other countries. We will reorient our minds from Russia to the rest of the world. I think we have been too dependent on post-Soviet Russian thinking. To some extent, the Iron Curtain is being demolished for KZ only now (Participant 2).

However, very few of the scholars are critical of the dangers of over-engagement with new allies, with the possibility of new dependencies. Only two scholars in our sample thought that it is important to continue to maintain balance and not over-engage.

We should not get too excited about these new opportunities, and we should stay sober and try to continue to balance and pursue our primary interests. We should not over-rely only on Russia or China or West. We should develop our own capacity both in military and in science. We should engage only in relations/collaborations, which will be beneficial for us only. Russia is not going to disappear, and we should continue to engage with it, but we should be prepared for the worse changes in the political regime there. The government should continue to balance and, most importantly, should invest in our domestic potential (Participant 4).

We will have more attention from Western countries to the countries of Central Asia. For us, this will be a chance. However, we should pay more attention not only to European countries, but also to Arab countries, which now offer more funding, and which are interested in collaboration with partner universities in our region. We should also collaborate with China more. I can see an increasing interest from Chinese universities to collaborate with our universities. If in the past we looked only at Europe, we should now expand our geography of collaboration. We should diversify our partners. We should look at China, Turkey, Arab countries, Singapore. We should just make sure that we engage with top world universities. We can learn from any of them. Position in the ranking is more important than the country of origin (Participant 7).

Discussion and Conclusions

The study of the perceptions of Kazakhstani scholars about the potential effects of the war between Russia and Ukraine (and associated sanctions) on internationalization and international mobility in higher education in the country and in the region, in general, revealed two important findings. First, Kazakhstani academics tend to see most changes related to the war in a positive way as a set of new opportunities. They anticipate several gains, including gains in skills, expertise, funding availability, and status/positionalities. Operating within the broader neoliberal discourse of competition and economic effectiveness, most of our participants see the current situation created by the war in terms of market reconfiguration, which will make Kazakhstani higher education and Kazakhstani scholars more competitive and attractive for external partners. On the other hand, higher education professionals are highly optimistic about the changing dependency status of Kazakhstan in the global colonial system relying more on the humanistic decoloniality discourse in conceptualizing the benefit. This decoloniality-related theme, however, is not very salient and is not associated with a critical perspective concerning non-Russian players. Faculty are cognizant of the weakening dependence on Russia but are not concerned with the potential of the increasing dependence on the West or China.

Regardless of the ideological orientation, all respondents seem to interpret the effects of the war in terms of redistribution of assets which influence the ability of the holder to advance in economic competition. This understanding led us to the realization of the potential relevance of the concept of capital and the explanatory value of the different forms of capital. We tried to reconceptualize the themes emerging from the findings in terms of five forms of capital: financial, experiential capital, human, social, and political. As a result of this effort, we were able to account for all of the themes with the help of the system of five capitals. Table 2 provides a snapshot of matches between our themes and the types of capital differentiated by the type of discourse – neoliberal or decolonial.

To conclude, the results of our analysis revealed that the effects of war between Russia and Ukraine on internationalization and international mobility in higher education in the post-Soviet region are conceptualized by Kazakhstani academics mostly in positive terms. There is less awareness about any negative consequences at this point, possibly, due to the early stage in the process of emergence of the new world order. Our study points to a promising way to conceptualize these effects in terms of various types of capital, which can capture the complexity of the influences on individuals, scholarly communities and practices, political statuses, aspirations, connections, and funding redistribution. Future studies of the effects of the war on higher education and internationalization in the region might find the types of capital framework useful in developing research questions and data collection and analysis strategies.

Table 2*Matching discourses, types of capitals and themes from the findings*

Types of capital	Definition	Gains (neoliberal economic discourse)	Losses (decolonial educational discourse)
Financial	Financial capital includes anything with a monetary value, contingent on the company using it to pursue revenue (Bourdieu, 2011)	Funding redistribution to KZ from former Russian partners and Russians. Return of domestic students and increase in supply of int. students -> more money for higher education.	Less funding for science due to economic decline
Experiential capital	Experiential capital is the knowledge gained through a variety of firsthand experiences over the course of one's life (O'Shea, 2016).	New experiences for KZ scholars working with foreign journals. New approaches to accommodate international students. Skills to use own equipment, which will allow to become more attractive collaborator.	
Human capital	Human capital involves a person's knowledge, skills, and expertise, and is acquired through the development of skills and capabilities that enable people to perform in new ways (Becker 1964).	Supply of skilled Russian scholars. More students will stay in KZ. More students will go to other countries. Opening of branches and increase in foreign specialists.	Competition for local scholars, negative effects on them, equity effects
Social capital	Social capital takes the form of social networks but also concerns the relations among individuals in a group or organization. Such networks result from the prevalence of norms such as trust, collaboration, and a sense of obligation (Coleman, 1988).	Former Russian partners will come to KZ with increased interest in the region. Diversification of ties, brokerage gains (due to positionality with respect to Russia).	Loss of connections with Russian scholars
Political capital	Political capital - sum of combining other types of capital for purposive political action or the return of an investment of political capital which is returned into the system of production (reinvestment) (Cassey, 2008).	Greater interest in KZ for int. collaborators and funders due to its positionality near Russia and China. Weakening of overdependence on Russia in research, opportunity for a more balanced development of research and higher education in general.	Potential of new dependencies on the geopolitical players, who became strengthened as a result of the war (West, China)

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Exploring the Impact of War on International Community College Students from Ukraine: A Case Study from Toronto

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Abstract

Since the full-scale war in Ukraine began in February 2022, many Ukrainians have migrated abroad. Canada, with its tradition of welcoming refugees and other displaced persons and its large Ukrainian community, has accepted thousands of Ukrainian migrants. After arriving in Canada, some decided to enroll in community colleges to improve their labor-market skills and to facilitate their transition to life in Canada. This empirical study draws on the psychological resilience theory and the social support theory to examine the challenges these students face, the coping mechanisms they use, and the support they receive from their colleges and Canadian society. The findings reveal that the participants experience stress, anxiety, helplessness, and isolation, owing to concerns about family members in Ukraine and difficulty adapting to a foreign environment. Financial worries also loom large because of their families' loss of property and income, as well as their limited job opportunities in Canada.

Keywords: community colleges, international students, mental stress, war in Ukraine

Анотація

З початку повномасштабної війни в Україні в лютому 2022 року багато українців емігрували за кордон. Канада, зі своєю традицією приймати біженців та інших переміщених осіб, а також з великою українською громадою, прийняла тисячі українських мігрантів. Після прибуття до Канади деякі з них вступили до муніципальних коледжів, щоб покращити свої навички на ринку праці та полегшити процес адаптації до життя в Канаді. З метою вивчення проблем, з якими стикаються студенти, психологічних механізмів, які вони використовують для подолання цих проблем, підтримки, яку вони отримують від коледжів і канадського суспільства було проведено емпіричне дослідження, яке спирається на теорію психологічної стійкості та теорію соціальної підтримки. Результати свідчать, що учасники дослідження переживають стрес, тривогу, безпорадність та самотність через занепокоєння щодо родичів, які перебувають в Україні, та через труднощі з адаптацією до чужого середовища. Фінансові проблеми також набирають великих масштабів через втрату їхніми родинами майна та матеріального забезпечення, а також через обмежені можливості працевлаштування в Канаді.

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Introduction

Brief Review of Ukrainian Migration to Canada

Canada has a rich history of embracing immigrants, refugees, and other displaced people from Ukraine. This brief review examines this history from a perspective relevant to the main theme of the study: the experiences of Ukrainians who fled war in their country. The first wave of Ukrainians arrived in Canada in 1891, with an estimated 170,000 immigrants landing between 1891 and 1914. These individuals were primarily poor peasants in search of improved livelihoods (Swyripa, 2022). After the First World War, when Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union, a large number of Ukrainian refugees arrived in Canada (Gerus & Rea, 1985). Another wave of migration occurred after the Second World War, with 34,000 Ukrainians arriving in Canada by 1954 (Swyripa, 2022), primarily as refugees fleeing persecution by the Soviet authorities.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many former Soviet citizens were able to travel freely for the first time, and another 112,000 Ukraine immigrants came to Canada by 2016 (Hou & Yan, 2020). In 2014, the Russian Federation annexed the Ukrainian Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and occupied parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions in Eastern Ukraine. These events caused the displacement of many Ukrainians, with some seeking to emigrate to Canada. Previous research indicates that some young Ukrainians pursued a Canadian college education to that end (Legusov, 2021). From 2015 to 2022, Canada accepted 23,570 Ukrainians as permanent residents (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022).

More recently, Canada has provided sanctuary to thousands of Ukrainians escaping the war with the Russian Federation. Under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) program, 1,189,320 Ukrainians applied to come to Canada, of whom 961,975 were accepted, and 286,752 arrived between March 17, 2022, and March 23, 2024 (Government of Canada, 2024a). This cohort constitutes largest number of Ukrainian migrants moving to Canada in such a short period. In this study, Ukrainian nationals who came to Canada under the CUAET program are referred to as migrants rather than refugees or immigrants. Even though most of them escaped war and experienced extreme hardship, they did not seek asylum and, therefore, cannot be considered refugees. It is likely that many of them will eventually obtain Canadian permanent residency and citizenship, but initially they were invited to Canada for three years, after which they are expected to return to Ukraine. Thus, the term “migrant” is best suited to describe them at this point.

In recognition of the challenges these Ukrainian migrants face, the Canadian government has introduced several opportunities to help them rebuild their lives in a secure and peaceful environment (Government of Canada, 2024a). Under the CUAET program, they are allowed to work and study in Canada. Some recently arrived Ukrainians have enrolled in community colleges to gain practical, marketable skills so that they can forge new lives in their adopted country. As Stevenson and Baker (2018) point out, higher education can enable refugees to gain knowledge and skills that will improve their employability, thereby easing their integration into the host country by enriching their social capital. That being said, many of them endured the trauma of war in their homeland, with all its concomitant effects on their mental and physical well-being. The impact of such experiences on their ability to adapt to and thrive in Canada’s college system, job market, and society is a topic that has yet to be fully investigated.

Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology as a Vehicle for Integrating International Students into the Labor Market and Society

Ontario’s colleges of applied arts and technology (CAATs) differ from American two-year junior colleges, which primarily prepare students for university. Instead, Ontario’s CAATs are independent establishments that prioritize technical and vocational education and preparation of graduates for the workforce. They offer a wide variety of programs, but all feature programs in business, applied arts, health services, and information technology (Jones & Skolnick, 2009). Even though CAATs were created in the late 1960s to address localized labor market demands and to contribute to the social and economic development of local communities (Jones, 1996), their societal role has broadened substantially since then.

Today, in addition to their original mission, they provide training to individuals who for various reasons have lost their employment, through the Better Jobs Ontario (formerly Second Career) program (Centennial College, 2024). They administer bridging programs for internationally trained professionals in order to “launch skilled newcomers into positions

that capitalize on their previous skills and experience in the shortest time possible” (Seneca Polytechnic, 2024a, para 1). CAATs provide English-as-a-second-language courses to newcomers and other non-native speakers of English. Many Ontario colleges have agreements with universities to enable their students to begin working toward a university degree during their studies and to earn both a college diploma and a university degree (University of Toronto, 2024). A notable aspect of a CAAT education is emphasis on practical work experience. Each CAAT has a specialized unit responsible for creating and overseeing work-integrated learning (WIL) programs for students, which are especially beneficial to international students, giving them an opportunity to develop vital professional contacts in the workplace of their host country.

Statistics Canada (2010, para 2) defines international students as “non-Canadian students who do not have ‘permanent resident’ status and have had to obtain the authorization of the Canadian government to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing an education.” Recognizing that international students face particular challenges in adjusting to a new country in general and the labor market in particular, CAATs provide them with guidance and assistance tailored to their needs. Such services include language support, career counseling, immigration advisement, and cultural-integration initiatives. Furthermore, the colleges help international students and graduates connect with employers (Seneca Polytechnic, 2024b), community organizations, and settlement agencies (George Brown College, 2024). After completing a college certificate, diploma, or degree program, international graduates are eligible to apply for a postgraduation work permit (PGWP) (Government of Canada, 2024b), which may vary in length from eight months to three years. Thus, international graduates have an opportunity to acquire valuable work experience that can lead to permanent residency and eventually citizenship.

This research aims to analyze the experiences of Ukrainian international community college students affected by the ongoing war in their country as they try to integrate into the college community and the Canadian labor market. The study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. Do the study participants experience psychological challenges resulting from the war in their home country and how do they cope with such challenges?
2. What support do they receive from their college and other sources, and how do they perceive and assess such support?

Literature Review

Despite the rich and growing literature on refugees and their children who pursue secondary education in host countries after experiencing trauma in their home countries (Ayoub & Zhou, 2021; Antony-Newman & Niyozov, 2023), at the time of writing no research has been conducted on international community college students who have been affected by the war in Ukraine. This review, therefore, draws upon a somewhat larger, albeit nascent, literature on displaced students in higher education.

Challenges Faced by International Students Who Flee War

Migrants fall into several categories, each with varying levels of access to education, financial support, and other forms of assistance in the host country, as recent studies show (Stevenson & Baker, 2018; Buckner et al., 2017; Streitwieser et al., 2020). For instance, in Canada and Australia, individuals who are designated as asylum seekers and wish to pursue higher education are often categorized as international students and are charged tuition fees that are significantly higher than those paid by domestic students (Hartley et al., 2018; White, 2017). Ukrainians who come to Canada to escape the war are granted three-year temporary residency under the CUAET program, which offers extended temporary status to Ukrainians and their family members and allows them to work, study, and stay in Canada until it is safe for them to return home. They are obliged to pay international tuition fees, however. Even so, their experiences are similar to those of traditional refugees, defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as “people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country” (Javanbakht, 2022, p. 1).

Research indicates that refugees aspiring to pursue higher education in their host country encounter numerous challenges, such as (1) high tuition fees; (2) inability to provide required admission documents; (3) inadequate language skills; (4) insufficient social support; and (5) cultural adjustment challenges (Jungblut et al., 2020). Berg (2018), who studies the challenges experienced by refugee students, finds that, in addition to the standard difficulties, the key integration challenges for refugee university students are social isolation and psychological distress. Many refugees endure personal, material, and psychosocial losses, resulting in cumulative psychosocial stress, economic hardship, and lack of resources for

years after their displacement (Javanbakht, 2022). Such conditions often lead to severe emotional and physical consequences, particularly for young people (Turrini et al., 2019). Kurapov et al. (2023) have investigated the Russo-Ukrainian war's impact on Ukrainian students inside Ukraine. Of the 589 participants in their study, the overwhelming majority (97.8%) reported deterioration of their psycho-emotional state. Such deterioration includes depression (84.3%), exhaustion (86.7%), loneliness (51.8%), nervousness (84.4%), and anger (76.9%), with women being more affected than men. The participants also reported increased use of tobacco, alcohol, pain relievers, and sedatives, as well as loneliness, burnout, and lower resilience. Although Kurapov et al. (2023) focused on Ukrainians studying at Ukrainian universities, their research provides insight into the challenges that many other young Ukrainians may be facing, including those enrolled at Western colleges and universities.

Experiencing the horrors of war, especially at a young age, can lead to anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, suicide, guilt, anger, sadness, anguish, and loneliness (Júnior et al., 2022). Even though there is no up-to-date, comprehensive information on the conflict in Ukraine, some data suggest that the number of Ukrainians experiencing PTSD is consistent with that of refugee populations in previous conflicts (Javanbakht, 2022). Ben-Ezra et al. (2023) investigated PTSD rates among Ukrainian citizens living inside and outside Ukraine and found that those living outside the country, as well as those under the age of 16, girls, women, and those with a family member who had been wounded or killed in the conflict, were most likely to have PTSD. Chaaya et al. (2002) also found that adolescent refugees were likely to experience PTSD for an extended period. Research by Zimmerman et al. (2011) showed that female refugees are more susceptible to mental-health disorders than males.

Unfortunately, refugees and other displaced persons from Ukraine often hesitate to use mental-health services, even when they are offered free of charge. Several scholars have pointed out that post-communist states tend to stigmatize people with mental-health conditions and lack the Western tradition of mental-health services (Burlaka et al., 2017). In Ukraine, for example, individual mental-health needs have often been considered secondary to collective well-being (Rouhier-Willoughby, 2008). Burlaka et al. (2017) observed that Ukrainians with mental-health problems tend to avoid treatment, owing to stigma, cost, and poor quality of care.

Coping Strategies of International Students

The research indicates that young refugees strongly aspire to higher education. This proactive response helps them overcome traumatic experiences (Streitwieser et al., 2020). In their 2019 study, Harvey and Mallman delved into the experiences of new migrants, including individuals from refugee backgrounds, in Australian higher education. Their findings revealed that certain students use resistance capital to overcome previous negative experiences (Harvey & Mallman, 2019). Resistance capital can be defined as “those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005. p. 80). Harvey and Mallman (2019) suggest that engaging in acts of resistance can enhance marginalized students' confidence by compelling institutions to acknowledge and recognize their reality, which was previously denied. Within the context of their study, refugee students specifically resisted existing institutional norms. This concept may also extend to Ukrainians, whose attitude and response to the conflict helps them address traumatic experiences and achieve success in a college setting.

The research on refugees' resilience and the mechanisms they use to overcome the effects of trauma is extensive. Although not specific to international students, these studies offer valuable insight into the resilience and coping techniques of war-affected youth and students. Oviedo et al. (2022) studied the circumstances, states of mind, and coping mechanisms of refugees who left their home countries in search of security. Their findings point to a variety of coping and resilience strategies. Communication with family members in the home country and access to sufficient help in the host country were identified as key aspects of coping and resilience. Oviedo et al. (2022) also found that prior development of a rich spiritual life or the practice of prayer served as psychological capital that increased survivor resilience.

Długosz (2023) conducted research to assess the mental health and coping strategies of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, the country that is the main recipient of Ukrainians fleeing the war. His findings showed that, of 737 participants, 73% experienced depression, anxiety disorders, and PTSD. The data analysis revealed that women, younger participants, and refugees who could not speak Polish experienced higher levels of mental-health disorders. Długosz (2023) also identified two types of coping strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Problem-focused strategies involve taking action to change the situation, to remove obstacles, or to eliminate their causes. The findings showed that participants who actively used problem-focused strategies scored better on the Refugee Health Screener-15 (a tool for screening refugees for emotional distress and mental health) than those who used emotion-focused strategies, such as praying, distracting

themselves, or taking sedatives. The highest levels of disorders were found among refugees whose attitude was one of resignation. The author concluded that mental-health issues are the main problem that could hinder Ukrainian refugees' adaptation, detracting from their overall health and quality of life (Długosz, 2023).

Hooberman et al. (2010) investigated the effect of resilience factors, coping style, social support, cognitive appraisals, and social comparisons on the severity of PTSD symptoms in 75 war survivors. Their results indicate that an emotion-focused disengagement style, such as social withdrawal, self-criticism, and downward comparisons, negatively affects resilience and increases the likelihood of severe symptoms. Other researchers (Jeavons et al., 2000; Punamaki et al., 2004) have also found that trauma survivors who use problem-focused coping strategies experience less suffering than those who employ emotion-focused strategies.

According to Berg (2018), who studies refugee students in Germany, supporting such students is frequently referred to in universities' internationalization strategies, yet is not truly prioritized. Their presence on campus is seen as beneficial to the entire student body, and some German universities have even created positions specifically designed to assist them. Even so, as Berg points out, often "counseling staff are just not qualified, and other [support] structures are necessary" (p. 231). More should be done to assist these students, who would benefit greatly from improved counseling, reduced tuition fees, and adequate living allowances. Moreover, Berg (2018) makes the case that universities should regard such students as eminently capable of success, in addition to focusing on their specific needs.

Theoretical Framework

All the participants in this study are international community college students who, in addition to facing numerous challenges common to all such students, must contend with the turmoil of war in their home country, forced migration, and resettlement in an unfamiliar environment. Such dramatic events may have a profound impact on an individual's mental health (Morina, 2018). To gain a comprehensive yet focused understanding of their experience, this study examines the phenomenon from two perspectives: the participants' internal abilities to cope and the resources available to them. To that end, two complementary theories are used.

The psychological resilience theory (Werner, 1989) provides an effective lens for an examination of the first research question, emphasizing an individual's mental and emotional capacity to cope with adversity. Such an approach has been used widely to explore the experiences of refugees and other displaced persons (e.g., Cicchetti, 2010; Bonanno et al., 2011; Morina, 2018). In the context of this study, the psychological resilience theory elucidates how internal factors, such as self-esteem, self-regulation, and positivity, may influence the participants' level of resilience.

In parallel, the social support theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) highlights the significance of external factors, such as relationships with family, friends, and community members, as well as access to resources and opportunities for dealing with trauma (Kliewer et al., 2021; Southwick et al., 2014). This theory helps investigate the second research question, which seeks to understand how the participants access resources and support to deal with their challenges.

Methodology

Method

The study used a qualitative research approach, with interviews as the primary method of data collection. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on a large participant pool to achieve statistical representativeness and to make generalizations to the entire population (Wright & Marsden, 2010), qualitative research aims to explore, to comprehend, and to gain insight into new phenomena by examining a relatively small number of cases (Merriam, 2009). In traditional quantitative research, generalizability is determined by the likelihood that patterns observed in a sample will also be present in the broader population from which the sample is drawn, whereas in qualitative research, generalizability depends on the probability that ideas and theories developed in one context will also be applicable in other settings (Crowther & Lancaster, 2012). Thus, the study findings provide insight into the experiences of international students from other areas affected by humanitarian and geopolitical crises.

Research Site

The study was conducted in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) at a prominent Canadian community college with a highly diverse student population comprising international, recent-immigrant, and domestic students. Canada’s status as a highly developed, bilingual country draws immigrants from around the globe. The GTA’s large population, robust, diverse economy, and favorable economic conditions provide international students with a sense of confidence that they can secure desirable employment opportunities after graduation.

At the time of writing, the college had more than 30,000 students, roughly 50% of them international, as well as several departments dedicated to serving international students, such as recruitment, admissions, and student services. In the 2021-2022 academic year, its population of international Ukrainian students was one of the largest among Canadian community colleges. Thus, the research site offered an ideal setting to explore the experiences of newcomers who had fled geopolitical and humanitarian crises and were pursuing a community college education. The college offers a wide variety of programs ranging from one-year certificates to four-year applied degrees.

Participant Recruitment

Notices inviting international students from Ukraine to take part in the project were posted near the international student service departments at several campuses. Ten students expressed an interest in the study. One of the students, although ethnic Ukrainian, was born in Canada and thus did not qualify for the study. Accordingly, nine students were interviewed. The study sought to include individuals who had a wide range of experiences but were affected by the war in one way or another.

Participants

All the participants were Ukrainian nationals who possessed a study permit and were enrolled in a full-time college program. Furthermore, they self-identified as individuals affected by the war. Table 1 provides a summary of the participants’ demographic data.

Table 1

Participants’ Demographic, Educational, and Employment Data

Pseudonym	Gender	Date of Arrival	Age on Arrival	Age at Interview	Home-town	Status in Canada	Employed
Valentyna	F	Aug 2021	17	20	Odesa	CUAET	Yes
Petro	M	Dec 2021	19	21	Kyiv	CUAET	Yes
Khrystyna	F	Jan 2022	19	21	Kyiv	CUAET	Yes
Hanna	F	Jan 2022	20	22	Luhansk	CUAET	Yes
Myroslava	F	Sept 2022	20	21	Lviv	CUAET	Yes
Nataliia	F	Aug 2022	20	21	Odesa	CUAET	Yes
Taras	M	Sept 2021	17	19	Zhytomyr	CUAET	Yes
Olha	F	May 2022	17	18	Donetsk	CUAET	Yes
Halyna	F	Aug 2021	18	20	Luhansk	CUAET	Yes

Of the nine students who took part in the study, seven were women and two were men. All were single with an average age of 19 at the time of the interview. It is notable that none were mature students. The researchers know, from their substantial experience with international college students, that the college previously had a much larger number of mature Ukrainian students. This situation may be due to a law prohibiting Ukrainian men between 18 and 60 from leaving the country but it does not explain why there were no mature women in the sample.

It is also notable that September 2022 was the participants' last date of arrival. Six of them arrived in Canada before February 24, 2022, when the major phase of the war started. The two men in the study arrived before the war started and the travel restrictions were put in place. The participants came from various parts of Ukraine; three were from territories occupied by the Russian Federation.

All used the CUAET program, which enables qualified Ukrainian nationals to acquire both a study permit and an open work permit. International students are typically allowed to work off campus for no more than 20 hours a week. The CUAET program, however, affords them the opportunity to work full-time and to receive government funding. As a result, even the participants who initially arrived in Canada on a study permit before the CUAET program was introduced (there were six such students), subsequently applied for and received CUAET status.

Data Collection

The empirical data for the study were gathered through in-depth, semi structured interviews, which allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceptions. The interview consisted of three parts. In part one, information on the participants' demographics was collected. In parts two and three, the participants answered a series of questions on their psychological challenges and sources of support.

The interviewees, all of whom were native speakers of Ukrainian or Russian, or spoke both, had the opportunity to speak the language of their choice. All elected to use English but occasionally switched to Ukrainian to express certain nuances. The interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes, with both researchers taking part. After each interview, they reviewed the collected information to reach a consensus on its meaning. As a result, six participants were asked to provide additional information or clarification. Two of the six were contacted for further clarification.

Data Coding and Analysis

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, two distinct rounds of data coding were conducted. In the initial phase, thematic coding was used to identify the main themes. Even though various themes emerged, their selection was guided by the research questions and the study's theoretical framework, with a specific focus on the concepts of individual resilience to adverse events and of social support. Subsequently, pattern coding was used to distill common and recurring patterns within these themes. Both rounds of coding were performed manually to engage with the data at the deepest level possible. To ensure high-quality analysis, the researchers independently coded and analyzed the data before comparing their results to establish a consensus on the emerging themes and data patterns.

Ethical Considerations

It was expected that some research participants might experience emotional distress when recalling traumatic experiences. Unfortunately, alternative approaches to data collection were not feasible because direct interaction with people affected by war is necessary to gain insights into their experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies. It is crucial, however, to strike a balance between gathering meaningful data and minimizing potential harm to the interviewees. Accordingly, several strategies were used.

All participants received detailed information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks before giving consent. The interview questions were shared with them in advance, so that they could make an informed decision about their involvement. Additionally, the participants were free to decline to answer any question, and they were entitled to withdraw from the study at any point. They answered the interview questions on the telephone, at home or in other safe locations. In this way, a secure environment was ensured throughout the interview process and the participants could disengage at any point if they so wished.

Furthermore, the participants were provided with information about available support resources, including counseling services and helplines. They were encouraged to seek assistance if they experienced any psychological discomfort during or after the interview. They were also assured that their data would be handled with the utmost confidentiality and anonymized to safeguard their privacy and to prevent potential stigmatization or re-traumatization.

Positionality Statement

The researchers are naturalized Canadians originally from areas affected by the war. They are intimately acquainted with the situation, having themselves been affected by the trauma of war or the fear of persecution. The one researcher came to Canada as an international student and the other as a refugee. Both have extensive experience in assisting international

Ukrainian CAAT students and other Ukrainian newcomers to Canada with academic, settlement, and immigration matters. They have completed a Mental Health First Aid program. Thus, their experience, expertise, background, and values provide a powerful lens for an examination of the experiences of international college students affected by humanitarian and geopolitical crises.

Subjectivity Statement

The researchers are from the same culture as the research participants or a similar culture, and have lived through similar experiences. Their closeness to the topic under investigation places them in the position of insiders, or someone studying a group to which he himself belongs (Breen, 2007). Insider researchers have the obvious advantage of possessing special insight into their subject matter and the ability to provide vital cultural context by interpreting meanings held by research participants (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). At the same time, such closeness may diminish the researchers' objectivity, preventing them from probing the participants sufficiently during data collection and leading to assumptions that distort the findings (McLoughlin, 2011).

To minimize personal biases that could affect the findings, the researchers used a reflexivity technique, which is defined as a process whereby a researcher "engage[s] in continuous self-critique and self-appraisal and explain[s] how his or her own experience has or has not influenced the stages of the research process" (Koch & Harrington, 1998, cited in Dowling, 2006. p. 8). The approach to reflexivity used in this study is based on two strategies identified by Roulston (2010): keeping a researcher journal and critically analyzing one's own performance as an interviewer.

Limitations of the Study

The study's narrow focus prevented a more thorough examination of the subject. Additionally, the study is based on a specific context, which limits the extent to which the findings can be used.

Findings

The findings are presented in three sections; the first two address the first research question and the third addresses the second research question. The data review was based on the study's overarching theoretical framework. Multiple noteworthy patterns emerged from the responses to each research question.

Mental-health Challenges

Several factors affected the mental wellbeing of the study participants. All reported varying degrees of mental stress, with the primary source being concerns and anxiety regarding their relatives in Ukraine. Some of their family members were in ill health, had lost property or income, or were unable to escape the conflict. These concerns had a profound impact on their emotional state, impeding their ability to concentrate on their studies and to adapt successfully to their new environment.

For instance, Valentyna, aged 20, arrived in Canada when she was 17, only a few months before the full-scale war began. Unfortunately, her parents were trapped in Ukraine because men under the age of 60 are prohibited from leaving the country and their spouses tend to stay with them. The prospect that her father could be mobilized and sent to the front heightened her distress. As a result, the war had a transformative effect on her worldview:

My view of the world has changed completely because, I don't rely anymore on anyone except myself and my family. That's the people I can rely on, and I just don't feel I can rely on anyone else. I don't feel protected and stable anymore. I feel that there is always some threat. It is like my life changed on February 24th. I feel like I'm expecting something bad to happen at any time. All the time, I don't feel safe. Yes, I know it is not real. It is emotional. But I feel fear. My old world is gone. My confidence is on the ground. Part of me has vanished. You know, like, I try to predict, to protect, to think ahead before something happens. I think it's because I, like, I grew up faster since the war started. So, when I was 17, I thought, "Oh, this life, like, everything is clear, everything is perfect." But then when the war started, I just stopped being naive. Like, yeah, that was the big change. I stopped being naive.

When another participant, Khrystyna, aged 21, was asked whether the situation in Ukraine had affected her wellbeing, she retorted:

My wellbeing? You must be kidding! First of all, my dad, he can't come visit me. That's what bothers me the most: that I can't see my parents unless I go to Ukraine. We don't meet, and I can't go because I have no money. So, this feeling that something is impossible, it really bothers me. Yeah, just like obstacles. You can't leave the country's borders. For me personally, it's difficult. And also, like, my emotional spectrum, it became wider; like, I never knew that I could be so angry. My mood is changing constantly. So, and sometimes it became more difficult to control my emotions. It is like there is a conflict inside me. Conflicts inside me and, of course, thoughts about the safety of my parents, the safety of my friends. I worry constantly, feeling that I'm helpless, that I can't affect things. I can't change anything because they all are there, and I'm here, and, no matter what I do, I can't help them. This feeling of helplessness is horrifying.

Several participants said they experienced feelings of loneliness that were intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and a lack of social-support networks. Here is how Valentyna, described her situation:

For me, the most difficult thing was that I was totally alone. Like, I came here when I was 17 and I remember the first time I was sick. I was so terrified that I'm not familiar with the medical system, and no one will help me.... It is better when you have some relatives or friends before you come to Canada because building it from the start, it's very challenging and risky. So, for me, the most challenge was being alone.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the students' social interactions, greatly limiting their opportunities for face-to-face conversations and exacerbating their sense of isolation. Furthermore, the absence of peers with whom they could talk openly about their situation made it more difficult for them to manage their emotions and to develop effective coping strategies. Some reported that their interactions with others occasionally led to misunderstandings. Factors such as cultural differences, language barriers, and limited awareness of the students' backgrounds may have contributed to their alienation and frustration, as expressed by Valentyna:

Many people were, like, "Of course, we are ready to support." They ... knew what was going on, but then there were a lot of people who would say to me, "Why can't Ukraine just give the territories to Russia? And there will be peace." Often, when I said that I am from Ukraine, people would say, like, "Isn't Ukraine a part of Russia?" or something like that. Or they would ask me, "Do you hate Russians?" Uh, so I had to explain it again and again. And it was so difficult for me emotionally. And I think that it's an educational role of the college. The college should have done something, some education activity, so people know what's going on and they know how to talk to me.

Such misunderstandings may impede their integration into the local community and introduce additional stressors, undermining their mental wellbeing. A key finding is that all the participants acknowledged the need for psychological support. Surprisingly, however, none of them had sought assistance despite the college's numerous announcements about the availability of such services. Their hesitancy to seek help can be attributed to various factors, the first being the stigma surrounding counseling. When Hanna, aged 22, was asked about her reasons for not using counseling services, she gave the following explanation:

I mean, they did provide some counseling but, like, they call it mental counseling. When you come from back home, like, you think that counselors deal with, like, depression, which is the disease of silent people who have nothing else to worry about. I didn't want to use them because it's lame! Because it's not real! It's just whatever. Like, I mean, I don't need psycho counseling.

Some participants said their inability to express complex ideas and feelings in English was also a barrier to seeking professional help. "I cannot explain because of English. At the beginning of war, the language problem, problem when you

talk about difficult [matters] ... and you're, like, 'How to explain it?' So, I even never try," Khrystyna explained. Some participants were not accustomed to online counseling, as Petro, aged 21, explained:

Counselors? So, I didn't use them. Psychological help support, they had it online. I don't like online formats. So, I don't use them. No, to be honest. So, how can you see a counselor in an online format? In my personal opinion, psychological sessions should be going in person.

The most significant factor was the participants' reluctance to seek help from counselors from a different cultural background. A comment by Myroslava, aged 21, exemplified this attitude:

I felt like I was too tired. I really didn't have any energy, and I know that the counselor wouldn't be Ukrainian. It would be just a psychologist who tell me not to worry. What can they know about how I feel?

When asked whether she would be willing to consult a counselor of Ukrainian descent, she replied, "Absolutely." Thus, the students preferred to seek assistance from professionals with an understanding of their distinct experiences, values, and culture.

Financial Worries

In addition to psychological hardships, all the study participants emphasized the considerable financial challenges they faced after fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. The families of several participants had lost jobs, and some from the eastern part of the country had lost property; thus, they were unable to provide adequate financial support for their children's education. Hanna, who is from Luhansk, recounted what happened to her family in 2022:

My grandpa got a heart attack because a bomb exploded some three houses away from his. We had a lot of investments. We had multiple pieces of land, we had multiple properties, like, before the war started. My parents bought a nice two-bedroom apartment in downtown for some \$40,000 at a time. But they sold it for some \$4,000 two years later. Somewhat a little bit after that, my grandpa was selling his house for small price. So, we lost all the investments and properties and, like, whatever value, like, invested we had, we lost it.

The participants further reported that they experienced difficulties transferring money from their Ukrainian banks to Canada because of the government's decision to put limitations on transactions during the war, thus preventing an outflow of funds from the country. Consequently, the students were under tremendous pressure to find employment so that they could sustain themselves and their educational pursuits. All the participants said they worked; but, with limited social networks and no Canadian credentials or work experience, their options were limited to low-paying service or manual-labor jobs. "There are many jobs in Toronto but they mostly low-pay jobs. New rule allows work full-time.... So, I, like, work three part-time jobs to pay for everything," Nataliia, aged 21, explained.

Coping Mechanisms

As noted, all the participants reported mental-health or financial challenges, if not both. In response, they used various coping techniques. Notably, all expressed a strong desire to connect with fellow countrymen going through similar experiences. Although students from other cultural backgrounds sympathized, they were unable to comprehend fully the specific nature of the participants' problems and to meet their needs. Despite the difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the college to shift all classes and activities to online platforms, several of the participants managed to find ways to connect with other Ukrainian students, including Valentyna:

Before the war, I wanted to meet people from other cultures. Suddenly, I had this strong feeling that I need Ukrainians around me. To talk to them, to discuss, just to be with them. I tried to do something myself. I created the Ukrainian Student Club. I started making some events on my own, like, totally by myself, trying to bring the information to the college, inform, like, giving information about the war.

Other participants engaged with the broader Ukrainian community, collecting donations, finding accommodation for newly arrived Ukrainian migrants and helping them get settled, and doing other volunteer work. Others worked long hours to avoid thinking about the situation, as did Petro:

Going to school and working 40 hours a week allows me not to think about kind of emotional problems, 100% That's what saved me. Yes, I just don't have time to think. Like, I had assigned 15 minutes a day to read the news, to understand, and then I had to go to work. Yeah, it's good. Good coping mechanism.

Assistance Received

The participants were asked to reflect on the support and aid they received from their college, the government, and Canadian society. All were granted a \$2,000 one-time bursary by the college to alleviate their financial burdens. They were also given access to counseling, although it transpired that none used this resource. Other forms of assistance included flexible accommodation in student residences, help with finding on-campus employment, and emotional support from faculty and staff members. The federal government extended a \$3,000 one-time allowance to all Ukrainian migrants in Canada who had fled the war. Moreover, some Ukrainian students were granted an open work permit (OWP), which authorized them to work full-time in Canada for three years. International students in Canada are usually allowed to work only 20 hours a week while studying at the postsecondary level (Government of Canada, 2024c). It should be noted, however, that the work experience they gain while studying full-time does not count toward permanent residency.

Ukrainians with relatives in Canada can apply for permanent residency (Government of Canada, 2023). It is important to note, however, that this policy does not cover the majority of international students, who do not have relatives in Canada. Several participants said they had received support from the Ukrainian-Canadian community. Such assistance included clothing and food, help with formalities, and help finding an apartment.

Discussion

Previous studies have demonstrated that refugee university students (e.g., Berg, 2018) and other types of refugees (e.g., Javanbakht, 2022) often experience serious mental-health problems. This research contributes to an understanding of the experiences of a unique group of migrants: Ukrainians who were given three-year sanctuary in Canada owing to the war in their country and subsequently enrolled in a community college as international students.

In line with previous research (e.g., Burlaka et al., 2017), the participants in this study were hesitant to seek help from mental-health specialists, even when such services were offered free of charge. The main obstacle was reluctance to share their feelings with counselors from a different culture. Another impediment was the stigma that their culture attaches to seeking treatment for mental-health issues. Accordingly, the problems experienced by such students may go untreated, a situation that points up the need for more resources to support refugee students and those who have had traumatic experiences, as discussed by Berg (2018).

In response to the growing number, and the paramount importance, of international students, CAATs have been developing various internationalization plans, strategies, and policies to reflect the new reality. For example, one of the largest community colleges in Canada describes its approach to international students as follows: "Our services and community are here to support you and make sure you have everything you need to feel confident and comfortable on your new adventure" (Humber College, 2024, p.17). As the findings of this study indicate, however, such initiatives may not always adequately address the specific needs of certain groups of international students. These findings are in line with those of other studies. For example, Barone and Unangst (2023) analyzed how internationalization is practiced by American and Canadian community colleges and found that, despite the inclusion of such strategies in institutional policies, support for some programs vital to international students, such as mobility and language training, was lacking. They also found that colleges' internationalization strategies tended to focus on quantitative goals, rather than qualitative aspects of intercultural activities (Barone & Unangst, 2023).

The number of students fleeing geopolitical and humanitarian crises is not expected to decrease; thus, colleges and other institutions need to provide more support to such students. Various researchers have identified numerous strategies that help refugees cope, and this study corroborates and expands on their findings. Streitwieser et al., (2020) observed that younger refugees often exhibit a stronger desire for higher education, which helps them deal with traumatic experiences. In

this study, an illustrative example was provided by Olha, an 18-year-old from Donetsk, who said she “studied all the time not to think about the problems back home.”

The current research also contributes to the literature on resilience as a mechanism for overcoming the effects of trauma. Such resilience can be conceptualized as active opposition to dominant power. For instance, native American students may oppose a Euro-centric curriculum imposed on them (Alabanza, 2020). In the Ukrainian context, the concept of resilience was expressed well by Taras, age 19, from Zhytomyr:

So, before the war started, I was not so good at history. But after the war started, I really tried to learn something new from the history of Ukraine. Before the war, I had some Russian language videos on YouTube, but after the war started, I blocked all Russian. Like Russian language. And now I only watch English and Ukrainian videos. So, basically, before the war started, as we know there was kind of assimilation between Russia and Ukrainians, it was kind of brothers, uh, at media and so on. But if you read something from the history, you understand the difference and ... why it was kind of a simulation of this. But no, I am Ukrainian and when I know it, it helps me.

The objective of this study was to investigate the experiences of Ukrainian international community college students affected by the ongoing war in their country as they tried to integrate into the college community and the Canadian labor market. The study’s contribution to this objective is two-fold, namely theoretical and substantive. The study’s main contribution to the psychological resilience theory (Werner, 1989) is that a group of individuals who are from the same culture and of similar age and upbringing can take drastically different approaches to coping with trauma. As for the social support theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985), the study findings show that social support is most effective when matched with an individual’s cultural and personal needs.

Overall, this research adds to the literature on international students and refugees who have escaped geopolitical and humanitarian crises in their countries. The findings may help colleges and other higher education institutions assist such students more effectively. From a societal standpoint, the study contributes to a better understanding of the challenges encountered by international students, many of whom plan to stay in Canada after graduation as permanent residents, and how they can be supported more efficaciously.

The study was conducted at only one, albeit large, CAAT. For a broader perspective, a similar study could be conducted at several colleges, including smaller ones, and at universities. It is also important to obtain a longer-term perspective on the participants’ experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, students from other countries affected by humanitarian and geopolitical crises, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Venezuela, can be studied with a similar methodology. Moreover, other theoretical frameworks can be used to examine this topic from a variety of perspectives.

Conclusion

Even though all the study participants were Ukrainian international community college students affected by the war in their country, the findings highlight the need for community colleges to provide special support to all international students who go through geopolitical and humanitarian crises.

To address the mental-health challenges of international students who have experienced trauma in their home countries, colleges need to provide accessible, culturally sensitive counseling services. Given that international students come from a wide variety of countries, it may not be feasible to have counselors and other support personnel from all ethnic groups. A possible solution may be to collaborate with government agencies and local community organizations to ensure that students are aware of mental-health assistance, government grants and allowances, settlement assistance, legal aid, and other community support programs. Colleges also need to promote the value of mental-health support and to address misconceptions so that students can overcome the stigma associated with counseling.

International students in distress can connect with one another by establishing student clubs and other organizations so that they can share their experiences, support one another, and hold informational events related to their culture and country. Furthermore, colleges can establish peer-support programs whereby students who have experienced traumatic situations but have successfully integrated into college life and Canadian society can mentor and guide students in need. Such initiatives can help them cope with traumatic experiences.

An essential feature of a well-functioning multicultural society is its citizens’ cultural awareness and cultural education; therefore, it is vital that colleges enhance educational initiatives and programs to increase cultural awareness and

understanding among the wider college community. The approaches can include workshops, presentations, and activities that provide insight into the history, culture, and situation of a country in turmoil so as to foster a more empathetic, inclusive environment. By implementing these suggestions, community colleges can play a crucial role in supporting such students, helping them overcome their challenges and achieve their educational and personal goals.

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Education in Exile as a Hope-making Practice: the Case of Russian Higher Education Projects

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the self-conceptualisation of higher education projects (HEPs) relocated out of Russia or created in exile by Russian emigrants after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, analysed by thematic analysis, and discourse analysis of projects' promo-materials, this paper explores how HEPs formulate their goals and aims concerning the conflict zone—their homeland. The research argues that these projects manage to overcome 'exiled consciousness' and appear as a hope-making practice. However, aiming to preserve the relocated academic heritage, HEPs limit their self-reconceptualisation, i.e., further reflection on the continuity of their practice. Along with presenting current narratives, the study suggests further directions for exploration of the imagined future and its materialisation mechanism through educational means in the context of a political and humanitarian crisis, along with the way the international education landscape is being reshaped in it.

Keywords: exiled academics, education in emergencies, higher education, transnational diaspora

Introduction

The spread of armed conflicts, political repressions and authoritarian rise have had a devastating influence on higher education around the globe. As a result of various forms of repression, dozens of thousands of scholars emigrate and continue to educate from exile. The phenomenon of academic emigration has been explored from a variety of perspectives; however, a particularly noticeable focus is on personal narratives of those leaving due to crisis or political oppression, as in the cases of Turkish (Aydin et al., 2021; Aydiner & Rider, 2022; Özdemir, 2019), Syrian (Dillabough et al., 2018; Parkinson et al., 2018, 2020), Ukrainian (Zavorotna, 2020) or German (Reisman, 2007) academics. The emphasis is on intellectual knowledge as, first of all, personal knowledge; reflexive and personal narratives cover the way of adaptation and transformation of fleeing scholars to their new environments and the cultural, social and economic difficulties they

encounter. The voices of their struggle reveal the particular language of this status– what Ashley and Walker (1990) call the ‘language of exile.’ It drastically differs from (voluntary) emigration, as it appears as a ‘limbo,’ ‘in-betweenness’ that causes frustration and prevents assimilation (Hall, 2018; Said, 2013). As a result of this personal experience, academics in exile, therefore, form a very specific subgroup of refugees. While an academic career entails mobility as one of its primary components, forced displacement is construed as diametrically opposed to academic mobility, undermining the trajectory of a scholar's development rather than fostering it (Axyonova et al., 2022).

Besides literature on personal strategies and narratives of emigration, there are several cases of what could be seen as collective exile – the relocation of the whole institution or the creation of a new one abroad (by former colleagues). Such a collective exile is represented by several notable examples, such as the New School's 'University in Exile' project (Durin-Horniyk, 2013; Krohn, 1993; Mack, 2017), the European Humanities University relocation from Minsk, Belarus (Dounaev, 2007; Mikhailov, 2009) or Central European University move from Budapest to Vienna (Baskerville, 2019). Besides, the experiences of universities fleeing Soviet occupation after World War II, such as the Ukrainian Free University, Baltic University in Germany, and the Polish University College in London (Rudnyćkyj, 1949), illustrate the concept of relocating entire academic establishments to maintain a familiar socio-cultural milieu, preserve accrued knowledge, and sustain stable academic networks. This deliberate action underscores the challenges scholars confront, including constrained avenues for homeland engagement and the potential distortion of the exiled scholar's identity, and elucidates their efforts to surmount these obstacles in the new countries.

To understand this practice of collective exile that aims to relocate or re-establish higher education projects (HEPs), I further explore the phenomenon of HEPs through the prism of ‘education in emergencies’ (Burde et al., 2017; Cardozo & Novelli, 2018), aiming to understand the role HEP could play in conflict and post-conflict periods while operating out of the conflict zone. While existing research in this area still primarily focuses on secondary and primary education, the emerging literature on HE has begun to reveal the importance of universities and tertiary sector in peacebuilding, recovery, and resistance in times of conflict and post-conflict periods (Millican, 2017; Milton, 2018; Milton & Barakat, 2016; Pherali & Lewis, 2019). HE institutions started to be given a role in crafting new futures after war (Russell, 2022), and it is recognised to be a key entry point for broader political, economic, and sociocultural change after the conflict (Cardozo & Novelli, 2018). However, the HE contribution to post-war restoration is mainly explored as HE being an entity within conflict space (Millican, 2017; Milton, 2018, 2019, 2021; Milton & Barakat, 2016; Pherali & Lewis, 2019), but not as one temporarily relocated out of conflict. Yet, this phenomenon of HEP relocation could uncover additional aspects of HE engagement in both the restoration and disharmony of the homeland. As a result of this gap, further research questions arise that navigate the paper: how relocated HEPs conceptualise themselves concerning their place of origin in times of conflict and what goals and aims they present to the broader society while being in exile. Exploring HEPs' self-perception provides further insight into the role and place of HEPs in the case of crisis. The following sections cover the theoretical underpinnings that guide this work, followed by the methodology. Finally, the findings present emerging narratives of the HEPs’ organisers in the case of Russian emigration after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Future Anticipation Through Exiled Consciousness

Within this paper, ‘relocation’ (*relokacia*) of HE is a specific term that Russian emigrants claimed after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 to mask their status of exiled. The latter encapsulated several aspects of emigration. First, this type of emigration happens involuntarily– one finds oneself in exile due to the inability to be part of the home country or as a form of punishment for dissidents (Ashley & Walker, 1990). Second, exile is perceived as temporary (even though it could last for a whole life), and thirdly, exile is a form of emigration strongly associated with intellectuals and academics (Claussen, 2009; Freire, 2014; McArthur, 2011; Said, 2013). The latter distinguishes ‘exile’ from ‘forced emigration’ and ‘displacement’, which could also lead to diaspora formation. While all three incorporate the meaning of involuntarily

leaving (from one place to another), exile is distinguished by the sense of dissidence, the leave due to being opposite (in most cases – to the homeland politics or regime). On the contrary, both ‘forced emigration’ and ‘displacement’ incorporate the idea of fleeing from external events, whether war, conflict, revolution, or natural disaster (Lindley, 2014). However, all three notions bear “a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future” (Clifford, 1994, p. 304), forming a desire or anticipation of the eventual return “when the time is right” (Ibid, p. 305). Such a longing about coming back to the homeland appears as “the consuming question of return” (Kettler, 2011, p. 208), an organisation based on anticipation of an eventual return to a place of real or mythical origin someday in the future. It is a future-oriented consciousness that influences how exiles navigate in their circumstances and subsequently could affect relocated HEPs' strategies and actions or even prevent any activity entirely. Such a ‘consuming question’ forms quite complex ties between the individual (and the institution one establishes) and their homeland, as in the case of New School (Chopra & Dryden-Peterson, 2020; Durin-Horniyk, 2013; Krohn, 1993), as the latter is a reason of institutional establishment in exile in the first place. Within this study, this contradictory wish to depart while also contemplating a potential return in the future, as described earlier, is referred to as the exiled consciousness.

Those waiting for a return, exiled in diasporas may interact differently with their place of origin while it is in conflict. Their controversial contribution could be both as peace-makers and warmongers, sometimes even simultaneously (Smith & Stares, 2007; Van Hear & Cohen, 2017). Exiled education could also contribute dually; while it could be one of the key means of peace-building (Brinkerhoff, 2011; Dryden-Peterson & Reddick, 2019), it could also undermine development by conflict escalation through perpetuating discrimination, racism, and other stereotypes (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). The HEPs' self-assumed role could be traced in their rhetoric about the anticipated future through the mission and the goals they strive to achieve. Thus, by focusing on self-conceptualization, that is the process of forming, developing, and organising one's own understanding and perception of oneself through actions and beliefs, this study outlines various narratives that could shed light on the connection of relocated HEPs with their homeland in crisis. The following section presents further context that is useful in understanding the specific cases of Russian emigration after 2022.

Context of the Study

This study follows four higher education initiatives ‘relocated’ out of Russia or created in exile by Russian emigrants due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and subsequent persecution of the academy at home. In this section, I will briefly describe the broader picture of Russian higher education in the context of war, then provide some insights on the nature of academic emigration since February 2022 and the subsequent formation of diasporic HE. While crackdowns on higher education had already begun prior to February 2022, the most severe impact occurred following the commencement of a full-scale war. The Russian Ministry of Higher Education and Science (MHES) adopted several strategies of repression and censorship to identify and expel disloyal scientists. One such strategy was monitoring (and potential prosecution) of scientists collaborating with the international academy, demanding the latter to report on any international contacts, as well as mandatory verifying foreign funds (Majer et al., 2023). These restrictions allowed to control scientific work, and in case of disobedience, scholars and scientists could be labelled ‘foreign agents’ (according to the amendments to ‘The Law on Non-Profit Organisations,’ an individual or an organisation that receives foreign funds must be registered as a foreign agent with the Ministry of Justice; such an individual cannot perform teaching activities and would be fired from university). Social and humanities scholars are mainly prosecuted for ideological disloyalty, while natural scientists and mathematics could be prosecuted for high treason, mainly for ‘violating state secrets’(BBC News Russian Service, 2023).

This leverage, along with overall state repression and censorship, forced scholars to leave the Russian academy en masse. According to various estimates, thousands of academics could have left after the 24th of February 2022, primarily due to politically motivated layoffs, ‘foreign agent’ labelling and/or closure or pressure on faculties or academic teams

(Balahonova, 2023; Martov, 2023). Since 2022, at least 2500 scholars have changed their affiliation from a Russian-based university to a foreign one (Levin, 2024). While some decided to fully integrate into foreign academies (through various assistance and support for fleeing scholars, whether short-term contracts, scholarships or ‘academic-at-risk’ positions), the others decided to relocate as a collective(s). Such a collective relocation appears in two ways: first, as a relocation of the existing institution(s) or its parts and second, as re-establishing the new institution with former colleagues in exile.

This group of newcomers is distinct with a specific feature. While there are emigrants among them who could be considered political refugees, there are many academics and other professionals in education who decided to leave the country as a form of political statement. Such a ‘voluntary leave due to political reasons’ blurs the traditional division between political and economic emigration; as Pilkington (1998) notices, “the split between ‘voluntary’ (economic) and ‘involuntary’ (political) migrants is the first dichotomy which has traditionally shaped migration studies” (p.12). As a result, their identity appears blurred. They are not prosecuted "enough" to justify their viewing themselves as "refugees" or exiles, and yet their move is not motivated by economic reasons or the ambition to build an international career. This ambiguity causes them to adopt alternative terms (such as ‘relocation’ instead of exile) to incorporate their experience. Based on this disturbed identity and considering the peculiarities of academic struggle in exile, the following section presents the study's methodology.

Methodology

Such a disturbed identity appears as a methodological entry point of this study. This study sees identity as personal temporal ‘layers of the self’ (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021, p. 223), which could be explored phenomenologically. Temporality comes as a result of elements of identity like self-image and the constitution of oneself in society undergoing transformations influenced by personal experiences. Through the personal perspective of the HEP organisers, I explore how relocated higher education maintains its ties with homeland and how exiled educators constitute roles for their projects and present these roles both to the broader society and the conflict society in the place of origin. In this section, I first present the cases and then briefly describe data collection and analysis in relation to detailed research questions.

Projects included in the study represent a range of HEPs that vary in their level of institutionalisation (see Table 1), i.e., the process of becoming an embedded part of a society and higher education system. Institutional rules may affect organisational structures and their implementation (Meyer & Rowan, 1977); therefore, institutionalisation aspects reflect how projects understand and present themselves. Three aspects of institutionalisation are taken into account: formalisation, legitimisation, and autonomy. Within the context of this study, formalisation is understood as a level of the organisation's formal structure. According to La Belle (1982), while formal education is embedded into the national educational system, non-formal could be understood as ‘any organised, systematic educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system’ (La Belle, 1982, p. 161). Legitimacy in relation to institutionalisation, as defined by Suchman (1995) is “a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p. 574). Finally, autonomy represents the organisational relations of an entity with an external system, emphasising self-management, egalitarian, nonhierarchical structures, and consensus-based decision-making (Pruijt & Roggeband, 2014). Within this study, autonomy could provide additional insight into why particular organisational and structural decisions are made within HEPs.

Drawing on publicly available information, cases are presented in terms of their level of institutionalisation to anonymise initiative names and exclude identification and further possible persecution of the HEPs faculty.

Table 1

Projects included in the study and their subsequent level of institutionalisation

	Mode	Established	Formalisation	Legitimacy	Autonomy and Independence
Project №1 (P1)	Online only	August, 2022	non-formal	Recognised as an alternative non-formal space for knowledge, it is not recognised as a formal higher education entity	Fully autonomous as an organisation, however, relies on external funding from donors and sponsors
Project №2 (P2)	Online with further plans to establish in-person (formal) courses	October, 2022	non-formal, but include some formal courses (credit-based)	Recognised as an informal successor of Russian-based faculty, established with the support of host-country/international university	Part of the host university, funded by the host university and complies with the academic framework of the host university
Project №3 (P3)	Started online and then transferred to in-person on campus	September, 2022 (announcement); first course September, 2023	Formal, accredited as a higher education	Recognised as a formal successor of Russian-based faculty, established with the support of host-country university	Accredited as a higher education institution and complies with national frameworks, funded by third-party
Project №4 (P4)	In-person, on campus	spring, 2023 (announcement); first course September, 2023	Formal, accredited as a faculty	Recognised as a higher education faculty by a partnership with a host university and international partnership (academic exchange)	Part of the host university, complies with the academic framework of the host university.

Varied in their level of institutionalisation, these initiatives share two key features: first, they are created as a reaction to the war or due to the war outcome (political repression and/or extreme war censorship towards faculty); and second, being out of the homeland, they still maintain a feasible connection with it, for instance, by teaching prohibited at home topics in Russian and/or attracting students from Russia. It is also worth noting that HEPs emerged in the form of close collaboration between each other and the ‘sharing’ of the lecturers beyond geographical borders; the same scholar could be part of several HEPs. Therefore, they appear as a network of HEPs around the globe, which resembles the transnational diasporic nature of the overall current emigration wave (Kostenko et al., 2023).

This study uses two methods of research: first, phenomenological semi-structured interviews conducted with the leaders of the projects and, second, discursive analysis of the materials that uncover projects’ self-presentation (such as promo materials and open table discussions). While some of the materials could be accessed publicly, within this study, the list of used sources is anonymised (see Table 2) to protect the identity of the projects’ representatives and avoid possible intensifying persecution from the Russian state. Drawing on these two methods, this research uncovers the phenomenological perspective of exiled higher education. It explores how relocated HEPs conceptualise themselves in relation to their place of origin in times of conflict and what goals and aims they present to the broader society while being in exile. To underpin this inquiry, several corresponding research questions are in place:

- What is the key rationale for developing the HEP abroad?
- How does ‘exiled consciousness’ influence the actions and strategies of HEPs?
- What other roles of HEP appear other than the production, curation and dissemination of academic knowledge?

Table 2.

The materials used and interviewees who participated in the study

HEP	Discourse analysis		Interviews
	Type of media	Date of pub	Role
P1	social media post announcing the initiative	15.08.2022	
	article by one of the faculty about the educational experience in the school	29.03.2023	co-founder of the school
P2	Recording of the interview	25.05.2023	
	social media post announcing the initiative		
	video (discussion) and project presentation ('Open Days')	21.10.2022	
	video presentation of the courses with faculty	27.12.2022	
	publication about the initiative (interview of the founder)	28.10.2022	co-founder of the school
	Video discussion on education in exile	3.11.2022	
P3	Video discussion on education in exile (including P3)	30.08.2023	
	Recording from the conference, announcing the project	25.09.2022	member of the working group
P4	Course descriptions sent to potential students after Open Day (website)		
	Call for papers (research grant description with project annotation) (website)		
	Founder interview about the project	6.07.2023	co-director of the Academic Center at the Faculty
	Recording of the project announcement	15.05.2023	
	Official program presentation (website)		

For data analysis, this qualitative study employs conversational discourse analysis (CDA) for the list of materials and thematic analysis (TA) to analyse semi-structured interview transcripts. As a result of CDA, the list of “coherent discourse units” (Biber et al., 2021, p. 20) is formed that represents key ideas and focuses shared by participants. Following CDA, TA presents an inductive ‘thematic map’ (Guest et al., 2011) iteratively constructed after interview analysis.

Triangulating these two data sources via ATLAS.ti and iteratively analysing appeared themes and coherent discourse units, the following section presents core narratives that occur throughout the analysis.

Results

The following section presents the narratives that reflect the motifs, ideas, and goals of HEPs, as well as suggests further conceptualisation of HEP's nature. Results are presented as three separate subsections to reflect various aspects of HEPs' self-conceptualisation: first, as an infrastructural entity ('safe haven'); second, as a space for pragmatic preservation; and third, as a realm of active hope ('hope-making praxis'). The ideas within the sections are attributed to different projects to reflect if and how the institutional level influences their self-conceptualisation. All narratives include quotations from both discourse analysis and interviews incorporated into the text ("*using italics in quotation marks*") to illustrate ideas. All quotes are translated into English from Russian by the author and could be shortened to convey meaning in a written text.

Safe Haven

The first subsection reflects how projects conceptualise themselves and what role they strive to perform and communicate to wider society. First, as the following quotes illustrate, HEPs present themselves as an infrastructural entity that aims to help others, namely, fleeing scholars and students.

We started with mini-courses [...] to give professors who left because of the war the opportunity to continue teaching. (Participant 1)

[To do an accredited degree] is important because it is another part of our mission. We can talk as much as we want about teachers, research, etc., but this is not a university. One of the missions is to help those people [students] in Russia who want to leave. (Participant 2)

Firstly, funding is essential to cover the positions of Russian scholars at risk, who will also teach at this program and in order to provide scholarships to students [from Russia]. (Participant 4)

Depending on their level of institutionalisation, it could be access to knowledge (P1, P2) or more substantial help with positions for scholars (P3, P4), visa assistance for students and scholars (P4), higher education abroad in the Russian language that allows student more smooth integration into European HE (P3, P4). According to HEPs, the latter appears as a substantial barrier for students who want to continue their education abroad, as there is "*poor knowledge of English in Russia*" that limits fleeing students with further options. The organisers strive to assist those in need due to political prosecution or dissent, both fleeing faculty staff and students who want to continue their education abroad, allowing them to keep their professional and/or national identity in international settings. HEPs act as a smoother transition phase, allowing to keep existing achievements in case of forced emigration. Furthermore, scholars' transition and assimilation into new academic environments in the case of forced migration can lead to a perceived erosion of one's professional identity, expressed as a sense of "*dissolution*". In this case, HEPs provide familiar spaces for teaching and learning practice, which allows continuity of one's academic endeavour.

It's difficult to build a career there [in the West], and not everyone, after becoming a professor [in Russia], wants to work as a postdoc on other people's projects. [...] Everyone still wants to preserve their collectives and continue what was good in Russia. (Participant 2)

Besides, HEPs act as places of normalisation, forming informal therapeutic communities, i.e., spaces that promote a sense of belonging and responsible agency (Pearce & Pickard, 2013). While official propaganda at home “gaslights” dissidents, claiming nothing is happening, emigrants form a space of solidarity abroad to express their agency and keep their academic identity. Participation in HEP means a “safe space” of intellectual freedom, where one can name things as they are, being less frightened by the repressions.

[There is] a feeling of complete gaslighting [as if you constantly hear in Russia] ‘nothing has happened, everything is fine, has something happened? Someone left? Was there someone in the first place? we don’t have anyone, everything is just fine, there is no politics, no repressions. (Participant 2)

These roles, both as infrastructural help and as sanctuary, highlight deficiencies in the existing international education framework, where institutions might be out of reach for some students and scholars at risk. While academic and student mobility is understood as something desirable, displacement due to forced emigration highlights the limited abilities of both scholars and students to integrate into the international academia, as the following quote depicts.

It is obvious that no one really needs us [...] no one has made any Western careers. It is clear that some were more integrated into Western academia, others less so, there were publications, but you couldn’t build a career on them. (Participant 2)

This limitation could be considered a pivotal aspect in the formation of diasporic communities, as diaspora refers to the dispersion of a group of people beyond their homeland, united by a common ambition to preserve their initial identity (Clifford, 1994). Hence, HEP serves as a knowledge hub that nurtures the diaspora and may provoke tension within the local host community (“We try to constantly consult with them [with the local educational community] so that all this is appropriate and does not irritate them”). This presents a complex challenge for projects to balance integration and assimilation into the new national/international context while preserving their identity within the new diasporic environment. The subsequent subsection elucidates how fleeing scholars grapple with the consequences of this balancing act by engaging with international higher education institutions and reflecting on their ‘academic heritage’.

Preservation and reconceptualisation

The second subsection illustrates how HEPs strive to preserve and transform their academic practice, which has formed since the 1990s. On the one hand, HEPs are derived from the intent to maintain and perpetuate their schools of thought (“schools of thinking”), which have evolved within several notable organisations. HEPs claim that social science and humanities are basically destroyed at home due to war censorship and repression, and they endeavour to maintain ‘their heritage’—what is left within their fleeing collectives.

I believe that [my institution] has been destroyed, and there has been some kind of raider takeover with its founders’ participation. [What remains] has nothing to do with our traditions. (Participant 2)

Our faculty collapsed, although we had an excellent faculty, and the director [of the faculty] was simply repressed. We decided that we should continue what we were doing there. (Participant 3)

HEPs aspire to save and preserve this heritage through teaching practice and research approaches by re-establishing it abroad—it presents a rationale for relocating existing institutions in the first place, as in the case of P2 and P3. This intent resembles one of the ‘White’ waves of emigration (1917–1921) that was fleeing after the Bolsheviki revolution; as Raëff

(1990) notes, ‘If they remain in exile [...] it was to preserve [...] their notion of what constitutes the genuine Russian culture’ (p. 47). Along with cultural preservation, HEPs work to safeguard the ‘*academic language*’ – the Russian that is used to teach, explore, write, and publish, especially in social science and humanities. While it is impossible at home due to censorship, it should be saved and used outside the country.

It is apparent that this [such programs] is simply impossible to do in Russia now because of the war. (Participant 1)

On the other hand, HEPs seek to engage in the process of sense-making, i.e., analysing the roots of the current catastrophe (namely, the Russian-Ukrainian war). They seek to collaborate closely with international HE (through a partnership with another university, as in the case of P3, or academic exchange, as in the case of P4) to reconceptualise their previous knowledge and experience. Instead of isolation and pure preservation, projects aim to incorporate into the fabric of the international academy (P2, P3, P4) or engage in ongoing public discussion on war in case of less institutionalised projects (P1).

Some [external] influence is good, other traditions and vision –it enriches everything, expands the vision and gives you a wider frame [for research and understanding]. (Participant 3)

This intent allows to overcome ‘exiled consciousness’, as it usually suggests that such preservation is done temporarily till the moment preserved (usually unchanged) ‘can return to build a democratic society in their homeland’ (Bulanova, 2011, p. 177) as in the case of previous mass forced emigration in 1917–1921. Temporality implies a finite duration, suggesting a passive strategy of anticipatory patience, which was very common among the ‘White’ wave. On the contrary, HEPs formulate their role as active and pragmatic; education is perceived as a valuable process in itself and, therefore, worth doing even if “*the beautiful Russia of the future will never come in our lifetime*”.

It’s strange to think that we’ll just hang out somewhere, do something temporary, and then come back, but first of all, no one promised us that we’d come back. We should do what we can now. (Participant 2)

However, while their current learning experience should be studied in more detail, the presented educational approaches and declared content that constitute ‘*heritage*’ appear to be very limitedly reconceptualised and reflect the inherent continuity of their practice. HEPs present previous forms of education as quite successful but failed due to external circumstances (failure of liberal reforms, increasing authoritarianism, conservative resistance, and repressions). For example, one of the approaches that are preserved by fleeing academic collectives is the liberal arts model (P2, P3), which was practised within several institutions. This model appears as a ‘system of higher education designed to foster in students the desire and capacity to learn, think critically, and communicate proficiently, and to prepare them to function as engaged citizens in a democratic state’ (Becker, 2014, p. 17). Therefore, pedagogical and organisational principles of HEPs highlight the necessity to educate active democratic citizens with a broader understanding of the world instead of a narrow vocational focus (i.e., graduate to secure a job). HEPs underline a crucial role of critical thinking that could serve as a basis for decision-making and informed choices after student life, insisting that higher education should prepare students to be multidisciplinary thinkers, sustaining and cultivating democratic virtue that should prevent something similar to the Russian brutal invasion.

We probably have a good education in mathematics, computer science, and physics, but they [graduates] are completely devoid of background, except through personal efforts. Well, what did this lead to— people with right ideas leave [country], others people do what they do, completely ignoring the context. (Participant 1)

Such a focus on the student's personal development (humanistic rationale) opposes two other common narratives about higher education mission in Russia, that is, professional rationale and ideological one, in Smolentseva (2017) terms, economic instrumentalism and social instrumentalism, respectively. However, while the liberal arts model is sustained in a democratic state, it could be very limited in changing the status quo in an authoritarian state, where there is no space for exercising democratic virtues. While HEPs see themselves as a structural reference for future educational reforms that might be useful for “*country restoration in order to prevent anything similar [to the current war]*,” I argue that further, more profound reconceptualisation of preserved educational practice might be beneficial to elaborate educational model more relevant to the existing context in Russia and further post-war restoration.

Another example of limited reconceptualisation could be seen in hierarchical teaching methods used in less institutionalised projects (P1, P2), even if their level of autonomy is relatively high. While some of the programs reflect the idea of horizontal collaboration between peers and co-creation of non-hierarchical knowledge, others perpetuate the ‘banking method’ of teaching, which Freire (2018) describes as “the scope of action that allows students to extend only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits of teachers' knowledge” (p. 58). Such an approach limits potential student transformation as it reflects the idea of enlightened citizens who need to be ‘filled’ with the right content to make rational and thoughtful decisions. Further experimentation with more horizontal and creative educational approaches could provide projects with active instruments of student transformation and create possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge beyond existing narratives. Overall, the ongoing reconceptualisation process seems inconsistent and incomplete, necessitating more concentrated efforts to address irrelevant or detrimental elements in the relocated heritage. Nonetheless, the subsequent section underscores how this pragmatic approach to preservation serves as a beacon of hope, fueling the continued implementation of HEP.

Hope-making praxis

The third subsection reflects on how HEPs try to transform the consciousness of anticipation into the practice of active hope. They do not only dream of returning (“*of course, we all want to get back home*”) but also act towards bringing the desired future, even if it never comes (“*if we do not do something now to achieve the future, then our chances of achieving [it] will be even less*”). Through the process of sense-making and international collaboration, they claim to be focused on the feasible goals and engage with current circumstances, whether or not the situation at home improves and allows them to return.

We are trying not to have mystical connections with Russia, but to take and do what has been done and root it in different places. I think this can be compared to plants that you divide like a bush. Well, yes, it has been separated, and then it somehow continues to work for the better tomorrow. (Participant 2)

Such a future-oriented function presents what Bloch (1995) calls ‘the anticipatory consciousness’, i.e., the human capacity to envision a future that is not yet realised, thereby shaping our actions and aspirations in the present towards that potential future. Such a consciousness is bound with hope, as there is always a gap between the present and ‘Not-Yet’ made future (Hammond, 2017). In the case of HEPs, it could be seen as *a hope-making praxis*, which Freire (2014) and Hooks (2003) describe as a pedagogical practice of faith reflected in concrete action. This practice combines concrete action of societal transformation, *praxis*, intertwined with a hope that this action produces, as hope appears to be a “crucial element of political struggle, especially when the conditions we find ourselves are becoming more authoritarian, morally intolerable,

and politically dangerous” (Giroux, 2022, p. 193). HEPs articulate a certain vision for the future of the homeland (for example, “*an educated European Russia of the future*”) and claim to undertake specific actions towards it (“*we think long-term and invest in the development of humanities and social science while abroad*”), despite a limited future horizon. This process creates hope that this future is possible, working as fuel for further action. As one of the faculty notes during the course presentation, “*It is... so hopeful to be part of {NAME} initiative!*”.

However, the desirable future and conceived image of Russia's restoration should be further scrutinised to explore inherent biases and exclusions that were part of the preserved heritage before forced emigration. Some statements declared by HEP (“democracy,” “human rights,” “active civic engagement”) seem axiomatic yet need further critical inquiry. At the same time, some other narratives are already being rethought. For instance, some HEPs reflect on their appearance within the local community (“*How should we [our new institution] be established here in order to avoid a colonial approach?*”), striving to differentiate themselves from Russian transnational campuses, which are rather seen as a form of colonial power (Chankseliani, 2021) aligned with the state agenda. While this reflection is in progress, further exploration of colonial biases could be undertaken, not only in relation to the new local community but also towards the variety of Russian indigenous people and HEPs accessibility to them. Therefore, a deeper investigation into the imagined future can yield a more intricate comprehension of various hopes engendered within relocated initiatives. Additionally, it could shed light on the individuals and groups systematically excluded from or marginalised within the overarching narrative of futurity.

Conclusion and Discussion

Since the full-scale criminal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the division within Russian higher education has deepened, prompting thousands of academics to choose emigration, either by necessity or out of a sense of being pushed out. In a bid to maintain elements of the established order and to provide support to departing peers, some of these emigrants have left in the form of fleeing collectives and (re)-established academic and teaching initiatives (higher education projects – HEP). Viewing these initiatives as instances of 'emergency education', albeit relocated out of the conflict zone, this study aims to examine how these projects cultivate a sense of identity closely intertwined with the forsaken homeland. Ranging from informal online courses to comprehensive degree programs, these projects assert various objectives and rationales for their establishment that were presented within this study. First, HEPs’ role transcends mere academic pursuits; they strive to serve as sanctuaries of intellectual freedom and act as reactive support systems for the politically persecuted and those who decided to leave as a statement of anti-war position, reshaping the landscape of international education. Second, departing collectives endeavour to safeguard their legacy encompassing accumulated academic, research, and teaching practices, seeking to replicate it in novel contexts. Despite the inclination towards preservation, the HEPs have taken varied, albeit notably restricted measures to reconsider the exported heritage. Third, their pragmatic position results in active practice; despite an exiled consciousness, that is, hope for a return and expectation of it, HEPs focus on what is feasible here and now. As a result, they foster social transformation through praxis (educative means), which, in turn, is fuelled by hope and simultaneously produces hope for those who find themselves in the intricate dynamics of voluntary exile.

However, further examination of this praxis could be valuable. First, the continuity of the initiatives' practices could be analysed, referencing geographical (‘central’ versus ‘peripheral’) and organisational (private versus state-owned) dimensions. The inherent biases and stereotypes that are unconsciously brought into the newly established learning experience could appear through them. Second, the international influence and global narratives should be studied to understand how the broader context reshapes 'the preserved.' Third, it would be beneficial to trace the discrepancies between the imagined abstract realm of thoughts (desired and declared mission and goals) and the everyday practice of teaching and learning. Exploring these gaps could allow for an understanding of the mechanism(s) of future creation that HEP fosters (or limits). Fourth, due to the ever-changing nature of conflict and its dynamic cycle, further long-term research on the role of

HEPs in relation to the homeland might be beneficial to trace the changing HEPs' self-conceptualisation. Lastly, additional investigation on the broader landscape of international education can delve into deficits of the current status quo that force emigrants to create their own HEPs instead of integrating into the existing academy individually. Besides, the way HEPs reshape this terrain could be a valuable entry point in understanding the geopolitical landscape for future research on collective relocation of higher education out of the conflict zone.

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Social Media Sanctuaries: A Discourse Analysis of Indian International Students' Agency and Liminality During the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

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Abstract

This study employed a social media discourse analysis approach to illuminate the narratives of Indian international students in Ukraine affected by the Russo-Ukrainian war. We used agency and liminality as analytic lenses to highlight how this uniquely situated population utilized Facebook to navigate conflict, voice demands, support each other, challenge hegemonic narratives, (re)construct diasporic identities, and re-orient their futures. Findings indicate that Indian international students in Ukraine displayed insurmountable courage and resilience during the war, enacting agency from the margins to amplify their voices and actuate desired futures. Furthermore, South Asian students in Ukraine put aside their religious, ethnic, national, and caste conflicts to come together as a collective, uplifting each other and centering humanity. Little is known about how international students, especially in non-Anglocentric, peripheralized European countries, negotiate power and navigate crises during war. This study fills an important lacuna in the literature on internationalization, crisis migration, and higher education.

Keywords: Indian international students, migrant students, Russo-Ukrainian war, social media discourse analysis

У цьому дослідженні використовується аналіз дискурсу соціальних мереж, щоб висвітлити нарративи іноземних студентів з Індії в Україні які потрапили у складні обставини російсько-української війни. Ми використали свободу волі та лімальність як аналітичну лінзу, щоб висвітлити, як саме ця група іноземних студентів використовувала Facebook для орієнтування під час конфлікту, озвучення своїх вимог, підтримки один одного, щоб кинути виклик гегемоністським нарративам, (ре)конструювання своєї діаспорної ідентичності та переорієнтації свого майбутнього. Індійські іноземні студенти в Україні продемонстрували нездоланну мужність і стійкість під час війни, застосовуючи свободу волі з маргінесу, щоб посилити свій голос і переорієнтовуються на бажане майбутнє. Крім того, студенти з Південної Азії в Україні відкладають свої релігійні, етнічні, національні та кастові конфлікти, щоб об'єднатися як колектив, підносячи один одного та зосереджуючись на людяності. Мало відомо про те, як іноземні студенти, особливо з неанглоцентричних європейських країн, шукаючи від влади рішень, долають кризи під час війни. Таким чином, це дослідження заповнює важливу прогалину у науковій літературі про інтернаціоналізацію, міжнародну освіту під час міграційної кризи.

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is one of the most devastating crises in recent history (Awuah et al., 2022; Haque, et al., 2022). International students in Ukraine were uniquely affected, suffering personal, academic, and financial challenges as a result (Arif et al., 2022). Prior to the war, there were over 76,000 international students living in Ukraine (Ali, 2022), mainly from India, Morocco, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Nigeria, and Turkey (Jain et al., 2022). When Russia invaded, students had to rush to safe locations, underground bunkers, and subway stations, some traveling long distances to reach the capital Kyiv or cross the border into neighboring countries (Jain et al., 2022). Their lives, which had earlier seemed ordinary, predictable, and placid, were held in suspension for an unknowable length of time, as they faced the uncertainty of a nebulous future which could include an eventual return to their home countries or exile (Morrice, 2022). There were approximately 18,000 international students from India in Ukraine, almost 24% of the total foreign student population in the country (Ukrainian State Center for International Education, 2020). The war caused a host of challenges for Indian international students, ranging from interruptions and truncations of their higher education degrees, scarcity of resources, to mental and physical harm (Ramamurthy, 2023; Roohi, 2022; Roy et al., 2022; Sarkar, 2022).

Indian students in Ukraine battled and braved fear, upheaval, disruption, dislocation, turmoil, debilitating uncertainty, and even loss of life and limb because of the war (Chakravorty, 2022; Purohit, 2023). Many of these students sought strength and solace through their struggles in communal spaces on social media, sharing information, resources, contacts, fundraisers, and posts of resilience. While refugee crises triggered by wars are not new, international students caught amidst armed conflicts are oftentimes an overlooked group in international higher education. There is also a gap in the literature regarding the creative power and agency of international students in Ukraine in the face of conflict-driven political, social, and economic transformations (Oleksiyenko & Shchepetylnykova, 2023). To our knowledge, there are few, if any, studies on the role of social media in offering safe, communal spaces for international students during the Russo-Ukrainian war. Our study addresses these gaps in knowledge by bringing into the limelight the lived experiences, sentiments, and struggles of Indian students in Ukraine during the Russo-Ukrainian War, as evident from their social media posts. We examine the limited liminal arena of the social media spaces of Indian international students in Ukraine, as well as the much larger liminal arena of Indian students' migration crisis in war-hit Ukraine.

As researchers working in solidarity with mobile people and condemning Russian aggression and occupation, we begin this inquiry by reflecting on our positionalities and considering questions around ethics and power, as recommended by Collins (2023). We then offer a conceptual framework, positing liminality and agency as valuable concepts for tracing Indian students' agentic responses to the dynamic changes within their environments. In the third section, we provide a literature review of the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war on Indian international students, and of the discursive and participatory possibilities afforded to migrants by social media. The fourth section lays out our method: a social media discourse analysis approach to analyze textual and graphic information dated from January 15, 2022, to April 15, 2023, within six Facebook groups of Indian nationals/students in Ukraine. In the fifth section, we offer our findings, which indicate that Indian students used Facebook groups to build community, affirm resilience, raise awareness, and advocate for safe passage and safer futures. We conclude with reflections, learnings, and insights into the sources of strength, hope, and endurance these students harnessed to continue their education, safe transport, and (re)settlement.

Positionality Statement

Our team was composed of a woman doctoral student of Indian (South Asian) origin studying in the U.S., a woman doctoral student of Ukrainian (East European) origin studying in the U.S., and a male senior American professor—a Fulbright Scholar who teaches higher education law and policy and conducts research on comparative and international higher education—at a large public U.S. research university. As researchers, we are a part of the social world (Holmes, 2020) and recognize that our work, life experiences, and social-historical-geographic-political locations influence our position toward the subjects we study, the lenses we employ, and our expected outcomes. The three of us come from very different racial/ethnic, national, and cultural backgrounds, and are also at different stages of our academic careers, and together, we

enriched perspectives and brought criticality and care into our conversations. We leaned into our lived experiences as educators and, for two of us, as diasporic international students, to add reflexivity to our analyses. We realize that knowledge is never value-neutral, and we explicitly chose to pursue value-based inquiry, acknowledging that our different values, principles, and ethical and geopolitical frameworks influence our understanding, decision-making, and perspectives. Researchers who acknowledge their subjectivity and lean into their capacities through personal experience and engagement are likely to find results that have greater depth of meaning and authenticity (Patton, 2014).

Literature Review

Impact on Indian International Students in Ukraine

When Russia invaded Ukraine, there were over 20,000 Indian nationals in Ukraine, approximately 90 percent of whom were students, mostly medical students (Rastogi & Singh, 2022). Indian nationals comprise the largest group of international students in Ukraine, accounting for roughly 24 percent of the country's 76,000 international students (Hussain, 2022). As per a statement by Ministers of the Lok Sabha of India (2022), more than half of these Indian students were enrolled in universities in Eastern Ukraine that bordered Russia and were in the epicenter of the conflict. As the first signs of war loomed in Ukraine in February 2022, the first batch of around 470 students were evacuated through Romania (Chaudhury, 2022). One month into the war, as tensions escalated, over 4,000 more students were evacuated (Laskar, 2022), but a significant number remained stranded in Ukraine, many of whom used social media to frantically reach the Indian government and request safe transit (Venkatraman et al., 2022). Pardal et al. (2023) investigated the sentiments of Indians regarding the Russo-Ukrainian war, using a social media sentiment analysis approach, and found that fear, anger, and sadness were amongst the top emotions expressed online, whereas positive posts expressed trust and anticipation that the war would end soon. Indians largely opposed the war and were fearful of its outcomes (Pardal et al., 2023).

Indian students stranded in Ukraine faced challenges related to their safety, well-being, food, shelter, and transport, which, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, took a toll on their mental health (Roy et al., 2022). Some relocated to other countries to continue their higher education (Ramamurthy, 2023). During the periods during which forced migrants are unable to move, they are often housed in camps, shelters, alien centers, and asylum homes, waiting in uncertainty as to when they will be able to continue onto their final destinations (Lenarčič & Medarić, 2023). As a result of airstrikes and shelling, 2,677 educational institutions were damaged, forcing over 130 institutions of higher education to be relocated (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2022), with students in Ukraine's universities reporting deterioration of their psycho-emotional status, including depression, exhaustion, loneliness, fear, burnout, deprivation, and lower resilience as a result of the war (Kurapov et al., 2023). The war also claimed the lives of some bright and promising Indian students, such as Naveen Shekharappa, a final year medical student at the Kharkiv National Medical University, who was killed by Russian shelling when he ventured outside to buy food and water (Roohi, 2022).

The Indian government launched 'Operation Ganga,' a relatively successful and swift evacuation mission conducted through the efforts of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Indian Air Force, that brought back around 22,500 Indian citizens to India safely since February 24, 2022 (Bapat, 2022), with over 8,000 amongst them students and scholars (Tripura, 2022). However, many students who returned to India mid-studies faced bleak prospects, limbo, and career uncertainty in their home country (Sarkar, 2022). Yet others returned to war-torn Ukraine even after being evacuated, braving air raid sirens and the threats of missiles and drone attacks just to continue their higher education in Ukraine. They mostly resettled in cities like Lviv, Uzhgorod, and Ternopil in the west—within range of Russian air attacks but relatively removed from fighting in the east (Purohit, 2023). The transit migrations of Indian international students fleeing (and returning to) Ukraine can be regarded as what Collyer (2010) termed fragmented journeys, that are divided into several stages involving different circumstances, statuses, and living conditions. While migrant journeys are typically portrayed as linear movements between two places (Crawley & Jones, 2020), the journeys of Indian students escaping from and returning to Ukraine were often haphazard, convoluted, chaotic, and nonlinear (Singh, 2022).

Social Media as Discursive & Participatory Spaces for Migrants

In a globalized, trans-capitalist, and increasingly precarious world of mobility and migration, digital technologies have become significant to social organization and sociality, both within and across borders (Brudvig, 2019). As

international students live, work, and study away from their homelands, social media has become a major channel for them to contact their families and friends overseas with high efficiency and expeditiousness (Wu, 2023). The trend of phrases such as ‘the connected migrant,’ ‘digital diaspora,’ ‘online diaspora,’ and ‘e-diaspora,’ which often center agency, particularly of non-Caucasian communities from the Global South (Candidatu et al., 2019), reveals that diasporic communities are increasingly harnessing digital technologies to express themselves. Digital technologies can empower precariously positioned migrants (Kintominas et al., 2021; Nedelcu & Soysüren, 2022), playing an instrumental role in their efforts to navigate arduous terrain, connect with migration industry actors (Gough & Gough, 2019; Ennaji & Bignami, 2019), deal with stress and homesickness (Wu, 2023), and facilitate ‘unbordering’ (Galis & Makrygianni, 2022). Migrants’ digital configurations are webs of diasporas (Diminescu, 2008, 2012) and networked publics (Boyd, 2010), with important consequences in terms of public visibility and the mediation of identity (Diminescu & Loveluck, 2014).

Social media spaces in particular act as liminal spaces for migrants (Mitra & Evansluong, 2019), offering migrants the potential to empower and mobilize themselves (Zhao, 2017). Social media networks actively transform the nature of migration networks and thereby facilitate migration, offering migrants a rich source of insider knowledge on migration that is discrete and unofficial and making migrants savvy when undertaking migration (Dekker & Engbersen, 2013). Witteborn (2019), conducting fieldwork with forced migrants through social media analysis, found that social media allows migrants to self-present, amplify their demands, and maintain sociality with members of other marginalized migrant groups. Gillespie et al. (2018) found that forced migrants often used smartphones and the internet to plan, navigate and document their journeys, maintain contact with loved ones, and enhance their visibility for survival, and the authors termed such articulation of digital and physical mobilities as ‘digital passages.’ While social media poses risks of government and corporate surveillance and the spread of right-wing ideologies (Krämer, 2017; Uldam, 2016), migrants are careful in their use of social media, validating the trustworthiness of news articles, cross-checking information with trusted social ties, triangulating information, and comparing information with their own experiences (Dekker et al., 2018).

Online communities reveal that the private and public are not separate, expanding the horizons of new grammars of subjectivity and experience (Marino, 2015), and function as transnational social spaces that enable transnational exchanges and transnational community and identity formations (Marino, 2015). Online communities empower migrants as they interact with each other, increasing their perceptions of themselves as collectives and allowing individuals to make visible their shared social and cultural identities (Marino, 2015). These spaces also allow migrants to engage in transnational ways of being and belonging (Nedelcu, 2018) and respond to the exclusions they face, undoing the mainstream discursive silencing of their subalternized lived experiences and centering voice and agency (Kaur-Gill, 2023). Social media can empower international students to curate content, create authentic narratives, collaborate, and communicate with each other, their wider university communities, and their home country support bases (Hughes, 2020), and bridge boundaries between their host country and home country identities and traverse different geographical, virtual, and cultural spaces (Sleeman et al., 2016). In this respect, social media can act as a scaffolding agent, allowing international students to identify strongly with their home and host countries simultaneously. There exists a need for more nuanced research on international students’ acculturation and integration (Omori & Schwartz, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

We chose liminality and agency as our analytic lenses because both concepts offer insights into the experiences, challenges, and identities of individuals actively navigating novel cultural and social environments. Moreover, liminality and agency center de-homogenization, empowerment, transformation, movement, cultural negotiation, and self-subjectivation (the ways in which individuals negotiate power and constitute themselves through practices and discourse). The concept of liminality can help to generate a grounded understanding of how social actors, such as forced migrants and displaced international students, maneuver through socially complex, dynamic, and affectively demanding situations (Ybema et al., 2011), and facilitates an understanding of change and transformation in critical internationalization and migrant studies (Giaki & Arvanitis, 2021). The concept of agency can shed light on how individuals, including students, exert agentic responses to unforeseen and novel circumstances, navigate constraints to mobility, and transform their present and futures (Tran & Vu, 2018). Framing migrant students as agentic subjects ensures that we do not objectify them, deny

them voice / speak over them or for them, reduce them to victimhood, nor treat them simply as passive, static receptors of the forces acting upon them, but rather honor them as actors who (re)shape the forces around them.

Liminality

Liminality is a concept that originates from anthropology but, in contemporary usage, is widely used across a range of fields, including migration studies and internationalization. Liminality stems from the Latin word *limen* and was introduced as a concept by Van Gennep (1909/1960), who identified three stages in rites of passage: separation, liminality, and incorporation. The liminal phase is the central and most significant stage, in which the subject in question has lost their old identity but has not yet been fully reincorporated with a new identity (Van Gennep, 1909/1960). Liminality, thus, is an in-between, marginalized, or hyphenated state (Adhikari, 2022), a threshold often crossed over as subjects move into new states of being (Beech, 2011; Eringfeld, 2020). According to Turner (1967, 1994), who built upon Van Gennep's work, liminality is an interstructural situation, a transition between relatively fixed or stable conditions (such as legal status, profession, academic calling, rank, or degree). Zahra (2019), documenting the hurdles faced by Rohingyas with regards to repatriation, explained that liminal subjects occupy a space between two clearly defined phases, statuses, or identities, neither fully part of the previous identity or status nor yet integrated into the new one.

Liminality can refer to suspended spaces (Janmyr & Knudsen, 2016) and to arbitrary, unfair, acute, unexpected, and imposed changes (Dunn, 2014). In the case of refugees and other displaced people, liminality denotes a 'permanent impermanence' that brings to light the increasingly protracted nature of exile, that often gives rise to ad hoc or makeshift arrangements put in place by governments, international bodies, and organizations, such as universities (Horst & Grabska, 2015). During liminality, individuals may experience a sense of solidarity with others in the liminal state. According to Turner (1994), liminal subjects often experience relatively undifferentiated *comitas*, i.e., community or even communion of equal individuals, in which the hierarchies and ranks between liminal subjects are dismantled. In other words, liminality offers liminal subjects a level plain to participate in, which is horizontal, nonhierarchical, and dedifferentiated in nature. The liminal phase, also and importantly, can be a time of introspection, self-discovery, learning, healing, belonging, and agentive subjectivity formation and self-actualization (Bloom & Goodnow, 2013; Dressman, 2002; Reckmans, 2023; Wu et al., 2020). Liminality involves 'becoming,' i.e., the (re)formulation of subjectivities (Simpson et al., 2010), and allows individuals to reflect on their pasts and prepare for (or even actively create) their futures.

Szakolczai (2015), describing liminality's analytic potential, emphasized the centrality of transformation and transition to the concept, explaining that after war, revolution, and other such crises that significantly alter the lives of everyone involved, liminality can lead to an understanding that such major events "literally and effectively transform the very mode of being of the individuals involved" (p. 30). For some, liminality manifests as a protracted, indeterminate journey that extends across their life course (Chakraborty, 2022), as exclusion and even criminalization (Torres & Wicks-Asbun, 2014), and/or as trauma through radically ungrouping (Tal, 1996). However, for many others, liminality offers a transformative, connective phase facilitating self-actualization, self-direction, and self-determination. Garsten (1999) described the liminal position as "a seedbed of cultural creativity, where old perspectives [...] are contested and new ones created" (p. 601), signifying that it can be empowering, reparative, and radically creative. Because liminal subjects are in-between social structures and statuses, they are afforded the space to reflect, change positions, harness new avenues of growth, and alter the trajectories of their lives. Turner (1967) agreed that liminality is a stage of reflection that stimulates subjects to "think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them" (p. 105).

Agency

Agency dovetails with liminality and has been a central concept in disciplines ranging from psychology and sociology to organizational theory, each offering unique theoretical and empirical perspectives. Psychological perspectives define agency as a human capacity to act intentionally and through the exercise of free will but still within the influence of external forces (Braun et al., 2018; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Metcalfe et al., 2010; Neumann, 2006). We found Bandura's (1982) thoughts on the centrality of the self-efficacy mechanism in human agency to be particularly relevant. Bandura (1982), highlighting the social aspect of human agency, suggested that agency operates in a reciprocal rather than

unidirectional manner. Yanchar (2018), building upon this idea, posited that agency is contextual, practical, and ordinary; it is a thrown projection situated within meaning- and possibility-laden contexts of life and a free will of people to actuate possibilities intrinsic to those contexts. According to Giddens (1984), agency concerns an individual's ability 'to act otherwise', to intervene (or refrain from intervention) in situations, with the effect of influencing specific processes or states of affairs. Thus, agency refers to individuals' "double capability to be reflexive about their situation – their 'discursive consciousness' – and to act upon it to 'make a difference'" (Zanoni & Janssens, 2007, p. 1376).

We grounded our understanding of Indian students' agency during the war in a sociological perspective, which puts human agency within the nexus of contextual, temporal, and structural aspects (Cavazzoni et al., 2022). In this regard, our conceptualization of agency is based on previous studies which view agency as a context-bound phenomenon subject to structural and power dynamics (Edwards, 2011; Mencutek, 2021; Ramos & Sarubbi, 2020; Yanchar, 2018). Sewell (1992) remarked that "a capacity for agency – for desiring, for forming intentions, and for acting creatively – is inherent in all humans" (p. 20). Agency captures individuals' desires, dreams, and goals that can serve as both sources of inspiration and direct forms of action that require knowledge and the ability to make the system work to an individual's or group's advantage (Ghorashi et al., 2018). For disempowered, de-privileged, and dis-resourced members of societies, such as racialized/ethnicized forced migrants, agency can also be about "having desires to play their own serious games even as more powerful parties seek to devalue and even destroy them" (Ortner, 2006, p. 147). According to Black intersectional feminist scholar Collins (1991), agency empowers individuals not aligned with hegemonic power to 'step aside,' i.e., step into the margins of discursive power and produce counter-narratives to dominant societal discourses.

There exists rich scholarship on international students' agency across academic disciplines (Bond, 2019; Karlsen, 2014; O'Meara et al., 2014; Soltani & Tran, 2023; Sun & Wu, 2024) and institutional contexts (Bjork et al., 2020; Hou, 2023; Kim, 2024; Kuzhabekova & Amankulova, 2024; Mukhamejanova, 2019; Oleksiyenko et al., 2023). While many studies focus on the interplay of agency, context, and structure, the temporal dimension of agency is often overlooked. It remains largely unknown how international students' agency manifests itself with rapid changes during abrupt geopolitical shifts. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) reconceptualized agency "as a temporally embedded process of social engagement" informed by the past (in its habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment) (p. 962). The authors posited that the key to grasping agency's dynamic possibilities is to view it as composed of myriad and changing orientations. In their examination of the literature on international students' agency, Inouye et al. (2022) likewise noted a predominantly "static conceptualization of agency, which limits capturing changes in agency and structure through higher education" (p. 16). Our study seeks to address these limitations.

Methodology

Data Collection

This study employed a social media discourse analysis approach to analyze textual and graphic information dated from January 15, 2022, to April 15, 2023, within six Facebook groups of Indian nationals/students in Ukraine (refer to Table 1 for details). We were guided by the following research questions:

- a) What were the lived experiences of Indian international students in Ukraine during the initial stages of the Russo-Ukrainian war?
- b) What were the agency and resilience strategies employed by this population of students amidst the conflict, and how did these strategies manifest through their online interactions?

We selected social media for two reasons: First, we found it challenging to communicate directly with international students during an ongoing conflict. Second, social media groups allowed us to access their voices, reflecting possibilities for international student agency within the impossible structures of war, violence, and exclusion. The groups were a mix of public and private groups, and the latter were accessed via membership. Additionally, two verified public diplomatic pages were also included as sites of analysis, i.e., "Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of India" and "India in Ukraine (Embassy of India, Ukraine)." The posts were manually organized and codified along themes (with posts in English, Hindi, and Ukrainian directly processed by us). We generated random pseudonyms using an online Indian name generator, which we

used in place of real names/account handles while coding data and documenting findings, in order to protect confidentiality. An ethical treatment of the data was assured by not storing any personally identifiable information. Institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained from the Human Subjects Committee affiliated with our university, with our project qualifying for exempt review because of its minimal engagement with human subjects.

To respond to the possible subjectivity of this research and limit the influence of our own experiences and biases, multiple strategies were employed to achieve trustworthiness. First, review procedures for Facebook posts and data gathering criteria and protocols were developed by the research team. Second, in addition to posts by Indian students in Ukraine, we also included posts by the Indian and Ukrainian authorities, agencies, students' families, and alumni, as these provided 'thick context' (KhosraviNik, 2017), which were compiled into a database. Finally, two chains of notetaking were maintained during data collection: one with evidence and discussion notes on criteria for coding and database entry, and the other with reflective memos and notes with personal reactions. Additionally, we aimed at striking a balance between being an instrument of data collection and being empathetic to participants' opinion, views, and experiences through demonstration of our interest, respect, and attention. Eschewing an 'objective,' value-'neutral' research paradigm in favor of value-based inquiry can lead to findings which are meaningful and explanatory (Dobozy, 1999).

Table 1

Group demographics

Name of Group	# of Members	Nature	About
Indian Students in Ukraine	119	Public	This group is only to raise the voice of Indian students stranded in Ukraine.
Indians Students in Ukraine Group	~4,500	Private	-
Ukraine crisis Indian students	87	Public	This group is for all the Indian Students who went to study [in] Ukraine, their parents, and their future.
Indians in Ukraine	~2,000	Public	A[n] effort to unite [the] Indian community. To gather all the Indians who are living, studying in Ukraine. This site provides [a] platform to share information about life @ Ukraine. We pick up news and trends that make you live and enjoy Ukraine in its best way. Share your experience about work, studies, business, and enjoyment, [and] life in Ukraine. Let's share information about new rule changes, a hotel you visited, a cinema you saw..
Indians in Ukraine	66	Public	This group should collect all information relevant to the plight of thousands of Indians trapped in Ukraine and seeking immediate evacuation.
Indians in UKRAINE	~7,100	Private	This group is for INDIAN citizens who live in Ukraine (either for study or business.) We are planning for a get-together in cities like:- Kyiv, Kharkiv, Vinnitsa, Lviv, Odessa, Ternopil. Come together and build a group for our community.

Data Analysis

Zhao (2017) recommended digital ethnographic methods to study international students' lived experiences through the multiple ways international students integrate digital media technologies into their everyday lives. To examine the sentiments and online interactions of Indian international students during the Russo-Ukrainian war, we opted for critical

discourse analysis (CDA) as our method, viewing discourse as language-in-use (KhosraviNik, 2017). CDA can reveal new and alternative subjectivities, which can empower vulnerable individuals (Morgan, 2010), in this case, Indian international students who became forced migrants because of war. We ascertained historical and geo-political context, as gleaned from the literature and from our own lived experiences, and embedded our data into this context, while also engaging in continuous self-reflection while undertaking our research, as recommended by Reisigl and Wodak (2017). CDA considers discourse (such as the use of language in memes and tweets) as a form of social practice, implying a dialectic relationship between particular discursive events and the situations, institutions, and social structures that frame these events (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), which, in the case of our study, included the government agencies, nonprofits, media, universities, communities, and nations involved in the Ukrainian migration crisis.

Additionally, we referred to the steps outlined by KhosraviNik (2017) for conducting a social media critical discourse analysis (SM-CDA) using an observational/communicative practice-based approach. A SM-CDA follows a context-dependent, critical analysis of communicative practices/content with a socio-political critique level (KhosraviNik, 2017). A viable SM-CDA needs both a horizontal context which deals with the intertextuality among textual practices and a vertical context which links such micro-features to macro-level socio-political context of users (the ‘thick’ context) (KhosraviNik, 2017). We, thus, linked students’ discursive practices (meaning-making processes) to the material sociopolitical contexts in which students were situated, as advised by KhosraviNik (2017). We regarded the students/users as co-consumers and co-producers of discourse, and regarded online language as dynamic, staying mindful of the nature, location, and dynamic of discursive power of social media and the fluid, changeable, and non-static nature of the interweb, as pointed out by KhosraviNik and Unger (2016). We looked closely at both texts and users’ “lives and beliefs about what they do with their online writing” (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 167). The basic unit of our analysis, as advised by Barton and Lee (2013), was “the mediated action, which is effectively the practice where the text is used” (p. 14).

We used two cycles of coding—in vivo coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2021)—to identify and analyze themes within the data, following Kozinets’ (2010) advice that online research (netnography) employ a blend of “analytic coding with a blend of hermeneutic interpretation,” i.e., thematic analysis (p. 124). Through in vivo coding, we used Facebook users’ own words or phrases culled from the data to create descriptive labels (codes) for concepts, ideas, or phenomena, which allowed us to summarize segments of data. Through pattern coding, we grouped these summaries into a smaller number of themes, as advised by Saldaña (2021). Pattern coding helps condense large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units, develop major themes from the data, examine social networks and patterns of human relationships, and glean insights from the data (Miles et al., 2013). Through pattern coding, we collated similar first-level codes into inferential codes that identified emerging themes. Creswell (2012) clarified that themes are similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea. Data was manually coded and documented using Microsoft Excel.

Results

As Russia launched its invasion, Indian international students in Ukraine used social media, including Facebook groups, as a source of refuge. Students shared information, including updates on the conflict, safety measures, and other resources available to them, such as news articles, advisories from the Indian government, and personal experiences. These experiences were brought to the fore through media such as reels, tweets, and live streams in which Indian students (many of whom were stranded, awaiting help from the Indian government, and uncertain about the fate of their journeys) articulated their concerns. Group members shared safety tips and advice on how to navigate the crisis, such as evacuation routes and locations of local embassies and support services. Some members, including international students and non-resident Indians (NRIs) from Ukraine’s neighboring countries, shared links to funds, volunteering services, food, accommodation, and/or transportation services to evacuate safely, find shelter, and/or get safely on flights bound for India. Some members also used these groups to seek assistance and tips related to immigration and visa issues and/or continuing their education in neighboring countries such as Georgia and Armenia. Our thematic analysis revealed four interrelated categories of agentic responses among Indian international students during the conflict, summarized below:

Voicing Concerns

Members expressed concern for Indian students stranded in Ukraine, bringing to light general worries about the safe transit of students amid the war and Ukraine's deteriorating security situation. There were mentions of depleting food stocks, violence, and beatings experienced by students at the border. As tensions escalated, messages expressed fear and alarm, such as this: "the city of Sumy was heavily bombed last night, hopefully the young Indian students got out in time. By now Russian troops will have taken the city." Many group members shared S.O.S. posts and appealed to the Indian government, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Indian embassy in Ukraine, to expedite evacuation, listen to the voices of stranded students, and provide them with necessary support in their hour of dire need. For instance, one reel, created by a female student and shared by various group members, alleged that Indian students were facing violence at the Romanian border, and that their cries were falling on deaf ears. In another reel, Indian students stranded at a railway station in Kyiv shared their anxieties, saying they felt hopeless, cut-off from their families, and desperate to go home, and such first-hand accounts of stranded students offered a glimpse into their distraught condition.

Some messages, including comments and replies to posts, expressed grief and condolences over the deaths of students, including Chandan Jindal, a medical student (originally from Punjab) who died of a stroke in Ukraine, and Naveen Shekharappa, a medical student (originally from Karnataka) who was killed from Russian shelling. A couple of messages alleged that local news channels in India could do more to cover the plight of Indian students in Ukraine, and that migrant students' calls for help were being overshadowed and obscured by lesser important news in India. One post encapsulated a common mobilization plea: "Let's help Indians who are trapped in Ukraine and need immediate evacuation." Other messages lauded the efforts of the Indian government and Operation Ganga to successfully orchestrate evacuations of Indian nationals and students. Overall, members emphasized the need to raise awareness and actively advocate for Indian students in Ukraine, issuing a collective clarion call to action.

A few parents of Indian students in Ukraine also shared their thoughts in these groups, worried about the safety and well-being of their children. For instance, a mother of a female student shared her apprehensions; her daughter was in her fourth year of her Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) degree, and the war had thrown the student's academic trajectory off course. Her mother shared: "As a parent of [... a] child sitting at home and waiting for a fight to end so that she can go back to study and complete her course, I feel lost and helpless for my child." A member responded that "our voice could remain a cry in the wilderness, but still, we need to speak out. Only then can we be heard, and solutions can come. So, speaking out is very essential." Apart from messages from students and their anxious parents, we also found messages from journalists (both freelance and affiliated with news networks), researchers, and filmmakers based in India and abroad, wishing to cover, study, and/or report on the condition of Indian students in Ukraine.

Sharing Information

Members circulated updates from the various Indian embassies situated in Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, and other countries neighboring Ukraine, by resharing/forwarding posts from the embassies' Facebook pages, Twitter profiles, and other channels. These updates included urgent advisories, required actions, and operating hours, reflecting efforts by the Indian authorities to assist citizens during the crisis. At many points during the crisis, the Indian embassy in Kyiv sent out various registration forms, directives, calls to action, information about teams dispatched to border checkpoints (Ukraine's crossing points with Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovak Republic), flight information, and 24x7 helpline numbers and email addresses, and this information, disseminated to coordinate the government's multipronged efforts, was passed around in various groups. Posts provided advice to Indian students, ranging from getting in touch with student contractors, not panicking, monitoring the embassy's updates closely, always carrying passports, carrying cash (in USD) for emergency expenses and other essentials, carrying COVID-19 vaccination certificates (if available), and pasting a prominent printout of the Indian Flag on vehicles and buses while traveling. Further, group members also circulated updates from Pakistan's embassy in Kyiv, revealing a heartwarming India-Pakistan unity during the crisis.

Second, members distributed information related to transportation, food trucks, and shelter. This included cab services (e.g., "recently published list of drivers in Ukraine and in Poland to/from the border"), train schedules (e.g., "evacuation trains from Kyiv to western Ukraine"), and bus schedules ("buses have been arranged [...] at Shehyni on the Ukraine border to take Indian citizens for transit entry into Poland"), as well as arrival and departure times of Ukraine relief flights to India. Many volunteers (including non-profit networks such as SOS Global Indians, and NRIs and expats) offered

to assist at borders and/or facilitate evacuation. One member shared that they had readied buses for an evacuation of Indian students from Lviv to Chop, onward to Budapest Airport, offering their WhatsApp details to connect. Another member posted a link to a Facebook group that offered free accommodation in Poland for Indian students and other foreign migrants fleeing Ukraine. Yet another group of volunteers, NRIs from the Czech Republic, were helping students stuck at borders, and their efforts were met with comments ranging from “so proud of you” to “god bless you.” Another member posted: “I am arranging [a] community along with my network and they are ready with food/camps across borders in Poland. We will help you in all possible ways. Even my friends/followers can go and pick you up.”

Third, members circulated information related to safe evacuation routes, including images of hand-drawn maps. One message laid out a safety protocol for students in active war zones, asking students in flats to stay alert, to avoid wearing headphones, and to go to basements or ground floors in case of sounds of war (“let’s be extra careful, everyone stay inside”). Another message laid out an evacuation route through Hungary, including means to get a visa from officials enroute and catch a train through Záhony to Budapest, affirming “stay safe don’t panic you will make it through!” Members also shared links to Google Drive folders with important resources, petitions, sign ups, fundraisers, and WhatsApp and Telegram chat links for students, emphasizing the importance of community support, safety, and coordination among Indian students and their networks. Comments included “let’s focus [on] helping needy ones,” “please post this on Twitter by using #indiainsukraine as it might reach more people,” “done with the tweet, have we got any updates on the situation?” “how can I help?” and “can we connect more people to help? I would love to help.”

Fourth, members circulated news articles, YouTube videos, and live streams from international and Indian (national and local) media outlets, such as BBC, NDTV, Indian Express, and WION, in languages including Hindi, English, Bihari, Bengali, and Punjabi. For instance, members shared news about the impact of war on Indian students in Ukraine (e.g., “Indian students trapped in Ukraine said they saw the scene of death with their own eyes,” “Indian students stranded in Ukraine desperately seek help, pleading to be evacuated”), ongoing evacuations (e.g., “Russia to provide evacuation corridors amid India’s students’ worry,” “Russia announces ceasefire for evacuations,” “evacuation of civilians from Ukraine’s Sumy underway,” “all 694 Indian students stuck in Ukraine’s Sumy moved out,” “700 Indians evacuated from Sumy may board flight home”), and responses from politicians and the general public in India. Members also shared news about the resilience displayed by students during the crisis (e.g., “Indian medical students abroad join forces to help peers stranded in war-torn Ukraine”) and resettlement (e.g., “good news for Ukraine return medical students”), seemingly in efforts to boost morale, celebrate victories, and keep hopes up and spirits buoyant.

Providing Emotional Support

Apart from institutional, discursive, and financial support, members also provided each other emotional support, articulating sentiments such as: “nice to see the group formed and helping each other” and “be safe, be strong.” The data revealed efforts to create inclusive, embracing spaces for Indian students in Ukraine, with some group administrators (admins) initiating member introductions and invitations to connect. There were several messages of encouragement and togetherness, emphasizing unity and support and reassuring students that the situation would improve and that they should not lose hope. “Hello everyone. I know it’s a difficult time for all of us. But we will find a way out together [...] We are all here for a cause. We are here to discuss our future together. We are not alone.” Some messages also offered mental health resources. For instance, a psychologist shared free mental health resources via graphic posters, in a group, sharing tips to deal with stress and trauma. Additionally, the data included references to numerology, Vaastu, gemology, and fengshui, which seemed to be shared by private practitioners seeking to offer their services in alternative healing, rather than by students, but still tied into a broader theme of emotional restoration, recovery, revitalization, and renewal.

Displaying Solidarity Against War

Many members expressed strong anti-war sentiments and a desire for peace, with one message citing World Refugee Day as a call to action for solidarity with refugees. Members called for an end to the war and emphasized the importance of resolving conflicts through diplomacy and international cooperation. One of the groups (Indian Students in Ukraine) posted: “The voice of our country today! My country is Ukraine! [...] “We are sure that everything will be fine and peaceful. We have a strong army, good weapons, a serious and not cowardly president, and excellent international partners who have

supported us in difficult times.” Some messages expressed optimism and prayers for a peaceful resolution to the crisis, reflecting a positive outlook and a belief in the ability to overcome challenges. Several messages addressed world leaders, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, and appealed for diplomatic efforts to end the war, with some individuals expressing willingness to offer solutions. Overall, group members largely condemned Russia’s violence and displayed solidarity with Ukrainian resistance.

For instance, one member wrote: “STOP WAR IN UKRAINE. I am a common citizen of India and lover of world peace. I understand that the terrorism and wars are inhuman and kill millions of lives [...] I love the legends of Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, and A. P. J. Abdul Kalam for their greatest services to the world [...] Now, I appeal to [the] UN to add “Sustainable Development Goals No. 18: NO WAR.” [...] I appeal [to] the developed countries to stop making war equipment and to stop buying and developing it and requesting you to divert the funds to [alternative development goals]. Love mother. Love nature. Love all lives. Love plants and flowers. Love animals. Love your neighbor. Love humanity and stop war [prayer emojis].” Another member asked groupmates “to spread awareness across the globe [and] document and tell about the crimes committed by the barbarian Russian invasion.” Another implored: “I am asking for help in sending an anti-war appeal to as many ordinary Russians as possible [to] stop Putin.” Another emphasized the brutal, destructive, and crippling nature of oppression, opining that “Russia’s president did not build these buildings nor created the human lives that he is destroying. He should park his ego and call off the war.” One member was even “willing to fund a private army to help Ukraine and its people as well as getting the Indian students out.”

Some members demonstrated strong allegiance to their host country, saying “if I stay or study in Ukraine, I will go for war [...] to help Ukraine, because [international students] have to help the country where they stayed.” Some expressed loyalty, patriotism, and gratitude toward their state government, national government, *and* host government, such as this student from Bihar: “I’m very grateful for helping us during evacuation by govt. of India, govt. of Bihar, and [the] people of Romania and Ukraine, without you this wouldn’t be possible. Thanks for providing shelters, food, and other facilities.” Members expressed their fear, sadness, joy, gratitude, and care through emojis of hearts, tears, anger, and hugs, and gained mileage through hashtags such as #studentsevacuation, #indiansinukraine, and #helpindians. One member even encouraged “Indians, let’s urge Modi to rescue all students from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka as well,” and this message revealed empathy, enlightenment, and a profound acknowledgement of a shared humanity that transcends cultural, linguistic, and national borders.

Conclusion

Our study illuminated Indian international students’ lived experiences through the Russo-Ukrainian war, revealing that social media networks can become places of refuge as well as platforms for visibility for international students. Indian international students in Ukraine occupy marginal spaces, as racialized immigrants, and found themselves doubly marginalized when they became forced migrants. They underwent harrowing displacements from their homes and universities, experienced disruptions of their academic pursuits, and feared for the safety of themselves and their loved ones. Nevertheless, Indian students in/fleeing/returning to Ukraine harnessed and exerted incredible agency from the margins, using Facebook groups to consolidate their efforts, share firsthand accounts of their journeys, make their voices heard, un/reborder boundaries, and pivot toward desired futures. Students displayed a range of strategies to navigate the challenges posed by the escalating conflict, including networking with relief volunteers and bodies, coordinating evacuation efforts, sharing critical information and updates, and advocating for collective rights and safety. These students resisted becoming pawns in larger geopolitical power games by centering their desires, articulating their demands, holding governments accountable, and reminding politicians (and the larger public) of the human costs of war. Their online interactions reflected urgency, solidarity, and resourcefulness in the face of Russia’s dehumanizing invasion.

Our study also found that Indian international students put aside/bridged intergroup and intragroup animosities and tensions to prioritize collective well-being, goodwill, commiseration, and safety during this war. While Indians are sometimes divided on issues such as religious, caste, linguistic, and ethnic differences in their home country, we found that Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh students in Ukraine largely set aside their differences and potential biases (including neonationalist, brahmanical, and religio-ethnic supremacist ideological leanings) to mobilize group dynamics, center

common good, and deploy collective agency. We say “largely” because we did encounter a few posts that reflected Sikh and other critiques of the Hindutva ruling regime in India, stoking tensions. However, such instances were exceptions rather than the norm, as the overwhelming trend among students, whether Punjabi, Bihari, or Gujarati, was of unity and fraternity in the face of adversity. This brotherhood and amicability were also displayed between students from India and Pakistan, countries often portrayed and positioned as enemies by mainstream Indian media outlets and populist parties. These findings suggest that international students, particularly from the Global South, can put aside their intranational and interethnic otherings to center collective advocacy and praxis against external, exclusionary, and oppressive forces.

Discussion

Our study brought lesser-heard narratives of the Global South—stories of students in peripheralized European countries—into the limelight of international education inquiry and research, zooming into a uniquely-situated group facing uniquely-precarious circumstances during an active war. We learned how international students activated agency, enacting it within the present while simultaneously directing it towards the future. We found liminal spaces to be immensely agency-affirming and solidarity-fostering, especially where group agency is concerned. Because much of the literature on international students (including from the Global South) tends to focus on international students in predominantly Anglophone countries, international students in non-Anglophone countries become decentered, thus occupying a liminal space in the literature on international students and, more broadly, higher education. We suggest that scholars give voice and presence to international students in the periphery (including Global South students in Central and Eastern Europe), while affirming the dynamism, pluralism, and distinctiveness of their backgrounds. We also recommend follow-up studies to track the divergent education/career journeys, intellectual growth, and existential aspirations of Indian students who fled Ukraine, remained in India, returned to Ukraine, or migrated to other nations. We recommend ongoing research on social media as agentic liminal spaces for international students during genocide, conflict, and war.

Further, our study found that while migrant students are often bracketed as ‘voluntary’ or ‘involuntary’ migrants (Arar et al., 2022), international students fleeing the Ukraine migration crisis escape easy, sweeping definitions. While these students may have initially chosen to study in Ukraine somewhat voluntarily, the outbreak of war and the subsequent need to flee elsewhere challenged the simplicity of these classifications. Some of these students may have found themselves pressured by circumstances to continue their higher education in neighboring countries like Georgia and Armenia. Therefore, conventional classifications of migrants, such as “voluntary” and “involuntary,” may not fully capture the complexity of studenthood in internationalization. We urge higher education scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to rethink watertight categories of migrant student compartmentalization, and to abstain from generalizing or homogenizing international students. Instead, educators can honor the complexities, nuances, and intersectionalities of students’ lived experiences and consider their multifaceted contexts and dynamic, shifting selfhoods. By being mindful of where international students are in their lives, where they are coming from, and where they are going (or unable to go), educators can cultivate empathy, nurture epistemic inclusion, and foster socio-politically responsive pedagogies.

Limitations

Our study encountered several limitations that may have impacted the depth and breadth of our findings. First, the active war situation in Ukraine and our research team’s location in the U.S. posed significant logistical hurdles, making direct interviews with affected students impractical or impossible. This hindered our ability to fully capture the nuances of their trials and tribulations, allowing us access to only the edges of their experiences. Additionally, the black box algorithms and policies of social media platforms like Facebook can shape the visibility and accessibility of certain content, potentially biasing our analysis. Given the sensitive nature of the information shared during a crisis, students may have been hesitant to fully disclose their experiences on this platform. Furthermore, the supranational corporation, Meta (formerly Facebook), has been known to expose their users to risks such as surveillance and data privacy concerns, which may have caused further apprehensions on the part of students, when it comes to freely sharing their thoughts on Facebook. Lastly, focusing exclusively on Facebook overlooked potential insights from other platforms that students may have utilized during the crisis. These limitations highlight the need for future research to employ diverse methodologies and consider alternative data sources to obtain a more comprehensive picture of these students’ lived realities.

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Power Paradigm Unleashed: The (Re)Configuration of International Higher Education Arising from the Russia-Ukraine Conflict and What it Means for Higher Education

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Abstract

The war in Ukraine has opened a Pandora's Box of internationalization concerns that, heretofore, took a backseat to concerns with the effectiveness and sustainability of the field. In analyzing the impact of the war on international higher education, scholars offered various assessments of the conflict's effects, especially in the combatant countries and post-Soviet Eurasia: e.g., the disruption of organizational forms and methods of internationalization in Ukraine, the forced relocation of international students and faculty, and the creation of special programs to accommodate transferring international students from Russian and Ukrainian universities. Each of these assessments catches aspects of the emerging reality. Yet, they miss a crucial change that the war has triggered: ideational change regarding the rationales, norms, and values that underpin internationalization and shape the behavior of states and other related actors. Through this work, I advance this line of inquiry and examine its problematic implications for policy and practice.

Keywords: internationalization, knowledge diplomacy, power paradigm, realism, soft power, Ukraine War

Introduction

The war in Ukraine has opened a Pandora's Box of internationalization concerns that, heretofore, took a backseat to concerns with the effectiveness, priorities, and sustainability of the field during times of changing economic, cultural, and geopolitical power structures worldwide (see Altbach & de Wit, 2021 for the state of pre-Ukraine War internationalization). Seeking to understand how the war impacts international higher education (IHE), social scientists have not hesitated to proliferate assessments of the conflict's cascading consequences for internationalization and other adjacent

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fields, especially in the combatant countries and post-Soviet Eurasia: e.g., the disruption of organizational forms and methods relating to internationalization in Ukraine (Upton, 2022), the forced relocation of international students and faculty (Packer, 2023), and the creation of special programs to accommodate transferring international students from Russian and Ukrainian universities (Kakuchi, 2022; Kukharuk & Kharchenko, 2022). Each of these assessments catches aspects of the emerging reality. Yet, they miss a crucial change in IHE that the Russia-Ukraine war has precipitated: ideational change regarding the rationales, norms, and values that underpin internationalization and shape perspective and behavior of states and other related actors. While this issue is particularly important for understanding the nature of and implications of change instigated by the war and for envisioning the future role of IHE, it is still understudied and undertheorized. Through this work, I advance this line of inquiry.

The main thrust of the article is that the Russia-Ukraine War has given renewed momentum to the power paradigm, which was the definitive factor in international politics during the Cold War (1945-1989). In my view at least, this development is a setback for the higher education community efforts to use IHE as a catalyst for peace-building and development. This is mainly due to the dismal assumptions that underpin the power outlook of international relations, which justify hegemony and domination as legitimate institutions to manage national interests (Adam, 2024a). The reinvigoration of this view is going to be consequential to international collaborations in my many fields, including collaboration in higher education. This is because the view overemphasizes the conflictual and competitive side of world politics, conceiving of the pursuit of noble normative goals as only attainable in the domestic arena (Mearsheimer, 2014). I therefore contend that (re)structuring IHE within a power paradigm will weaken the ability of higher education to function as a mechanism of cooperation, development, and sustainability. As an alternative, I call attention to Knight's (2022a) knowledge diplomacy framework, which, as will be shown, holds promise for moving beyond zero-sum conflict, and for sustaining the original ideas of international cooperation and exchange in higher education as promoters of peace and mutual understanding and of global engagement (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations further underscore the need for global cooperation in higher education to generate the knowledge and capabilities necessary to address some of the most pressing challenges facing our shared humanity. These ideas have continually been sidelined by the tendency of internationalization in the past 30 years to be considered in a more westernized and predominantly English-speaking paradigm (Tight, 2022), to be more driven by government priorities of soft power, reputation, review generation, and global rankings (de Wit & Deca, 2020), and to be less inclusive (Stein & Andrepotti, 2016).

Following an interdisciplinary approach that integrates knowledge from higher education studies and diplomacy studies, I pursue the argument, first, by considering some of the questions raised by the war in Ukraine about IHE. I then sketch the broad contours of the power paradigm in its two versions: hard power (Morgenthau, 1967) and soft power (Nye, 2017). In the process, I problematize how both versions played out in IHE. Next, I introduce the knowledge diplomacy framework as conceptualized by Knight (2022), highlighting its basic features and its pragmatic and moral justifications. The final section discusses the battle of ideas and the problematic implications of ideational transfer to a power-centric reasoning of IHE with a focus on integrating IHE as a pillar of national security.

Being the largest conflict in Europe since World War II, the war in Ukraine has been a massively disruptive event—a critical juncture (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). Such critical junctures could spell the end of many institutional and systemic practices, processes, and policies associated with IHE. They could also conceivably provide an opening for substantial institutional reconfiguration. Within the latter scope, this article aims to broaden our conception of internationalization, encouraging rigorous attention to the ideas underlying debates and policymaking of this critically important dimension of higher education. Thereby, the text contributes to the ongoing debate regarding a more pertinent conceptualization of IHE (Beelen & Jones, 2015; de Wit & Jones, 2022; Lee, 2021). Indeed, the war in Ukraine has brought IHE at a crossroads. For the crossroads to be decided and sound directions to be established, scholars should continue to contemplate what constitutes internationalization that can viably support the building of academic and institutional cultures that cultivate the necessary conditions for human flourishing worldwide.

To that end, there exists several possibilities for cross-fertilization between higher education and diplomacy. To illustrate one of those possibilities, higher education continues to be the key knowledge institution in society that sustains diplomatic institutions by training which guides diplomats and foreign policy professionals in their thinking and actions. It also conducts research on national, regional, and global problems. Diplomacy, on the other hand, focuses on the processes of managing international relations to address those problems in such a way as to contribute to a more peaceful, just, and orderly world. Given the multi-interest nature of educational decisions, the porous nature of borders in today's global age, the institutionalization of internationalization in most universities, and the trade-off realities of educational policy (driven by the search for national interests and the impulse of global impact), many educational policy choices are diplomacy decisions. Therefore, studies that draw on academic and international relations (like the one presented in this article), serve as a two-way road between foreign policy and diplomacy agents and scholars, alerting the former of the implications of their thoughts and actions while reminding the latter that that understandings of international relations from which diplomacy agents are absent may not be complete. The need for such roads has never been greater.

Utilizing International Higher Education in Conflict

From the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was clear that this conflict was a watershed moment for IHE. Along the first reactions of the higher education community – official denunciations (Northwestern, 2022) to the European Union suspending and terminating grant agreements to Russian academic institutions (O'Malley, 2022), and Russia considering retaliatory measures (Vorotnikov, 2022) – several questions emerged. Given the values underlying international activities in higher education, such as exchange and cooperation, peace and mutual understanding, human capital and development (de Wit & Deca, 2020), should the international higher education community react by emphasizing the traditional values of IHE, or can Russia's aggressive behavior only be met with a strong response as the imposition of sanctions on Russian academic assets, even if those measures affected the thousands of Russian scientists who condemned their government's actions (Gaid & Else, 2022)? Given that those measures are atypical in the scope of IHE, at least over the past three decades, does this development signify the end of the post-Cold War IHE? And perhaps more importantly, when and to what extent are we morally justified to use IHE as a tool to alter governments' actions that we consider to be unacceptable or ethically questionable? These questions and the consternation caused by the war on many university campuses moved concerns about internationalization from a limited constituency to front page news, exposing it to new audiences. Nowhere is this clearer than in the controversy sparked by the U.S. Congressman Eric Swalwell's idea to expel Russian students from American universities.

The idea did not pass unquestioned by scholars from different disciplinary leanings who raised ethical and procedural concerns about the proposed punitive action (Fischer, 2022). Swalwell's view and the debate it sparked were certainly catalyzed by the war in Ukraine, but his comments were not born *ex nihilo*. Rather, his comments were concomitant with another event. At that time, Swalwell was a member of the United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. International relations scholars (e.g., D'Hooghe & Lammertink, 2022) show that this is the time when the debate was at an historic high and efforts within government circles about managing the risks presented by international collaboration in science, technology and innovation to national security. This said, the Ukraine's war accelerated already existing trends.

D'Hooghe and Lammertink (2022) provide comparative analysis of nine countries' approach (the United States included) to knowledge security, highlighting the geopolitical and technological forces shaping these approaches. This work is pertinent to higher education in two ways. First, it elucidates the changing global context preceding the war which is generally characterized by geopolitical shifts, with economics, technology and security intertwined. Second, it analyses a critically important development: knowledge security policies, highlighting their potential implications for IHE. Specifically, it warns against the possibility of unintended consequences such as fueling xenophobia and prejudice,

encouraging interference of state actors in higher education, influencing academic freedom, and jeopardizing research ethics.

However, lost in much of the conversation is understanding of the ideas and theories that policymakers like Swalwell bring when making sense of a major contemporary issue on the international stage as knowledge security, or the war in Ukraine for that matter. The following sections shed light on the intellectual underpinnings of their actions, or inactions, by discussing two major concepts that continue to affect how governments approach to international relations, diplomacy, and international education. Perhaps an understanding of the concepts underlying government action on the international stage can help to establish appreciation of the extent to which ideas can impact the directions adopted by governments. And with a better understanding of this dynamic, perhaps we would be more able to discern the change that the war in Ukraine presents for IHE and the opportunities for – and limits to – steering that change into desirable outcomes in politics.

The Power Paradigm Described

In the battle of ideas, it is important to know what we are fighting for and why the battle is worth fighting. Doing so requires first an examination of alternative ideas and the institutional transformations they cause. I undertake this task, first, by discussing the power paradigm and its dynamics in IHE during two periods: The Cold War (1945-1989) and the post-Cold War (1990-2022). The year 2022 is intentionally selected. It marks the beginning of the war in Ukraine, which (I believe) heralds a new regime of international order similar to that of the Cold War era with respect to perceptions of world politics and inter-state relations. Given these parallels, probing into the intellectual forces that forged foreign policies is critically important for understanding the role of IHE in the past, which could in turn purvey valuable lessons for higher education community efforts to make sense of current global realities, their impact on internationalization and get them incorporate that knowledge into future focus.

The Cold War (1945-1989): Hard Power Politics, Soft Power Policies

To understand the power paradigm consequences for internationalization of tertiary education during the Cold War, it is necessary, first, to explore the main tenets of realism: the school of thought that came to dominate international relations (IR) after World War II. Generally, realists of all hues converge on a set of ideas regarding the nature of IR. One is that international politics is a realm characterized by a constant strife for power among states, ensuing in inevitable conflicts (Jönsson, 2022). Hence, states are the main actors within international politics, a realm characterized by anarchy and inevitability of conflict. As an anarchy, the world is a self-help system, where “nations meet under an empty sky from which gods have departed” (Morgenthau, 1967, p. 249). Put differently, the world system has no supranational authority that resolves grievances faced by individual states. Therefore, states can only sustain themselves and avoid situations inimical to national interests by amassing hard power. This is, briefly, the essence of—*realpolitik*—power politics—which can be traced back to the Athenian historian Thucydides (circa 460-400 BCE) and the Florentine philosopher, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527 CE). Both observed that states meet potentially unfettered by morality or a supreme power, and, therefore, hard power is not merely complementary to a particular state’s diplomacy but indispensable to it (Machiavelli, 1950). Although their views reflected different political climates, they remain central planks of the modern tradition of political realism (Mearsheimer, 2014). This raises a question as to how this worldview had influenced IHE during the Cold War.

An answer to this question is inseparable of the theory on which most foreign policy officials cut their professional teeth: realism. It can be aptly argued that the realist worldview created a collective mindset about diplomatic engagement in the West (led by the United States) or the East (led by the Soviet Union). The *realpolitik*, military aggression was countered by an equilibrium of power in the form nuclear deterrence, which dissuaded both superpowers from pursuing their foreign policy objectives through military action, especially against each other. Instead, both blocs used what the architect of ‘containment’—America’s strategy of fighting the Cold War—George Kennan described as “means short of war” (Harlow & Maerz, 1991, p. xxii). Nonetheless, both superpowers continued to consistently employ hard power rhetoric and

threats of mutual assured destruction while engaging in proxy conflicts fought mainly by allied countries in the Global South. Hence, the Cold War was mainly waged on propaganda, political, and economic fronts. IHE was the intellectual front.

Drawing on archival records of the former Soviet Ministry of Education and declassified documents of the United States National Security Council, Tsvetkova (2008) shows IHE was enlisted by both powers for winning the hearts and minds of people in foreign lands and ultimately making them susceptible to their ideological influence. The two superpowers employed a similar approach: providing scholarships that allowed foreign students to attend universities in the United States or the Soviet Union as part of government-sponsored international education programs. However, the selection criteria of students and intended outcomes of programs were different. While the Soviet programs targeted students from unprivileged backgrounds to engineer a pro-Soviet social transformation, the United States focused on students from the existing dominant groups to reproduce an elite with positive attitudes toward America (Tsvetkova, 2008).

The striking characteristics of those programs were, first, the low cost and, second, the securitization of IHE in the sense of treating IHE as a matter of national security, thereby enabling extraordinary methods to be used in the name of security. For example, the Soviet programs, such as those run by the Soviet People's Friendship University were totally free. Free tuition attracted thousands of students even from countries that were still under the yoke of colonization. Foreign students were closely watched by the KGB, the Soviet primary security and intelligence agency. Similarly, the Western agencies briefed their own students before travelling to the Soviet bloc countries and sought information and sometimes affiliation after they had done so (Perraton, 2020). This analysis shows that both superpowers treated IHE and universities as just another vector of national security. On both sides of the ideological spectrum, various methods were utilized to ensure a strategic preponderance for one ideology over the other in the cultural Cold War of internationalization (Tsvetkova, 2022).

If there is one conclusion to be drawn from this historical analysis, it might be that IHE was not so much aimed at cultivating understanding, academic quality, and solutions to commonly faced challenges as it was aimed at ideological incorporation through education within competing ideological camps. This is a far cry from our contemporary understanding of IHE to which I now turn.

The Post-Cold War (1989-2022): Soft Power Politics, Hard Power Policies

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the Cold War and the emergence of new world order. And as a new order arises, different understandings and priorities for states arise as well. It was a time of optimism about the prospects of world peace and prosperity. In the flush of optimism, scholars such as Francis Fukuyama thought, or at least hoped, the 'end of history' would bring in its train the end of realism and its dismal assumptions of world politics (Fukuyama, 1992). A range of scholars were already on the scene who posed an intellectual challenge to realists' conception of international relations. Among those scholars was the American political scientist, Joseph Nye. In the post-Cold period, probably few concepts have more profoundly influence discussions of foreign policy and IHE worldwide than Nye's idea of 'soft power.' The term first appeared in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead* in which Nye defined soft power as "getting other to want what you want" (Nye, 1990, p. 31). But, in its original formulation, the lineage of the idea could be traced to Nye and Robert Keohane's 1977 book *Power and Interdependence*. Much of the book's thesis is that the world has become more interconnected, where multiple formal and informal ties connect societies, a condition described as "complex interdependence" (Keohane & Nye, 1977, p. 20). The multiplicity of linkages within a system of complex interdependence has transformed how power is exercised on the international stage. In an increasingly connected world, the primacy of military power is diminished relative to other aspects of foreign policy like political and cultural values to persuade: soft power (Nye, 2017). Then, as now, the idea of soft power presented an intellectual challenge to the realist power and dominance paradigm. This is because it captured a liberal perspective on IR, such as the possibility of conflict resolution and development through international institutions and cooperation in economy and education.

In higher education studies, as in IR and diplomacy studies, the idea of soft power gained great prominence. But with important exceptions (Knight 2015, Knight, 2022b), the concept of soft power found particular traction in IHE,

popularized by legions of scholars who viewed it as emblematic of the ideal underlying IHE. There is a paradox in this trend that underscores the importance of interdisciplinary research and scholarship that both cut across and reach beyond disciplinary boundaries. While the majority of higher education literature suggests resistance to neoliberalism and its problematic implications for international cooperation in higher education, the literature also showcases a wide appeal of soft power, a concept broadly considered as a neoliberal idea in IR and diplomacy literature (Bloor, 2022; Wendt, 1992). IR and diplomacy scholars view soft power as a neoliberal concept, because while the concept dismisses as counterproductive the use of hard power to advance national interests, it does not reject dominance and hegemony as desirable outcomes of soft power efforts and initiatives (Kearn, 2011; Golub, 2019; Marlin-Bennet, 2022; Zahran & Ramos, 2010). The danger, Knight (2022a) cautions, is that because domination and national self-interest are built into the concept as essential features, IHE driven by soft power will be aimed at gaining competitive advantage in science and technology for hegemonic reasons, in a zero-sum or near zero-sum relationship. This is especially the case with countries that can project more political, military, and economic power on the international stage. Thus, the concept of soft power has only reinforced the unidirectional nature of internationalization in contemporary practice (Global North to Global South), thereby leading to a loss of diversity, epistemicide, and linguicide (Lin et al., 2021). Put differently, internationalization as a soft power perpetuates neocolonialism and Western hegemony (Guo et al., 2022).

Yet, soft power has been enthusiastically embraced by IHE and found its way to the minds of statemen with profound results for policy. Analysis of internationalization policies in tertiary education demonstrate disturbing patterns. For example, Lomer's (2017) textual analysis of policy discourse on IHE and international students in the United Kingdom shows that policies espouse power relations assumptions, predicated on Cold War politics. Key assumptions are that international students will identify with the host country and will treat the United Kingdom favorably when they reach positions of power in their home countries. Mihut et al. (2017) show that this logic guides IHE initiatives and programs in many countries today. It is noteworthy that this is the same logic that guided IHE programs during the Cold War. But there are important differences to note as well.

The first is the cost of these programs, especially those provided by Western countries. For self-funded students from the Global South in particular, studying in a college or university abroad is a financial burden for students and their families, which is a trend with wider societal implications. First, it creates and reinforces socioeconomic inequalities and hierarchies, creating a global class of graduates who enjoy access to better paid jobs for attending Western universities (Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022). Second, it increases the importance of global rankings, given the fact that international students use rankings to decide where to study abroad (Adam, 2023). This in turn propagates a narrow view of academic excellence. The third implication concerns who benefits from the human capital created through international student mobility programs, especially in the wake of recent changes in immigration policies in several Western countries that started to consider international students as potential immigrants. Adam (2024b) shows that the international education strategies of Canada and German, which is not typically an immigration country as Canada, have shifted emphasis to recruiting and retaining international students as future immigrants. It is perhaps an exaggeration to claim these are deliberate policies to encourage brain drain, because many international students (e.g., in the United States) often remain after obtaining their degrees from American schools (Altbach, 2013). However, this direction of mobility represents an irretrievable loss for the sending countries, which incur direct costs like tuition fees and indirect costs due to the loss of human capital from some of the brightest young people and from teaching, research, and innovative ideas that had been cultivated from overseas experience.

The analysis in this section shows that the distinction between soft power and hard power is only of semantics as the two concepts are quintessentially hegemonic. Thus, the separation between hard power and soft power is artificial. The logic and values underpinning the two concepts betray the claim that they are significantly different. Countries that wield more military and economic prowess are better positioned to exercise soft power and achieve their national self-interests. This said, the post-Cold War era of higher education internationalization was a time of soft power politics in which governments toned down their rhetoric of hard power. But as shown in this section, their policies sought the same ends

pursued by hard-power mechanisms: to sustain political and economic preeminence in the new global order. As will be shown, knowledge was a crucial aspect within this dynamic in an age where intellectual capital and brainpower is replacing physical capital as the key to strength and prosperity. And while the internationalization of higher education has loosened the grip of Western powers on knowledge, it has also afforded them opportunities to ride over the Global South countries' investment in human capital by attracting and retaining knowledge workers and talents from those countries, thereby weakening their capacity to build their own knowledge economy (Stein & Andreotti, 2016). As a result, a monetized version of IHE was established, a model that draws on foreign income and talent from source countries. This is a form of national aggrandizement: hard power rooted in knowledge. Therefore, the post-Cold IHE can perhaps be described as an era of soft power politics and hard power policies.

2022: The Strong Comeback of the Power Paradigm

The war in Ukraine is not the first in Eurasia during the post-Cold War era, which saw no less brutal conflicts such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. But what distinguishes Ukraine's war is that it resulted in weaving IHE into the Western sanction regime targeting Russian academic institutions and individual scientists. By so doing, the imposition of coercive sanctions to punish Russian aggression on Ukraine has given realist great power politics a new lease on life. Realist theoreticians like John J. Mearsheimer are now at the heart of the debate on the war, waxing eloquent on how their perspective explains the events unfolding in Ukraine. Generally, realists see the war as a validation of their theory (Mearsheimer, 2022; Hughes, 2023; Smith & Dawson, 2022). And as this text shows, IR theories have had significant influence on the views, rhetoric, and policies of IHE, which broadly oscillated between two versions of the power paradigm over the past 70 years. My purpose in the next section is to start a conversation on an alternative to the power paradigm in its two versions: the hard and the soft. Therefore, I call attention to Jane Knights' knowledge diplomacy, believing that it holds important potential for harness the power of higher education in the liberal interest of advancing world peace through institutions, cooperation, and interdependence.

The Diplomacy Paradigm: The Road Untaken

Rarely in the course of modern history has there been a challenge to realism from disciplinary fields other than IR, political science, and political philosophy. Hailing from a background in higher education studies, Knight (2022a) presents an important intellectual challenge to realists' dismal conception of international relations, showing us that national interests can be advanced through mechanisms and strategies that do not necessarily entail a domination and aggression, and that higher education is the cornerstone of this vision. In her book *Knowledge Diplomacy in International Relations and Higher Education*, higher education institutions emerge from the text as an instrument of diplomacy and strengthening relations between and among countries, an idea that goads our reforming impulse into reimagining the role of higher education in the 21st century.

Integrating knowledge from higher education studies and diplomacy studies, Knight examines the role international higher education, research, and innovation (IHERI) in building and strengthening international relations. She conceptualizes this role as '*knowledge diplomacy*' (KD), which is defined as "the process of building and strengthening relations between and among countries through international higher education, research and innovation" (Knight, 2022a, p. 103). Few cautionary notes are in order in this regard. First, while IHE is situated at the center of KD, it avoids Knight's widely cited definition of internationalization: "The process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2004, p. 11). The definition is value-neutral, and therein lies the rub. In the philosophy of social sciences, neutrality is never uncontroversial insofar as it is difficult to obtain (Zecha, 1992). Definition, after all, is about identifying the most relevant facts and dimensions of a phenomenon. And even when facts are irrefutably true, in the process of selecting which facts are more relevant, scholars might, subconsciously sometimes, reveal personal biases. By this token, while Knight's definition of internationalization is descriptive (aka value-neutral), its neutrality makes it elastic and vulnerable to various (mis)interpretations. As noted earlier, internationalization

tends to be seen as the Westernization of higher education. This tendency in IHE initiatives is not covert. The competitiveness introduced by global rankings exemplify how internationalization is being interpreted as spurring the impulse toward *Harvardization*, or the “Harvard-here” model (Moodie, 2008 cited in Hazelkorn, 2011). Stated differently, rankings spur the veneration of Harvard University, which came to define the gold standard in American higher education (Crow & Dabars, 2015). The point I am trying to make here is that the neutrality of Knight’s definition of internationalization opens it to overstretching to mean many things. Perhaps it is noteworthy that Knight’s work warns against such eventuality. For example, in stressing the importance of not using internationalization for proselytizing, Knight (2021) acknowledges the importance and uniqueness of local contexts and suggests that “internationalization must be customized to the local situation and that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to internationalization is not appropriate” (p. 65). Second, the definition KD is more expansive than IHE. The definition does not include the term knowledge. Instead, IHERI are used as fundamental concepts to represent the transfer, production, and application of knowledge. Thus, the concept encompasses three dimensions: higher education, research, and innovation. In this definition diplomacy is framed as a process – a means to an end, a positive end, for all the parties involved in diplomacy. This definition, Knight (2022) explains, is consistent with the understanding that diplomacy is generally understood as the process of developing relations between and among countries to operationalize foreign policies. This is a key difference between KD and soft power. Third, the definition is value explicit. That is, KD is anchored in values of reciprocity, mutuality and finding common ground. It is quintessentially aimed at positive outcomes for all the parties engaged in IHERI, not hegemony or zero-sum relationships. This is a key difference between soft power and KD.

Within a KD framework, IHERI is about addressing national, regional, and global challenges both science-oriented issues (e.g., climate change, epidemics, sustainability, water security) and socially oriented issues (e.g., poverty, migration, social justice). It is about using the expertise of diverse IHERI actors whether they are universities, centers of excellence, research networks, foundations working collaboratively among themselves as well as with actors from other sectors toward a common goal. Put differently, IHERI in KD framework is not about cultivating ideological conversion or getting your way as it is the case with soft power.

Although not explicitly stated, Knight’s diplomacy framework aligns with key principles of classical liberalism, which places considerable emphasis on the primacy of universal equality of human beings in dignity and rights as a foundation for ethical individual and collective actions in matters of domestic and international relations (Fukuyama, 2022). Knight extends this liberal principle to the domain of IHERI, highlighting in the process the potential of this approach to world politics for both building interstate relations on the basis reciprocity and mutuality and achieving sustainable solutions to the problems facing the world today.

In my opinion, there is a moral and pragmatic justification for Knight’s (2022) KD. The moral justification arises from the possibility that IHERI, through the prism of KD, to lower the horizons of politics, so that politics would not be about a particular country’s will, ideology, or interests being imposed on other countries. KD is basically an assertion of the equal human right to live the good life. Hence, KD runs afoul of the a widely accepted philosophical view of justice which holds that “the scope of obligations of justices is defined by membership in a common political community” (Young, 2006, p. 710). On this account, individuals have moral obligations of justice only to those people who recognize one another as belonging to the same country. Young (2006) shows that the fact many issues nowadays have global reach, and thus, moral agents, individual or institutional, have obligations that are identical for all human beings, as “[t]here is a moral imperative to minimize suffering, wherever it occurs” (Young, 2006, p. 710). The pragmatic justification arises from the fact that no country, no matter how advanced it is, can single-handedly and unilaterally tackle the biggest challenges facing the world today. Issues, such as climate crisis, corruption, geopolitical tensions, and growing disparities in wealth and wellbeing, all require multilateralism and a sustained commitment to cooperation and reciprocity.

Nonetheless, this essentializing view of IHERI, which forms the conceptual basis of Knight’s definition of KD, raises a question about whether diplomacy employing knowledge other than IHERI can also be considered as knowledge diplomacy. Do indigenous knowledges, which have the capacity to perform a critically important role in international

diplomacy, also account as knowledge diplomacy? The experience has thus far shown that this capacity is diminished by entrenchment in Western paradigms of knowledge that often perpetuate existing academic culture of subordination of the Global South higher education systems and institutions (Gildea, 2019; Kuzhabekova, 2020).

Furthermore, in the context heightened global competition in intellectual property-intensive industries and the rise of neo-nationalism (Douglass, 2021), which is fueling anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric, economic protectionism, and attacks on journalists and academics, how can KD initiatives navigate this environment and function as a building block of international relations? These questions need to sufficiently addressed in order for KD realize its potential in the future.

Discussion: The Danger of Uncontested Ideas

The war in Ukraine has ignited a battle of ideas that has thus far gone in favor of realist power-based view of the world. This is best expressed in the attention that realist work has received since 2022. There is a danger in conceding to the rhetoric and reasoning of the power paradigm, given the exploitive character of this worldview, as shown in this article. But there is a far more dangerous aspect that should not be ignored or underrated: the susceptibility of realism to unstated assumptions, especially in terms of their obsession with the ideas of anarchy and the inevitability of conflict. Allison's (2017) book *Destined for War* provided testimony to this realist view of world politics. In a rebuttal of this view, Wendt (1992) eloquently shows that, even if the world was an anarchy, it is how states and different actors view and react to anarchy is what really matters. Wendt (1992) shows that our views of anarchy, and the world for that matter, is socially constructed: "anarchy is what states make of it" (p. 391). If states decided to adopt another conception of their security on the basis of cooperation, not security, they can escape the debilitating consequences of conflict and war. Therefore, Wendt (1992), and rightly so, draws attention to the fact that concepts and conventions are not immutable, and that they can be changed by human practice, out of agency. Furthermore, he encourages to continually challenges ideas lest they occupy the public space and impact policy.

Nowhere is this dynamic clearer than in the field of knowledge security, which has been a growing concern on the policy agenda in several countries. D'Hooghe and Lammertink (2022) show that nine countries have recently started developing national policies and frameworks to defend their science and technology from foreign interference. A big concern raised about these policies is that they are often at odds with academic freedom and international collaboration in IHE. Another major concern is about their unintended consequences, as they sometimes create hostile environment for foreign students (D'Hooghe and Lammertink, 2022). These developments echo the securitization procedures that weakened the *raison d'être* of IHE during the Cold War. Can the higher education community avoid the institutionalization of this myopic vision of IHE? Only if we listen closely to the echoes of history and avoid replaying the discordant notes of the past. Perhaps redefining IHE as a knowledge diplomacy is the first step on this path.

Conclusion

Wars bring in their train misery, but they also offer valuable opportunities for change. The war in Ukraine is no different. I sought in this article to salvage from the misery bequeathed by the ongoing war some knowledge for the future. Toward this end, I argued that the biggest change triggered by the conflict for higher education internationalization is ideational. Specifically, the war has revived interest in instituting cooperation in higher education as a pillar of national security, in the same manner that prevailed during the Cold War (1945-1989). I showed that the factor underlying this development is the renewed interest in the realist power paradigm, which came to dominate political thinking during the Cold War. I also showed that the softer version of power paradigm—soft power—which was largely embraced by higher education scholars socialized to chafe at the exertion of hard power, is undergirded by, and suffused with, the hegemonic logics and aspirations that characterize the realist hard power paradigm (though using different methods). To help eschew an epistemic entrenchment in hard and soft power models of internationalization, I drew attention to Knight's (2022a) knowledge diplomacy framework, which, I argued, holds potential for higher education to become an effective mechanism

of cooperation, development, and diplomacy. I examined the knowledge diplomacy framework and elucidated its moral and pragmatic justifications.

While this article broadens understanding of major contemporary development as the influence of the ongoing war in Ukraine on higher education internationalization, IR realism, and soft power, the ideational perspective it takes makes it somewhat less informative in prescribing detailed policies and procedures to adopted in pursuit of the knowledge diplomacy ideal. However, the text provides the basis for future research and debate on practical approaches to using higher education as a mechanism of knowledge diplomacy.

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Escaping The Acquiescent Immobility Trap: The Role of Virtual Mobility in Supporting Physical Study Abroad Aspirations among Students from Russia

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Abstract

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has significantly impacted the outbound student mobility of Russian students. This paper highlights and explains the positive role virtual student mobility can play in shaping and sustaining the international education aspirations of Russian students amidst the entangled geopolitical and financial crises. Drawing upon the Aspirations-Capabilities framework of migration, the notion of mobility capital, and different states of (im)mobility, the study analyses 16 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with Russian students who participated in various forms of virtual mobility in 2020-2023. The findings reveal that virtual mobility can bolster Russian students' capacity to aspire to international studies despite the mobility-suppressing climate by acting as a 'rite of passage' en route to international education, increasing language confidence, and challenging media portrayals of hostility towards Russian students. The richness of the virtual mobility experience in terms of communication with foreign teachers and students plays a key role in activating this affordance.

Keywords: virtual student mobility, international student mobility, aspirations-capabilities framework, Russian students

Introduction

Since the 2014 events in Crimea and the gradual shift in the political climate in Russia from internationalisation to nationalisation, westbound student mobility has been often viewed as an unwelcomed phenomenon in Russian political and academic discourse. Being framed as the projection of the Global North's soft power leading to brain drain (e.g., Antyukhova 2019; Savelchev, 2023), outgoing student mobility to western countries has been subjected to a suppressive top-down approach, with mass media as a third power willingly or unwillingly playing a subtle yet powerful role in this creeping process. At the institutional level, many initiatives were stopped or put under administrative pressure, often in the form of recommendations or unspoken regulations easily adopted in the context of high self-censorship, a lingering legacy

of the Soviet Union (Kaczmarek, 2020). This can also be linked to “New Public Management Paradigm” as a means “to resurrect quasi-Soviet means of political control” (Chirikov & Fedyakin, 2022, p. 237).

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has further impacted the outbound student mobility of Russian students, exacerbating an already troubled practice recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic-related travel restrictions and grappling with worsening currency exchange rates ever since the 2014 events in the Crimea. The media sources promote the messages that Russian students are subjected to discrimination in the West and consistently portray western educational systems as hostile (e.g., Alekseyeva, 2022). Indeed, some countries have stopped either accepting Russian citizens into higher education institutions or granting them student visas, e.g., the Czech Government has banned the issuance of new visas and residence permits (incl. students) to Russian and Belarussian nationals; similar restrictions were adopted in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Many western universities have also withdrawn from temporary student mobility initiatives with Russian higher education institutions. The combined number of international university partners across 4 major universities in Russia has dropped by almost 50%, from 501 to 270 (Krasnikov, 2023). On top of that European universities were accused by top Russian officials of expelling students from Russia for political reasons (“Russian Students expelled from European universities will have the opportunity to continue their education in Russia for free”, 2022). Mass media also spread the news about admittance denials for political reasons based on the case of one British University (Jack, 2022; Matthews, 2022). These specific cases, however, are being extrapolated in the media to the whole Global North as a portrayal of hostility towards students from Russia. This is likely to promote a certain cognitive bias based on overgeneralisation among the Russian student body. At the same time, economic problems in the West are exacerbated in the media, which focuses on the negative outlook and potential future problems while simultaneously portraying Russia as a better place to live financially and from the perspective of ‘traditional values’ and cultural fit (e.g., “The Main Goal of the West is to Worsen the Lives of Millions of people." It's Bad Where There is no "Russian World," according to Kremlin Propaganda”, 2023).

On top of the above attitude-shaping influences, students may also have concerns about the possibility of their reintegration into Russian social and labour systems when they return with a degree from abroad. They may fear being ostracised by the society or limited in their opportunities politically due to being labelled a “person under foreign influence” under the law on foreign agents which came into force in December 2022 (The Federal Law “On Control over the Activities of Persons Under Foreign Influence”, 2022). This might create a stronger association between student mobility and subsequent emigration, which many individuals might not be willing to embark upon. Certainly, those with initial emigration intentions who view education as an instrument to facilitate such permanent move are likely to be less affected. For those who hold no permanent emigration intentions, however, the rationale behind pursuing education abroad becomes rather questionable.

In summary, the public perception of international education is being affected by (1) portraying western educational systems as hostile towards students from Russia, both at the application stage and during the study process, (2) increasing the sense of risk of failing to integrate into the labour market in Russia in case of return, and (3) making the move abroad for any reason, including educational, look like a financially and culturally non-wise decision. Combined with unfavourable currency exchange rates and structural constraints such as limited flight options and visa difficulties, these factors contribute to an overall climate that is likely to suppress the international educational mobility aspirations of Russian students.

By definition, virtual mobility (VM) is the mobility which is “achievable not through time spent abroad, but through participation in networks facilitated by technology and involving links to students and institution abroad” (Sweeney, 2014, p.9) and encompasses “all forms of education across borders where students, their respective staff, and institutional provisions are separated by geographical distance and supported by technology” (Mittelmeier et al., 2019). Aghayeva (2022) argues that it includes a broad range of non-traditional formal and informal educational provisions ranging from full online degrees to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and online international teaching and learning groups.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, virtual mobility was on the rise, with many initiatives still continuing as they may fall through the holes of the administrative sieve due to their low level of institutionalized formality. Therefore, as in other troubled contexts such as during the lockdown, virtual student mobility can equip Russian students with international education experience and exposure otherwise unattainable.

Amidst these suppressing forces, virtual mobility, whether formal via bilateral institutional agreements or less formal through lower-level stakeholders collaboration initiatives (when students partake in online international learning independently or when virtual mobility programs are initiated by lecturers, program coordinators, or departments, surpassing administration) can be one of the ways to alter students’ perception about the existing scope of opportunities and raise their aspirations for international student mobility.

Therefore, the present research seeks to answer the following research questions:

R1: Does participation in virtual student mobility increase Russian students' aspirations for subsequent physical student mobility?

R2: If so, how does it affect any future mobility decision-making process under the current mobility-suppressing climate in Russia?

Literature Review

The majority of studies see academic mobility as the result of individual choice which reflects personal characteristics such as socioeconomic background, gender, language proficiency, and personality (Christie, 2007; Dreher & Putvaara, 2005; Findlay et al., 2006; Halsey, 1993; HEFCE, 2004). Reay et al. (2005) concluded that there are different "circuits" within which students make educational decisions, with some looking locally, some within the region, and some looking nationally. Later, Brooks and Waters (2009) have shown that some students look further afield, globally, within an international "circuit."

Since international students are regarded as a distinct and well-defined group of migrants, the allure of foreign study destinations is often described through push-pull theories of migration (Chen, 2007; Raghuram, 2013). There is a body of research that supports the existence of a correlation between study abroad and labour migration intentions (Hawthorne, 2010; Hazen & Alberts, 2006; Robertson, 2011; Rosenzweig, 2008; Tremblay, 2005). According to the human capital investment theoretical framework for migration studies, the choice to migrate is determined by the difference between the discounted expected future benefit and the costs associated with migration (Sjaastad, 1962). According to this school of thought, students are seen as being primarily motivated by economic factors, and their choice to pursue a degree outside of their home country is seen as the product of rational thought in the form of economic gain calculations. In application to the outbound student mobility from Russia, Minaeva (2020) shows that among Russian students who consider degree mobility, 84% plan to stay abroad upon graduation, with 60% willing to emigrate permanently and 24% intending at least to work abroad for some time after graduation. A higher quality of life in the host country (18.2%, n=112), higher salaries (15.8%, n=97), and better career chances (13.5%, n= 3) are the key *economic* reasons for such decisions, according to Minaeva (2020).

However, for students to reap the benefits of the destination country's labour market, a substantial investment is needed first to cover international tuition, living costs during studies, visa expenses, and often years of foreign language training. Several empirical studies have confirmed the socially selective nature of international student mobility (e.g., Salisbury et al., 2009; Wiers-Jenssen, 2011). Studies from many countries have shown that internationally mobile students tend to be of higher socio-economic status (e.g., Brooks & Waters, 2011; Di Pietro & Page, 2008; Gerhards & Hans, 2013; Netz & Finger, 2016) and could even be referred to as 'migratory elite' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002). This migration stream is, thus, a positive selection type for which pull factors, as theorized by Lee (1966), are of great power, and those involved in mobility aim to maximize the gain rather than escape adverse circumstances at home. Indeed, those privileged enough to be able to study internationally are less likely to experience negative economic push factors at home due to their on average higher financial status. This means that, firstly, they are not driven by (or solely by) financial prospects and might be "pulled" by other factors as well; hence, taking only economic rationale into consideration does not allow for grasping the full picture. Therefore, it could be argued that "higher quality of life" as the most common rationale for post-study immigration intentions among Russian students, as illustrated by Minaeva (2020), is not necessarily a purely economic factor and requires more nuanced exploration.

Indeed, when financial gain calculations are not that straightforward (especially in the case of students already endowed with considerable financial resources at home), it is important to consider other, perhaps less tangible, factors. Among the many well-researched push factors affecting international student decision-making is fear of political or other forms of oppression (Altbach, 2004; Kirkegaard & Nat-George, 2016), including pressures related to gender or sexuality (Waters & Brooks, 2021), which might be of particular importance in the current context of Russia. At the same time, Perkins and Neumeyer (2014) argue that destinations with greater civil and political stability attract more international students. By comparing the situation at home and abroad, although with their limited knowledge, students might thus make not only financial calculations but quality of life calculations in general as they attempt to expand their capabilities and freedoms (Juran, 2016) beyond purely financial standing. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) refer to such considerations as "social costs" calculations.

In fact, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) present a rather nuanced picture of pull factors. Apart from financial costs, it could be argued that pull factors are largely formed through a subjective perception of a destination country as a desirable place of study/living based on other people's views and accounts embodied by an individual and coupled with a perceived ease of transition and adjustment. Lee (1966) was the first to draw attention to the subjective nature of destination allure,

arguing that there is always "an element of ignorance or even mystery about the area of destination" and "uncertainty concerning the reception of a migrant in a new area" (Lee, 1966, p. 5) since personal contacts or other sources of information are varied and not always available. So once again, though the study destination might have objective pluses and minuses, it is the level of awareness and the subjective perceptions that form its image as a desirable place to study for an individual. De Haas (2021, p.26) describes this influence as being "aware of alternative opportunities and lifestyles".

To conclude, pull factors are not objective but rather represent subjective evaluations of benefits and drawbacks that a particular country or abstract concept of elusive deictic 'elsewhere abroad' (Carling & Schewel, 2018) can offer. In line with Lee's (1966), it is not the pull factors as such but their subjective perception by empirical individuals that leads to the migration decision. These socially and/or individually constructed imaginaries appear to be the departure points for all further thoughts, considerations, and actions. As Riaño and Baghdadi (2007, p. 7) argue, "imaginings about the qualities that specific places in the world may have, as well as the people who live there, and the social, economic, or political opportunities that those places may open up, are significant in the decision of whether or not to migrate and of where to migrate". These imaginings, referred to as imaginative geographies in the context of international student mobility (Beech, 2014), are important in making a place accessible and understandable (Chang & Lim, 2004). They are the inherent part of the equation behind the decision to become internationally mobile as "a function of the combined 'pull' factors and 'push' factors as influenced by intervening obstacles" (Sirowy & Inkeles, 1984, p. 65).

In modern Russia, the mass media consistently shapes a particular view of western countries as economically unstable ("The Main Goal of the West is to Worsen the Lives of Millions of people." It's Bad Where There is no "Russian World," according to Kremlin Propaganda", 2023). This might negatively affect the evaluation of prospects should a student wish to seek employment abroad upon graduation, diminishing the rationale of a higher salary and better career opportunities pursuit, which almost a third of potentially internationally mobile Russian students stated to be of importance in one of the latest research on the topic at the time of this publication (Minaeva, 2020). From the quality of life perspective as a rationale for studying in another country, media messages of students from Russia being discriminated against in the West imply the possibility of higher "social costs" associated with studying abroad and can result in lower mobility numbers from Russia to these countries, a tendency similar to the drop in international student numbers from China to the USA associated with the fears of COVID-19 pandemic accusations (Shen et al., 2023). A significant 33% drop (in comparison to the year 1993) in the inclination of Russian citizens to pursue education abroad was reported by the large-scale study (n=1600) conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center VCIOM (2023), explicitly highlighting the role of the interwoven economic status, urban or rural living, and media consumption (television and the internet) in this decline.

As for the potential returnees to Russia after the study abroad period, it is possible that those of higher economic status might have viewed study abroad as a way to gain a higher social status at home by gaining human capital unattainable for others (Ballatore & Ferede, 2013; Munk, 2009; Waters, 2006). As this rationale has also been negatively targeted in current Russia through certain laws, such as the law on international agents (The Federal Law "On Control over the Activities of Persons Under Foreign Influence", 2022), not only might international education no longer provide an advantage, but on the contrary, students might also fear public ostracization. Hence, the decision-making landscape is likely to have changed for many potential returnees who hoped to use an overseas education as a means to achieve a more privileged social and/or professional position at home.

It is important to note that even in the case of favourable push-pull factors calculations, barriers or obstacles can prevent a student from deciding to study internationally. The decision-making landscape is changing in Russia, with a growing divide between those who can and want to pursue international education and those who disregard this option as either a desirable and/or possible pursuit. The financial costs are influenced by currency exchange rates (OECD, 2017) but could be to a certain extent mitigated by the availability of scholarships (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985; Altbach, 2004; McMahon, 1992). As the Russian Ruble keeps plummeting and a number of scholarship schemes are now closed for Russian citizens, studying in the Global North now requires much more financial resources to cover tuition and living expenses. Additionally, immigration restrictions and complex visa procedures can also deter students from choosing a particular country as their study destination, being either viewed as obstacles or limiting the allure of a country in general (ICEF Monitor, 2022). However, the financial resources of those with higher socio-economic status enable them to perceive increased expenses (including those associated with overcoming structural constraints that have been significantly exacerbated due to sanctions) as a matter of 'cost readiness' rather than as an ultimate barrier to participation (Schnusenberget al., 2012). Those with fewer financial resources, on the other hand, have found themselves in a position where physically studying abroad is becoming beyond their capacity.

At the same time, virtual mobility and international online learning offer an alternative route towards obtaining international experience, international credentials, and language skills without facing considerable financial and social costs.

The barriers to participation are minimal in comparison to physical mobility. Therefore, it is interesting to examine the effect that virtual mobility as an alternative option has when physical student mobility is distorted for other than COVID-19 related reasons, keeping in mind that the level of distortion varies for students of different socio-economic background.

Theoretical Framework

One of the ways to explore diversity in individual level of decision-making is through the Aspirations-Capabilities framework of migration introduced by de Haas (2021). Though geared towards general migration decisions, this framework is applicable to international students as well since they can be viewed as ‘elite migrants’ as described above. According to the author, migration theory needs to simultaneously address agency and structure and their constant interplay by adopting the concepts of aspirations and capabilities. De Haas writes that migration aspirations are “affected by culture, education, personal disposition, identification, information and the images to which people are exposed” through creating a particular image of a desirable future. At the same time, accumulation of facets, such as education, can increase one’s capacity to aspire, by “(1) making people aware of alternative opportunities and lifestyles, and by (2) making people believe that migration is ‘within their reach’” (de Haas, 2021, p. 25). In other words, education (educational experiences and experiences of education), amongst other factors, can affect the subjective individual perceptions of both desirability and possibility of migration.

In the same paper, de Haas (2021) synthesizes research on mobility and immobility and presents four categories of (im)mobility: voluntary mobility, voluntary immobility, involuntary immobility, and acquiescent immobility (Table 1).

Table 1

Aspirations–Capabilities-Derived Individual Mobility Types (de Haas, 2021)

		Migration capabilities	
		Low	High
Migration aspirations (intrinsic and/or instrumental)	High	Involuntary immobility ^a (feeling ‘trapped’)	Voluntary mobility (most forms of migration)
	Low	Acquiescent immobility ^b	Voluntary immobility and involuntary mobility (e.g., refugees, ‘soft deportation’) ^c

Note. ^aCarling (2002); ^bSchewel (2015, 2020); ^cBoersema et al. (2014) as cited in de Haas (2021)

The difference among voluntary, involuntary, and acquiescent immobility is hard to capture as the borders between the categories are rather fuzzy and fluid (Schewel, 2020), or at least appear to be so when working with empirical data. People’s immobility can be the product of various circumstances: “an enthusiastic embrace of local opportunities, a commitment to staying in one’s community despite local decline, risk aversion, acceptance of one’s inability to migrate, or perhaps a person has never meaningfully considered leaving and thus never developed a real preference one way or another” (Schewel & Fransen, 2022, p. 4459). In relation to international students’ mobility as a developmental pursuit, the line, though fine, can be drawn between the futures student envision for themselves at a particular point of time within their life course.

Students with higher socio-economic status are more capable of a voluntary choice to either study internationally or stay home from the financial point of view. They are also more likely to have accumulated personal experience or embodied the experience of family and friends as significant others to inform their own views of foreign locales as desirable places to pursue education, thus being less prone to media portrayals. For those less privileged, economic and structural difficulties could be hard to overcome.

Indeed, the "migratory resources" are "unequally distributed within and across communities and societies" and are comprised of "people’s access to economic (material), social (other people), cultural (ideas, knowledge, and skills), and

bodily (good health, physical condition, and habitus) resources” that shape not only ability to move abroad but aspirations as well (de Haas, 2021, p.15). However, in application to international student mobility aspirations, there is another way to view ‘migratory resources’ (excluding the financial component) that have aspiration supporting power – ‘mobility capital’ coined by Murphy-Lejeune (2002). The author viewed mobility capital as a combination of: (1) family and personal history (for example, parental views towards mobility and whether there was a history of migration within the family); (2) previous experience of mobility; (3) the first experience of adaptation; and (4) personality features (such as openness to new experiences, etc.). Weenink (2007) argues for the inclusion of language skills, whereas Carlson (2013) - for the inclusion of general awareness of opportunities in a larger context outside of the country of origin, therefore better aligning mobility capital with migratory resources. What is important is that both migratory resources and mobility capital can be accumulated (e.g., Schäfer, 2022). Migration research in general has demonstrated that mobility experience leads to learning effects, decreasing the informational and psychological costs of further mobility (DaVanzo, 1981; Kley, 2011), especially if that experience was positive. In application to international student mobility, numerous studies conclude that previous experience of educational mobility significantly improves the chances that a person will study abroad again (e.g., Czaika & Toma, 2017; Elken et al., 2023; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; van Mol & Timmermann, 2014; Wiers-Jenssen, 2013). However, in application to Russia, the study by Holicza (2018, 2020) on Russian students (n=302) found that short-term study abroad decreases the desire to live overseas, contrary to expectations. The author shows that Russian students who have not studied abroad are more eager to leave Russia, while those with international experience prefer returning home. Holicza (2018, 2020) attributes this change in attitude post short-term mobility to the realistic insights Russian students gain abroad, including the challenges associated with physical relocation and cultural adaptation, unlike their peers who, influenced by (social) media, hold more idealized imaginaries.

As for virtual mobility formats, Lee et al. (2022) found that those students who have participated in international virtual exchange are twice more likely to take part in subsequent immersive physical study abroad, though the authors acknowledge the possibility of various explanations for such correlation. Not involving overcoming the rifts of geographical relocation and uprootedness (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), it, nevertheless, can be argued that virtual student mobility has the potential to enhance participants’ mobility capital through the provision of a personal, deep experience as well as a positive experience of adaptation to a new socio-cultural educational space – two powerful facets of personal mobility capital. Most importantly, it allows participants to gain mobility capital in the context of the absence of financial and structural constraints, such as difficulties with obtaining visas and travel arrangements that students from Russia are likely to experience under the current sanction regime. VM experiences have, thus, the potential to alter Russian students’ perceptions of desirability and possibility of pursuing degree studies abroad affecting their current position within a certain mobility type in line with the Aspirations-Capabilities framework of migration (de Haas, 2021).

Methodology

Participants

The study employed qualitative methodology. As part of the research, 18 semi-structured interviews were collected from students from Russia (18-24 y.o.) who took part in any form of virtual mobility (Collaborative Online International Learning projects, MOOCs, semester-long online mobility, synchronous short-term educational programs) between 2020 and 2023. The interviews were conducted between October 2022 and March 2023. This allowed for capturing the accounts of students whose educational journey was affected both by COVID-19 pandemic and the political and economic crises due to the Russian-Ukrainian war. Two of the respondents were excluded for the purpose of this research paper: one on the basis of their current state of student mobility for graduate studies in Hungary, and another - due to their current status as an international student in Russia, originally from Kazakhstan.

The recruitment strategy was that of a combination of convenience and snowball recruitment. Students were approached via International Collaboration and Education offices (ICEO) of Russian universities as gatekeepers, higher education practitioners who might have taken part in the organisation of less-institutionalized forms of VM, and through open call on social media. In total 72 ICEOs were contacted with 10 forwarding the call for participation for potential participants. Additionally, 30 higher education practitioners were approached. These practitioners have previously taken part in the U.S.-Russia University Virtual Partner Program (UniVIP) training which resulted in several collaborative projects in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years. As the participants were not asked how they learned about the research project, it is difficult to tell with confidence which channel was most effective.

The number of respondents might not seem large. However, the outbound student mobility in Russia has been historically low in terms of the percentage of total student body (0,9-1%) with short-term institutionalized mobility even

less spread (0,3-0,4%) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023; IIE, 2023). As for MOOCs, certainly, the number of students enrolled in MOOCs on foreign platforms is much higher. According to 2021 Coursera report (Coursera, 2021), there were 2.4 million Russian students enrolled, however, half of the students from Russia attend courses exclusively in Russian (Zakharova & Yuditseva, 2019). The experience of MOOC is very much different from other virtual mobility formats due to the lack of direct contact between students and instructors. Nevertheless, those MOOC participants who agreed to participate in this research project did it after a certain self-selection process which indicates that they viewed their experience with MOOCs as international online learning. The inclusion of MOOC participants into the research provides a comparative ground for better understanding of other virtual mobility formats as more immersive international educational experience providers.

Data collection and analysis

The original ethical approval application did not account for conflict-induced constraints on mobility; therefore, the questions about war were not included in the interview guide. Only when the topic was brought up by a respondent could the researcher follow up on it, should it be necessary. Hence, any references to the Russia-Ukraine conflict emerged naturally in the interviews as part of students' reflections on their virtual mobility experience and study abroad aspirations in the current climate created by objective constraints on mobility and aggravated messages of hostility towards Russian students. Moreover, no "why" questions were asked to avoid post-hoc rationalisation of one's feelings and decisions.

Also, to minimize the concern that the interviewees might provide answers they might consider to be those the researcher is hoping to receive, extensive pre-interview bracketing was conducted (Chang, Fung & Chien, 2013; Husserl, 1927). During the bracketing, the researcher made explicit that she does not approach data collection with any pre-conceptions and is only looking to collect authentic views and opinions, whatever they might be, and that irrespective of the nature of responses, they will be valuable assets for understanding the phenomenon of the possible interplay between physical and virtual mobility formats. The interviews were transcribed shortly after they were conducted; any information that might indirectly allow for participant identification (e.g., their higher education institution) was deleted from the transcripts. The transcripts were then sent to research participants for verification and any redactions, if necessary, after which data was fully anonymized through pseudonyms.

Interviews collected were then subjected to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), as it allows for the exploration of how individuals make sense of their own lived experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The limitations of this approach include the possibility of dual bias, both on behalf of the respondent and on behalf of the researcher (Smith et al., 2009, p. 35). The first might fail to report accurately past events, whereas the second might misinterpret them, filling the holes with preconceived assumptions based on his/her own experience. As a Russian national and an international student, I cannot be totally bias-free. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to accurately capture the interpretive process, providing theoretically grounded justification for interpretations. For this analysis, as described in the theoretical framework, the guiding theories are the Aspirations-Capabilities Framework, (im)mobility decision typology, and mobility capital (previous experience of mobility and experience of adaptation).

Findings

Despite the diversity in the types of VM experience in terms of length, workload, student-teacher and student-student levels of contact, disciplinary area, participants' nationality, and level of institutionalisation, 75% of the respondents (12 out of 16) commented on the increased sense of aspiration. In this section, firstly, possible reasons for increased aspirations will be covered, and secondly, different types of (im)mobility states resulting from such aspiration-inducing VM experiences of respondents will be explored within the current Russian context using the above-described theoretical framework.

Positive experience of adaptation

Several students spoke about the increase in general desirability to study internationally due to their overall positive experience during their virtual mobility. Half of the respondents were more specific and linked their increase in study abroad aspirations to increased language competence, or rather, language confidence. Although Weenink (2007) argued for the inclusion of language competence into the mobility capital of a person, the quotes below indicate that it is the experience of using one's knowledge of a foreign language for educational purposes that boosts one's aspirations.

After this program, I thought that it might be more interesting for me to go and study somewhere in an English-speaking country [originally the student planned full degree mobility to China]. And I thought

that maybe I have a sufficient level to actually do it. I will understand, and I will be able to learn instead of just sitting and not understanding what's happening in class. ... But the more you engage, the more you participate in such programs [referring to VM], the more you understand that your level is likely sufficient, that you probably have great opportunities, and there's nothing to be afraid of. ~ Larisa

I realized that, as it turns out, I can study in a foreign language and even do it successfully. I didn't end up with all F's; I was even certified with positive grades. I made connections. So, I understood that all those boundaries that existed at the beginning of the semester, they are personally my boundaries – only I can expand or narrow them. That's why I came to this realisation... ~ Marta

Conversely, some students made it explicit that they considered that the effect was minimal (Diana, who took part in a MOOC, and Vladimir, who participated in an online school based on mass synchronous lectures) referring to the lack of direct contact with the instructors which impeded their overcoming of the language barrier.

Well, for now, I can't even say what it will look like at all if I study abroad. I mean, of course, I could try to imagine, but that's certainly involves a certain kind of barrier at a different level. When you're directly in contact with the instructor, in such a verbal communication, you realize that there's still some fear, the fear that suddenly everything gets mixed up in your head and you won't be able to respond properly or something like that. ~ Vladimir

Those students (Diana and Vladimir) not feeling the increased language confidence were also the ones who did not notice any increase in their aspirations because of VM participation. Importantly, they were the only clear cases of non-increase, as the only other person who did not experience the increase in language confidence (Lidia) linked it to the fact that she had previously participated in a year-long exchange program abroad, hence, was already a confident foreign language user. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the improvement in language confidence indicates a positive experience of adaptation and plays an important role in increasing study abroad aspirations.

Virtual mobility as previous experience of mobility

Interestingly, most respondents (9 out of 16) spoke of the increased sense of *possibility* of physically studying abroad after VM participation. They noted starting to see further international educational sojourns as being 'within their reach' (de Haas, 2021). Therefore, it can be argued that their capacity to aspire increased through VM experience, which led to the increased sense of aspiration. However, they do not necessarily link it to anything in particular (e.g., language confidence), but rather to the fact that they have acquired international educational experience as such. Although their experience was online, it still contributed to their mobility capital as personal mobility experience (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) and acted as a 'rite of passage' *en route* to international education. Below is one of the most exemplary quotes:

With the overall idea of international exchange, it seemed like the concept of international exchange itself was somewhat unattainable. One's behaviour had to be impeccable, even the evaluation of extracurricular activities. Oh, my Lord! It was almost to the point where your teeth had to be the whitest colour. You know, there's this saying, about how you had to be perfect to get into such a program. I lived with a mindset like that ... until I've participated in this program [referring to VM]. The stars seem closer now. You can somehow reach out for them. And the world has become a tiny bit smaller. ~ Alina

Overall, it is possible to conclude that VM has an affordance to boost mobility capital of a person through provision both experience that is viewed by that person as 'previous mobility experience' and a 'positive experience of adaptation' in line with Murphy-Lejeune (2002) notion of 'mobility capital', as argued earlier. The increase in the mobility capital then forms the ground for subsequent mobility aspirations under the Aspirations-Capabilities Framework (de Haas, 2021) as it changes the perception of opportunity structure and informs VM participants that they might thrive within a foreign education system studying in a foreign language. VM allows them to realise that they can study abroad and can do it successfully.

Involuntary immobile or trapped in acquiescent immobility

Certainly, an increase in aspirations does not necessarily lead to a firm decision to pursue international education. According to the Aspirations-Capabilities framework, there could be two explanations for why remain in their original place of residency: “(1) that a person lacks the capability to move or (2) that staying is a voluntary (or acquiescent) preference” (Schewel, 2020, p.338). The key difference between involuntary and voluntary/acquiescent immobility could lie in the perception of barriers to participation. Russian students forced into the state of immobility by external, geopolitical conflict-induced factors acknowledge the limiting effect these factors have on their opportunities. They speak of ‘certain events’ and ‘challenging current situation’ as they resort to self-censorship and avoid explicit references to Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Well, actually, I did have plans to continue my education abroad. I wanted to relocate to another country, but we faced a different situation that also prevented me from doing that. At this point, I believe that it's not forever. Certainly, there will be opportunities in future as well. I sincerely hope so. Unexpected complications arose... Well, this time it didn't work out, again due to certain events, perhaps. It didn't fall into place. But I'm not losing faith in the future... Yet planning something in our times, well, we know that it's very challenging, extremely challenging. ~ Alexandra

I have thoughts of moving. However, in the current situation, it's very challenging. Right now, leaving Russia to go somewhere is difficult, but I've been having these thoughts for a while. I mean, it's really problematic. Bank cards don't work, nothing works. So, that's why I enrolled in these courses [refers to VM], to gain skills, to somehow improve my language. Because I understand that all of this will be useful to me in the future. ~ Karina

The narratives behind acquiescent immobility are much more subtle and revolve around dodging study abroad options and not “meaningfully considering alternatives to staying” (Schewel, 2020, p. 339). Acquiescently immobile individuals are likely to view study abroad as something impossible to be realized, something like a ‘fairytale’, beyond their reach in de Haas’s terms (de Haas, 2021) as in the below quote from Vladimir’s interview:

Well, we were actually offered a chance to go and study in Spain, but we looked at it as, you know, kind of like a fairytale, more or less. ~ Vladimir

Even though further in the interview Vladimir says that he would like to go abroad during his studies towards a PhD, he nevertheless does not exhibit any readiness to engage in any goal-oriented behaviour stating that “If I am offered to go, then I am always in favour of such things”. This indicates that although he acknowledges such a possibility in general, hypothetically, he does not meaningfully consider it as being applicable to him.

Voluntary immobile: staying or not going

The key difference between acquiescent and voluntary immobility is the level of meaningful engagement with the idea of studying internationally. However, it is important to distinguish between two versions of voluntary immobility: choosing not to migrate and choosing to stay (de Haas, 2021; Schewel & Franssen, 2022). The former is linked to risk aversion, barriers, and negative imaginaries of other places; the latter represents the embrace of local opportunities, commitment to the home locale, and vision of the future at home. Though all these rationales were argued to be possible by Schewel and Franssen (2022), the difference between the two anchoring points allows to differentiate between those students whose choice is less affected by negative media portrayals and those who have fallen victim to them.

The two most exemplary quotes from those who choose ‘to stay’ are below, with the first quote being an example of embracing local opportunities within Russia, and the second – of a commitment to improve the situation at home:

Well, I still often analyze why I only focused on the language barrier. Why don't I want to go abroad? And I've come to the conclusion that it might not be just about that one reason. Maybe it's because I still like it here, and I haven't exhausted all the resources and opportunities here. I'm quite an ambitious person... But overall, I believe that while I'm living in my city and my country, I still have untapped possibilities. ~ Diana

Well, I think as of now ... Well, how to say it? I just don't like the idea of permanently leaving Russia, thinking that everything about Russia is terrible and one must leave. I don't like that mindset. I understand that there are problems. I can clearly see that within education. Those issues are more apparent to me. Perhaps

I have a need to fix something here. I understand that it's not very realistic, but it's as if... I don't know, I was born in this country and I should try to make it better. I don't think it's impossible. Maybe on a local level at least. ~ Pelageya

Those who choose 'not to go' are more likely to talk extensively about the barriers to participation, such as financial difficulties, concerns about structural barriers in terms of gaining admission and securing a visa, as well as concerns about facing discrimination and negativity during the potential study process while in another country, in line with the hostility narratives promoted in the media. David is an example of it. He does not talk about the benefits of staying but rather justifies his choice not to pursue study abroad opportunities despite his initial intentions to do so which even manifested in action (taking a language exam). He questions the 'appropriateness of such an action [study abroad] in the current realities' speaking of structural difficulties, fears of ostracization upon return to Russia as well as concerns about the potential lack of acceptance while abroad:

So, at the moment, I'm preparing for my master's degree. I've taken the international IELTS exam with the intention of using it for admission to a foreign university. But for instance, right now when the application deadlines are approaching and many will close in March, I haven't done it yet because I have doubts about the appropriateness of such an action in the current realities ... Due to political reasons, there are discrepancies in views, values, and attitudes, probably towards national identity and possibly some practical difficulties. Although personally, well, if I were to express my feelings, I would probably say that what might be frightening is the recent changes in the situation due to the very latest events. ... So, in the immediate perspective, it's more about the processes that concerns me. The difficulties, the logistical problems and technical issues related to finances, payment for all of this, the restrictions related to sanctions. In the long-term perspective, there are indeed further concerns. Questions arise about acceptance from others, not only within the national environment, but within a different national environment. ~ David

In two minds: no decision reached

The acquiescent immobility should also be separated from the cases when the decision has not been reached *yet*. The basis for this distinction could be again the depth of engagement with the idea of pursuing education abroad. Those who consider mobility are at the evaluation stage of the financial and social costs associated with this venture as illustrated by the following interviews excerpts:

Yes, as always, it varies. Some people say that given today's circumstances, everyone talks about how it's not the right time to go anywhere, you should stay at home. Well, sure. And then some say that it's a very good step, that there are great prospects, great opportunities. Others ask, what's wrong with where you are? Why is it bad here? Everyone's saying different things... ~ Uliana

And for now, I don't know where to go. There are so many considerations. It's still vague... So, for now, I'm waiting until I finish at least this year, decide what and where I'm studying, and I have one more year left. I'm hoping that something will become clearer. Firstly, there's also the added factor of not wanting to change anything due to the situation. Yes, I know that universities admit students, but again, not every university and not every country is welcoming. So, I wouldn't want to experience additional stress due to this. Maybe it's necessary to wait a bit. There are many factors here, both financial and the global situation. ~ Marta

Personal virtual mobility experience role in combatting negative portrayals

What is important is that all the participants, regardless of their current (im)mobility decision, value opportunities to gain international experience, develop their disciplinary knowledge, and improve their language skills through further future possible virtual mobility. Just as COVID-19 normalized online studies, so have students' previous virtual mobility experiences normalized for its participants this virtual mode of learning and collaboration within an 'international circuit' (Brooks & Waters, 2009). This is important as it might allow for keeping these students open to the world despite the mobility-suppressing climate in Russia, which again will provide them with personal experience of international engagement, empowering them to combat the narratives of 'hostile elsewhere' (especially in the West) in Russian media, just like in the following cases:

[Speaking about receipt of the scholarship for VM participation] Especially now considering the current event... as if they shouldn't have given [a scholarship], but they nevertheless somehow still did ...

~ Pelageya*

I'm not worried about how I'll be treated, because in general, everywhere people treat me well It's not like they look at me through the lens of what's happening in Russia. I never felt that when we were talking to the person responsible for the program... ~ Pelageya*

Perhaps, it was a bit surprising for me, or even more so, that there was absolutely no negativity directed towards me, like, being from Russia, there were no conflicts at that moment. I've heard somewhere that in that country Russians are not liked or something like that. At first, I was a bit cautious, not that I was afraid, I didn't hide the fact that I was from Russia or anything. I was just curious to see if there would be any evidence of what I had heard. But even with the students, we all got along very well. ~ Marta*

*Pelageya's VM happened in spring-summer after the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine militarised conflict

*Marta's mobility took place prior to the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine militarised conflict

To recapitulate, among the VM participants interviewed as part of this study, only one person (Vladimir) can be placed within the acquiescent immobility category. His placement within this category can be attributed to the low richness of his VM experience since he took part in an online international school based on mass lectures as opposed to more immersive forms of VM in terms of communication with a course instructor and peers, as well as his initial low aspiration level to become physically mobile, judging by curiosity being the reason for his VM participation. Additionally, one person (David) resorted to risk-aversion behaviour abandoning study abroad plans partially due to perceived barriers to participation and partially due to concerns about integration either while abroad or at home upon return. Yet again, the same pattern can be observed in terms of the reason for VM participation (curiosity) and the low level of engagement with other people during the MOOC in which David took part. Nevertheless, the majority of VM participants interviewed as part of this research project reported an increased sense of aspiration for potential further physical study abroad.

Discussion

Although international student mobility is often framed as an elitist pursuit, most students from Russia, even prior to the financial and political upheaval, could not routinely afford international educational sojourns. They might have hoped to receive a scholarship or planned to invest a considerable proportion of their personal/familial assets into funding their education abroad. For them, the opportunity structure has changed considerably after the start of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict in February 2022, and they now might experience involuntary immobility with the potential to drift towards acquiescent immobility, as time passes.

Examples of the state of involuntary immobility include situations where students are no longer able to afford to study abroad, are unable to transfer money abroad or pay their tuition due to sanctions against Russian banks, or experience visa denial as a result of their inability to show proof of the necessary maintenance funds (sufficient and accessible while abroad) as part of the visa application process or structural constraints when visas are no longer issued for Russian nationals, nevertheless still expressing the desire to study internationally. It is important to remember that these students' aspirations were formed when study abroad opportunities were viewed as 'within their reach' (de Haas, 2021). These students might still retain high aspirations for some time, but the potency of aspiration is likely to decrease as they progress through their life course (Wilson, 2010). Once their aspiration level decreases considerably, these students are likely to become acquiescently immobile, neither able nor wanting to study abroad.

The discrimination narratives in the media as well as journalistic pieces on the poor financial and cultural situation in western countries have the potential to accelerate the erosion of study abroad aspirations among these students, targeting both economic and better life rationales for studying in the West. The students are thus likely to become complacent about the opportunity structure and be deprived of the freedom to rationally choose their educational path on a global scale, overlooking the opportunities even if they emerge. This would illustrate their transition into the state of acquiescent immobility when their decision to stay is not really a decision, but the product of not meaningfully considering the alternatives thus not really developing a preference (Schewel & Fransen, 2022). As Schewel (2020, p. 334) explains, the category of acquiescent "non-resistant to constraints" immobility "challenges prevalent neoclassical and push-pull perspectives that assume the aspiration to migrate should be greatest among those who have the most to gain (often in

economic terms) from migration" and could also explain why some linguistically and academically capable students do not pursue study abroad opportunities even when presented with them. What participation in VM does, is keeping these students open to consideration of studying internationally for a more prolonged period of time through shaping an attitude that this route is realistically, not hypothetically, possible for them personally. Whatever the decision they then reach is secondary to this discussion, as long as they give study abroad option due consideration and thus, actually, exercise the choice. The latter is of core importance as expanding the range of possible ways of life from which a person can choose ought to be viewed as an end rather than a way to achieve a particular objective (Sen, 1999) such as, for instance, an increase in international student mobility numbers.

VM participation is of particular importance for Russian students of lower socio-economic status whose potential to gain similar experience through physical travel has been significantly limited by plummeting currency exchange rates, cancelled scholarship schemes, and limited collaboration options between higher education institutions in Russia and in the Global North. The findings illustrate that virtual mobility has the affordance to empower Russian students to escape the acquiescent immobility trap to which the notion of 'freedom to choose' is ontologically inapplicable. Participation in virtual mobility does so by supporting their study abroad aspirations despite multiple entangled crises though increasing their capacity to aspire via accumulation of mobility capital as a migratory resource.

Limitations

The potential limitations of this study are the relatively small sample size and self-selection bias of respondents during recruitment. However, qualitative studies using empirical data tend to reach saturation within a narrow range of interviews (9–17) as shown by the systematic review conducted by Hennink and Kaiser (2022). Also, as this research focuses solely on the level of affordances, the observed changes in aspirations, perceptions, and attitudes provide a sufficient basis for drawing theoretical conclusions, which is the aim of this study, thereby mitigating concerns about generalizability. The internal validity is achieved through triangulation between theoretically devised mechanism of the influence and its manifestation in empirical data.

Another potential limitation is that people tend to like more those things that can move them toward their goals (Ferguson & Wojnowicz, 2011). Yet, the students were not asked for evaluations, and their understanding of study abroad as a possible option after VM participation cannot be explained by their initial predisposition towards more liking of the process. The boost in the foreign language confidence can be attributed to it only partially.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study indicates that the acquisition of mobility capital through VM contributes to heightened aspirations for physical student mobility in line with the Aspirations-Capabilities framework. It provides evidence that personal experience of mobility, though virtual, has an affordance to support students' capacity to aspire for international studies, even if caught in the entangled crises as in the case of students from Russia amidst ongoing at the time of study Russia-Ukraine conflict. It can also make students less prone to media portrayals of hostility towards them within other higher education systems. Nevertheless, the richness of virtual mobility experience in terms of communication with teachers and fellow students from abroad plays a key role in activating this affordance. Therefore, more of synchronous virtual mobility initiatives are needed to help young adults in Russia stay open to the world and foster their sense of global belonging by penetrating holes in the again-falling "iron curtain".

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Academic Exodus from Russia: Unraveling the Crisis

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on Russia's academic sector, relying on the limited evidence available. The invasion has triggered an academic exodus from Russia, with both immediate and far-reaching consequences. These consequences range from the interruption of ongoing research projects and the termination of international collaborations to the emergence of an intellectual void, raising concerns about the future of academic pursuits in Russia. Conventional models for understanding academic mobility, which primarily focus on professional and economic incentives, prove inadequate in accounting for the complexities introduced by geopolitical strife, international sanctions, and curtailed academic freedoms. This paper calls for an interdisciplinary approach incorporating perspectives from political science, sociology, and international relations for a richer understanding of academic migration in conflict-affected settings. The Russia-Ukraine war serves as an important case study, shedding light on the vulnerabilities of academic sectors, even in the aggressor country where the physical conflict is not occurring, and offering broader insights for the field of academic mobility.

Keywords: Russia; Ukraine; Academic Mobility; Geopolitics; Sanctions; War; Academic Freedom.

В данной статье рассматривается влияние войны между Россией и Украиной на российский академический сектор, на основе имеющихся ограниченных данных. Российское вторжение вызвало отток академических кадров из России, что имеет краткосрочные и долгосрочные последствия. Результатами являются приостановка как текущих исследовательских проектов и прекращения международного сотрудничества, так и возникновение так называемой интеллектуальной пустоты. Она, в свою очередь, приводит к опасениям относительно будущей академической деятельности в России. Традиционные модели понимания академической мобильности, сосредоточенные в основном на профессиональных и экономических стимулах, оказываются неподходящими для учета текущих сложностей, которые вызваны геополитическими разногласиями, международными санкциями и ограничением академических свобод. Данная статья предлагает междисциплинарный подход, который включает в себя подходы дисциплин политологии, социологии и международных отношений для более глубокого понимания академической миграции в условиях конфликта. Война между Россией и Украиной служит важным примером, который показывает уязвимость академических секторов даже в стране-агрессоре, где отсутствует физический конфликт, и предлагает более широкое понимание для академической мобильности.

Introduction

The migration of intellectuals is not a new or isolated event as it frequently unfolds against the backdrop of significant societal upheavals, capturing the confluence of economic, political, and ideological factors that drive individuals away from their home countries. Academic migration driven by geopolitical or domestic turmoil is not unique to Russia. Nevertheless, its case offers valuable comparisons to other historical and current instances. The breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 triggered a notable exodus of Russian academics, particularly among Jewish intellectuals who had previously experienced systemic discrimination (Kot et al., 2020). In the 1990s, Russia experienced significant academic migration, notably to Germany and Israel, encompassing 5%-10% of the professionals in science and education sectors. This migration phase saw a substantial exodus of physicists and mathematicians, raising alarms over a potential brain drain. The departure of up to 40% of high-level theoretical physicists and significant percentages of other key scientific personnel not only denoted a loss of immediate intellectual capital but also posed challenges to Russia's scientific and technological development aspirations. Key factors prompting this migration included disparities in remuneration, research infrastructure, and career prospects, reflecting the systemic lags in Russia's development trajectory (Latova & Savinkov, 2012). This migration of intellect had a long-lasting impact on academia in post-Soviet countries, especially Russia, mirroring similar situations in other countries. For example, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 led to a mass departure of academics in the face of ideological repression and international sanctions. Likewise, South Africa experienced an exodus of academic talent post-apartheid, largely for economic reasons (Hugo, 1998). More recently, the Syrian civil war led to a significant outflow of academics and researchers, who have been fleeing amidst a humanitarian crisis (Akkad, 2022). In Syria, this extensive departure of scholarly talent not only deepens the immediate crisis but also threatens the long-term capacity for academic and societal reconstruction, much like the lasting consequences seen in South Africa and Iran.

Each of these instances of academic migration shares common elements, including the loss of talent and enduring impacts on respective academic communities. However, they also present unique challenges. While economic instability drove academics away from South Africa, ideological shifts and geopolitical isolation played a major role in Iran and post-Soviet Russia. The crisis in Syria presents an even more complex scenario, as it involves both a loss of talent and the immediate physical safety of scholars. The variety of elements in each scenario highlights the complexity of academic migration, emphasizing the need for a detailed exploration within specific geopolitical settings. Therefore, this essay turns its attention to the current Russia-Ukraine war as a contemporary example of another significant wave of intellectual migration.

In the context of Russia-Ukraine relations, the war not only alters the geopolitical landscape but also disrupts the academic ecosystems both in Ukraine and in Russia. The war places Russia in a precarious position on the world stage, inviting economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation that indirectly bear upon its intellectual community. These changes exacerbate existing challenges within Russian academia, such as political influence or limited academic freedom, and serve as a catalyst for increased migration. This has immediate implications for international collaborations, affecting both Russian institutions and their international partners, and potentially leading to a realignment of intellectual networks.

This essay synthesises both recent non-academic and academic sources to explore the migration of Russian intellectuals in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine. By meticulously examining and synthesizing available research findings, news articles and commentary, government and institutional reports, online portals and databases, we have developed an integrated narrative that captures the dynamics of the exodus. Our methodological approach, therefore, is rooted in critical analysis of literature, aimed at distilling key insights to offer an informed perspective on the crisis.

This subject of exodus is not merely a topical issue of the day; it is an urgent matter that requires scholarly scrutiny. While there has been a smattering of non-academic discourse on the immediate ramifications, the evidence on the scale of the exodus and the impact on Russian academia and its international collaborations remains largely uncharted territory.

Background

In the decade leading up to the Ukraine war, Russia experienced notable transformations in its higher education and research sectors. A series of reforms characterised this period, enhancing the global visibility of Russian academia. Yet, as will become evident, these advancements have faced significant threats due to subsequent geopolitical events.

Government policy played a crucial role in shaping Russia's higher education trajectory. Noteworthy policies included performance-based monitoring that led to institutional mergers and reorganisations (Platonova & Semyonov, 2018), reforms to the regulatory framework (NCPA, 2019), and the development of research-intensive universities (Fedyukin et al., 2022). A flagship initiative was the 5/100 project, formally launched by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science in 2013. The project aimed to elevate at least five Russian universities into the top 100 worldwide by 2020. This was planned to be achieved through targeted improvement in research output and fostering international collaborations (Chankseliani, 2022; Fedyukin et al., 2022; Platonova & Semyonov, 2018). Although the project did not fully achieve its ambitious targets, its impact is undeniable. By 2021, 16 out of the 40 Russian universities featured in the QS rankings were participants in the 5/100 project. This marked a twenty-fold increase in the number of Russian universities in the QS rankings compared to 2013. Notably, at the onset of Project 5/100, none of the participating universities were represented in these rankings. However, by 2021, half of the participant universities, 10 in total, secured positions in the top 100 subjects and sectors, thereby affirming the project's success in enhancing the global competitiveness of Russian higher education, as corroborated by a 2021 analysis from the Higher School of Economics (2021).

Participant universities also notably increased their contributions to top-tier research. By 2018, they accounted for half of the top 10% of Russia's most highly cited academic papers, up from 24% in 2013 (UNESCO, 2021). Moreover, the decade saw an overall surge in scholarly publications from Russia. According to Web of Science data, Russia's academic output rose by 66%, from roughly 28,115 publications in 2008 to approximately 42,291 in 2018 (Chankseliani et al., 2021).

The period also marked an expansion in Russia's international academic collaborations. Since the end of the Cold War, Western and Russian higher education institutions have cultivated connections, encompassing academic exchanges, curriculum development, and joint research projects (Burakovsky, 2022). The data indicates that the proportion of internationally collaborative Russian research output rose from 31% in 2009 to 39% by 2019 (Chankseliani et al., 2021). These international collaborations provided Russian researchers with broader platforms to disseminate their work.

Russia was also successful in attracting high-calibre, experienced academics—both Russian and foreign—alongside promising young talent. Additionally, the country broadened the scope of educational programmes offered in collaboration with prestigious global institutions and research centres (UNESCO, 2021)

In summary, the decade before the war with Ukraine was a period of considerable transformations in Russian academia, marked by reforms, increased global visibility, and a surge in research output. However, as will be explored in the sections that follow, this promising trajectory has been abruptly and profoundly disrupted by Russia's war in Ukraine.

The Immediate Effects and Exodus

The onset of the Russia-Ukraine war on February 24, 2022, has had a devastating impact on Russian academia, leading to a comprehensive breakdown of scholarly relationships with the West. Economic sanctions coupled with a worldwide academic embargo have led to severed partnerships, suspended collaborative initiatives, and frozen financial transactions, causing a severe dip in research funding and halting numerous ongoing projects (Hunter, 2022; UK Government, 2022).

The political environment created by the war has further intensified the academic isolation of Russia, setting the stage for a series of unilateral actions by various countries. Many Western nations have not only cut off scientific ties but also imposed restrictions on collaborative endeavours, further crippling Russian academia. For example, the United States has limited its research collaborations with Russia in response to the war (Ambrose, 2022). These actions are not isolated events but form part of a broader trend among European countries, which have taken decisive measures in curtailing their academic

and research engagements with Russia. CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, also decided to terminate international scientific cooperation with Russian Federation (CERN, 2023).

Germany suspended all academic and research collaboration with Russia. This halt, initiated by the German Ministry of Education and Research echoed the sentiments of the German Rectors' Conference. It covered ongoing and planned activities, freezing research projects and other academic relations between German and Russian institutions. The Ministry criticised Russia for its grave breach of international law and for alienating itself from the international community. The severance of academic ties was part of a wider expression of solidarity with Ukraine from academic institutions across Europe and beyond, aligning with appeals from Ukrainian academics for international support against Russia's aggression (Havergal, 2022).

Denmark also severed academic relations with Russia and Belarus due to the invasion of Ukraine. Danish Research Minister urged universities to halt research and innovation cooperation with institutions in these countries and to avoid new exchanges. This move sent a clear message that aggressive actions result in international isolation, aligning Denmark with Germany in condemning Russia and Belarus's actions while showing support for Ukraine. This decision also put pressure on other European nations contemplating whether to cut scientific ties amidst the ongoing crisis (Matthews, 2022).

Dutch universities halted their academic and research partnerships with institutions in Russia and Belarus, responding to a plea from the Dutch Ministry of Education. This decision aligned with similar moves by Germany, Denmark, Latvia, and Lithuania. The freeze encompassed financial exchanges, data sharing, and the barring of Russian and Belarusian academics from events and peer-review processes for research proposals. While the Dutch academic entities supported this decision, they expressed regret over its impact on education and research. The Dutch Education Minister acknowledged the temporary jeopardy to academic freedom but deemed the action necessary due to the grave situation in Ukraine (Upton, 2022).

While international sanctions and academic embargoes have severely hindered Russian academia, the country's own internal policies have compounded these challenges. Stricter controls over foreign academic interactions and increased crackdowns on internal dissent have served to further isolate Russian scholars and students who remain in Russia. Over the past 18 months or so, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation has taken stringent measures by designating 69 out of 114 organisations as 'undesirable' foreign and entities operating on Russian soil (Ministry of Justice, 2023). This includes the classification of various research institutes, such as the German non-governmental organisation Zentrum für Osteuropa- und internationale Studien (Prosecutor's Office, 2023), the Vienna-based Central European University (Lebedeva, 2023), and Free University—an educational initiative consisting of educators and researchers who were dismissed from Higher School of Economics. These actions have had profound implications for the academic landscape in Russia, leading to heightened difficulties and limitations for those involved in scholarly pursuits and research.

Notably, ideological constraints on university activities have been on the rise. Various manifestations of ideological indoctrination have emerged, including a reduction in dissenting voices against the war (CurrentTime, 2023), public actions endorsing the ongoing war (pguas.ru, 2022), lectures delivered by military personnel (RSUH, 2023), and the expansion of ideologized educational courses within universities (Vedomosti, 2023). These developments contribute to a climate of ideological influence that affects the academic landscape.

These internal measures, coupled with the international isolation, have derailed what was once a promising trajectory for Russian academia. As a result, a growing number of scholars and students find themselves disconnected from the global academic community, prompting them to seek opportunities abroad (Burakovsky, 2022). An open letter condemning the war garnered 8,500 signatures from Russian scientists, signifying a broader discontent and online chat rooms dedicated to academic relocation have amassed around 6,000 members (Balahonova, 2023; Re: Russia, 2023).

While the migration of Russian academics following the dissolution of the Soviet Union unfolded over extended period and was influenced by evolving political or economic landscape, the exodus precipitated by the recent conflict appears to be more immediate. The rapid escalation of the Russia-Ukraine war seems to have catalysed a swift response marked by a certain sense of urgency, reflecting the acute impact of sudden geopolitical turmoil on individual lives and careers.

This exodus spans a range of countries. The most popular countries for prominent Russian academics are Germany, the United States, and Israel (Talanova, 2023). Also, migrants have been choosing Latvia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Dubai, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Mongolia, and Latin American countries (Boutsko, 2022; Kamalov et al., 2022; Lem, 2022a; Tropiano, 2023). The selection of destination countries by Russian academics amidst the exodus appears to be influenced by a confluence of factors not limited to well-developed academic infrastructures. Language compatibility, the presence of existing diaspora communities, and the perception of a country's political stability and openness to immigrants might also play roles. Additionally, the relationships and collaborations that academics have built over the years can influence their choice of new location, providing a sense of stability and familiarity in times of change.

The departure, often not officially announced, is driven by an adverse political environment, restrictions, and a fear due to potential imposition of martial law making future departure impossible (Boutsko, 2022). More specifically, academics cite the lack of academic freedom, the criminalisation of free speech on certain topics, and severed international ties as some of the driving factors behind their decisions to leave (Interfax, 2022; Lem, 2022a).

It is important to note that incidents targeting academics have been a recurring concern, posing a substantial risk to those scholars who lack the means or ability to relocate. In response to these challenges, T-invariant and the CISRUS Centre initiated a project dedicated to the documentation of violations pertaining to the rights and freedoms of scientists and educators. This project aims to shed light on the issues faced by academics, particularly those who are unable to seek refuge elsewhere, thus bringing much-needed attention to their plight (T-Invariant, 2023).

For those leaving, the term 'Russian Europeans' has been coined. The term reflects a moral stance against the current political situation in Russia. However, the ability to leave is seen as a privilege, and the departure is characterised by some as a form of personal surrender, marking a failure in their lifelong missions, yet with a hope of return if political conditions ameliorate (Boutsko, 2022). The exact number of academics, researchers, or scholars who have left Russia following the onset of the war in Ukraine has not been clearly documented in the sources available. According to the latest investigation of Novaya-Europe, roughly 2500 scientists left Russia (Levin, 2024). This estimation is based on the data from the international ORCID database –the database contains information about more than 20 million researchers worldwide. As of October 2023, ORCID had registered over 130,000 scientists with at least one affiliation related to Russia. According to the study, the percentage of researchers changing their affiliation from Russian to foreign remained steady at 10% from 2012 to 2021. However, in 2022, 30% of ORCID-registered scientists moved abroad from Russia. Prior to this Novaya-Europe, after reviewing open sources, reports at least 270 university staff from Moscow and St. Petersburg's top universities, including 195 Russian scientists, have left Russia since the war began. HSE saw the most departures at 160, followed by St. Petersburg State University (35), and Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology (32) (Talanova, 2023). Only the German Alexander von Humboldt Foundation helped 62 scientists to leave Russia (Balahonova, 2023). These figures represent a conservative estimate, drawn only from cases that could be validated through open sources. The real number can, in fact, be considerably higher (Balahonova, 2023; Talanova, 2023).

While the exact percentage of academics who left Russia or are considering leaving Russia and their chosen destinations is not explicitly documented in the sources, there is a broader trend of intellectual flight from Russia. Young Russians and students are particularly keen to leave, with one survey indicating that one in three Russian students expressed a wish to depart from the country (Moscow Times, 2023). In addition, there is evidence on the exodus of other high-skilled individuals working in software development (Wachs, 2023), tech or media digital industry (Tropiano, 2023), and art and culture (Kamalov et al., 2022). It has been observed that since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the country has been facing a significant exodus of individuals, marking the largest since the October Revolution of 1917 (Boutsko, 2022).

Hanson and Baltabayeva from Arizona State University conducted in-depth interviews with 47 Russian emigres. The participants, aged between 25 to 40, were highly educated, significantly more than the average population in Russia, and predominantly employed in the tech or digital media industry. These migrants were unified in their opposition to the prevailing Russian regime, a stance that had previously led to detentions due to their political activism, illustrating a generational and geographical polarisation. Although none suffered physical harm, the psychological strain of the war was

evident, with many expressing a mental anguish that interfered with their daily routines. Interestingly, the desire to leave Russia had been a lingering thought for many participants, often fuelled by a mental dissociation from the conventional Russian ethos of enduring adversities. The war became the tipping point, pushing many to seize what they perceived as their last opportunity to leave (Tropiano, 2023).

Thus, the Russia-Ukraine war has triggered an immediate and substantial crisis in Russian academia, marked by financial constraints, international isolation, and a notable intellectual exodus. The consequences of this crisis can pose an existential threat to the future of academic and research development in Russia.

Implications for the Future

The immediate effects of the Russia-Ukraine war on Russian academia are undoubtedly profound, causing disruptions in ongoing research projects, severed international collaborations, and a climate of uncertainty within academic circles. These immediate consequences, however, are just the beginning of a broader spectrum of implications for the future. Beyond the present turmoil, it becomes evident that the academic exodus and the academic isolation caused by international sanctions are only the tip of the iceberg in a much larger context of challenges and transformations that lie ahead. This section delves into the long-term consequences of these events and their potential impact on Russia's academic and research landscape.

In the wake of these immediate challenges, the long-term consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war on Russian academia loom large. As international partnerships dissolve, the ongoing projects are halted, and collaboration with Western institutions becomes increasingly uncertain. Data from technology firm Digital Science reveals that the war has already impacted Russian academics' research collaborations with colleagues in the West, while simultaneously amplifying China's role as a co-author in scholarly papers—hinting at a potential pivot towards China as Russia's main research ally (Lem, 2022b).

Moreover, the departure of top-tier researchers and academics signifies a rapid erosion of intellectual capital, a resource that took years, if not decades, to cultivate. The repercussions of this brain drain extend far beyond the war's immediate impact, casting a shadow over the future of academic and research alliances in Russia. The nation's reputation in the global scientific community is at stake, as its academic and research communities risk isolation from the global research landscape.

Economic sanctions, imposed by Western nations and compounded by Russia's financial constraints, further complicate the research landscape. These measures limit access to external funding and research grants, hindering the allocation of resources. As a result, a dwindling pool of qualified researchers must grapple with the challenge of sustaining high-quality research in an increasingly difficult environment.

The quality of higher education in Russia is also likely to deteriorate, as experienced educators and researchers take their expertise abroad. These effects paint a bleak picture for the nation's academic and research landscape, potentially setting back its scientific endeavours for years, if not decades.

The emigration of highly educated individuals, who could have been leaders for anti-authoritarian movements, creates a paradox. It might inadvertently relieve the Russian government of some internal pressure. In other words, while this exodus appears to be a brain drain, it could also serve the interests of the Russian government by eliminating potential nodes of opposition to the regime and its war efforts (Tropiano, 2023).

Looking ahead, the Russia-Ukraine war is poised to have a significant and lasting impact on Russian academia. It may reverse years of research and higher education advancements, posing a formidable challenge for the nation to rebuild its intellectual capital and research capabilities in the post-war era.

In light of these additional complexities, an interdisciplinary approach to studying academic mobility becomes imperative. Incorporating perspectives from political science, sociology, and international relations can provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence academic migration during times of geopolitical conflict. This crisis offers an opportunity to develop new theoretical frameworks that can better account for the impact of geopolitical and conflict-related factors on academic migration.

In summary, the exodus of academics and researchers is not just a short-term crisis but a long-term detriment to Russia's research capacity and, by extension, its socio-economic and political development. The exodus has broader implications for Russia's position in the global research community. As its pool of academic talent disperses, Russia faces the risk of becoming increasingly marginalised, with its contributions diminished and its global influence waning.

Concluding Thoughts

The current exodus of Russian academics both mirrors and contrasts with the early post-Soviet migration flows, highlighting an evolving landscape of migration drivers and destinations. Whereas the migration in the 1990s was largely driven by economic instability and better opportunities abroad, the current wave is more spontaneous and driven by immediate geopolitical crises and concerns for personal safety and academic freedom. Understanding these patterns is crucial as they not only reflect the immediate impact of the Russia-Ukraine war but also signify deeper shifts within the Russian academic milieu over decades. These historical and current trends reveal the academic sector's sensitivity to broader socio-political shifts.

The Russia-Ukraine war is expected to have a significant impact on Russian academia, potentially reversing years of research and higher education advancements. The exodus of academics will pose a severe setback, making it a challenging journey for Russia to regain its previously acquired intellectual capital and research capabilities in the post-war era. The ongoing migration of Russian academics due to the Russia-Ukraine war calls for a reassessment of the conventional frameworks used to understand academic mobility. Traditional models have largely focused on professional and economic incentives, such as research funding, career advancement, and institutional reputation. While these have been effective in explaining migration in stable geopolitical environments, they are insufficient for addressing new variables introduced by the war, such as international sanctions, breakdown of diplomatic ties, and restrictions on academic freedom.

In light of these additional complexities, there is a need for an interdisciplinary approach to studying academic mobility—one that incorporates perspectives from political science, sociology, and international relations. Such a framework would offer a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence academic migration during times of geopolitical conflict. The current crisis offers an opportunity to develop new theoretical frameworks that can better account for the impact of geopolitical and conflict-related factors on academic migration.

In summary, the Russia-Ukraine war holds significant ramifications beyond its immediate geopolitical scope. It brings forth challenges that require a more integrated and interdisciplinary approach, opening avenues for future research. These issues are not just pertinent to Russia or conflict zones but hold critical implications for the field of academic mobility and the stability of academic ecosystems globally.

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Effects of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on the Internationalization of Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

The war in Ukraine has affected the internationalization of higher education in Kyrgyzstan in a number of ways, some unique to Kyrgyzstan and some paralleling effects in other countries. This reflective essay, drawing on four theoretical frameworks, with a focus on examining the actors involved, and informed by personal communications and participant observations, suggests that further research is needed on a number of Kyrgyzstan-specific topics. Moreover, the presence in Kyrgyzstan's capital of two internationalized universities with connections to opposing side in the conflict – the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University and the American University in Central Asia – puts forth the notion that post-World War II assumptions about internationalization contributing to mutual understanding were developed in specific contexts. The complexity of the forms internationalization takes now implies that the comparative and international education field might benefit from some broader rethinking about the rationales for and effects of internationalization.

Keywords: internationalization, transnational education, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine war

Украинадагы согуш Кыргызстандагы жогорку билим берүүнүн интернационалдашуусуна ар түрдүү таасирин тийгизди. Алардын айрымдары Кыргызстанга гана таандык болсо, кээ бири башка өлкөлөр менен бирдей мүнөзгө ээ. Бул рефлексивдүү баян катышуучу тараптарды изилдөөгө басым жасап, о.э. жеке пикир алышуу жана жеке катышып байкоо жүргүзүү ыкмалары аркылуу маалымат алуу менен төрт теориялык негизге таянып жазылган. Ал Кыргызстанга тиешелүү бир катар темалар боюнча мындан аркы изилдөөлөр зарыл экенин көрсөтөт. Мындан тышкары, Кыргызстандын борборунда карама-каршы тараптар менен байланышы бар эки эл аралык университеттин – Кыргыз-Орус Славян университетинин жана Борбордук Азиядагы Америка университетинин болушу согуштан кийин өз ара түшүнүүчүлүккө өбөлгө боло турган интернационалдашуу жөнүндөгү божомолдор конкреттүү контексттерде өрчүйт деген ойду жарат. Интернационалдашуунун бүгүнкү күндөгү түрүнүн татаалдыгы интернационалдашуунун себептери

менен натыйжаларын кайра кенен карап чыгуу салыштырма жана эл аралык билим берүү тармагы үчүн пайдалуу боло турганын билдирет.

Война в Украине повлияла на интернационализацию высшего образования в Кыргызстане по-разному, некоторые из них уникальны для Кыргызстана, а некоторые имеют параллельные последствия в других странах. Это рефлексивное эссе, опирающееся на четырех теоретических основах, с акцентом на изучении участвующих сторон, а также на личном общении и наблюдениях участников, предполагает, что необходимы дальнейшие исследования по ряду тем, специфических для Кыргызстана. Более того, наличие в столице Кыргызстана двух интернационализированных университетов, имеющих связи с противоборствующей стороной конфликта – Кыргызско-Российского Славянского университета и Американского университета в Центральной Азии – выдвигает идею о том, что послевоенные предположения об интернационализации, способствующие взаимопониманию будет развиваться в конкретных контекстах. Сложность форм, которые принимает сегодня интернационализация, подразумевает, что сфера сравнительного и международного образования могла бы выиграть от более широкого переосмысления причин и последствий интернационализации.

Introduction

“The State Department sent me to Kyrgyzstan.” This is the headline of Isabella Romine’s article in the student newspaper of Wake Forest University in North Carolina (Romine, 2024). As a student receiving the State Department’s Critical Languages Scholarship to study Russian, Romine did not have the option of spending the summer of 2023 in Russia because of the war in Ukraine and US sanctions. While Romine appears delighted with her experience and eager to return to Kyrgyzstan, others affected by the war have had more disruptive and less pleasant encounters with its results. A list of those affected by the war highlights some of the characteristics of Kyrgyzstan that make the war’s consequences for the internationalization of higher education distinctive in some ways and similar to other countries in other ways.

Actors Specific to Kyrgyzstan

The following Actors play roles in the internationalization of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. (1) American University of Central Asia, its US partner, Bard College, and Bard’s links to the now-closed Smolny College at the University of St. Petersburg, leading to some Russian and US faculty and administrators relocating to AUCA; (2) Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University and its new rector, Denis Fomin-Nilov, plus the Russian university international branch campuses in Kyrgyzstan; (3) Huge youth population and the lack of sufficient jobs which leads to a substantial out-migration to Russia (and elsewhere) for work; (4) Returning migrants, including some who have obtained Russian citizenship, but who do not want to be forced to serve in the Russian army, and others concerned about the current atmosphere in Russia; and (5) Children of these migrants who lived in Russia and went to school there, and now are coming back and enrolling in Kyrgyzstani schools and universities.

Actors Present in Other Countries

The following Actors also exist in other countries. (1) Russian “relokanty” – young men, occasionally with families, who left Russia during the military mobilization and came to Kyrgyzstan, either as a “first stop,” or as a more permanent relocation, as they could come without a visa; (2) South Asian medical students who were studying in Ukraine and now look to continue their education elsewhere; and (3) US education abroad students who, under other circumstances, might have studied in Russia and Ukraine.

This list is generated from personal communications, participant observations, and media reports rather than a systematic survey of higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan. These actors suggest that four theoretical frameworks may

be relevant for analyzing the effects of the war on the internationalization of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. First, Moscowitz and Sabzalieva's (2023) SIAOS framework (Scales, Interests, Agents, and Opportunity Structures) analyzes the "new geopolitics" in higher education, which they describe as an environment altered by "mounting backlashes to multi-lateralism and free trade, a resurgence of populism and nationalism, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate related emergencies, intensified territorial conflicts and new military invasions, and increased attention to structural racism, coupled with the spread of grassroots social and political movements." Second, Dakowska and Harmsen's (2015) model for analyzing Europeanization and Internationalization in Central and Eastern European Higher Education Institutions, which focuses on Structures, Norms, and Actors. Third, Chankseliani's (2020) analysis of Russian International Branch Campuses (IBCs) in "the Near Abroad" which concludes that decisions to locate campuses abroad are made not by individual institutions, but rather by the government of the Russian Federation, and not for financial gain or prestige, but rather "as a tool to retain and strengthen its [the government's] political power and influence in the region" (Online, Abstract). Finally, Ergin and colleagues' (2019) discussion of "forced internationalization" – the need for nations and institutions to develop policies, procedures, and practices to support faculty and students who are working and studying in new locations not by choice but rather because they have been "forcibly displaced" from their home institutions and places as a result of "conflict, violence, or persecution."

Actors and Actions Specific to Kyrgyzstan

AUCA and KRSU

One unique factor in Kyrgyzstan is that the American University of Central Asia and the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, named after Boris Yeltsin, are both located in Bishkek, the capital of the country. This sets up an interesting dynamic in which the two institutions have links to countries that are on opposite sides of the war, setting up clear differences in their geopolitical "interests," to use the Moscowitz and Sabzalieva's (2023) term. In Moscowitz and Sabzalieva's schema, the interests may be economic, political, cultural, collective, or individual. Both the US and Russia have interests in most of those categories, with different emphases (Cooley, 2012) and new priorities since the war began.

Russia shows its "soft power" interests in Kyrgyzstan through a number of projects in education, including building schools with Russian-medium of instruction, supplying Russian-speaking teachers to Kyrgyz schools, donating Russian-language textbooks in a number of subjects, training teachers to Russian standards, and supporting nutrition programs (Altynbaev, 2021; Osmonalieva, 2024a; Osmonalieva, 2024b). Rossotrudnichestvo, the "agency whose main mission is to strengthen Russia's humanitarian influence in the world," according to its website (Rossotrudnichestvo, n.d., para 1) is the actor in Kyrgyzstan which implements these projects. Some observers, however, critique Russian methods and materials as being outdated (Altynbaev, 2021).

Kyrgyzstan also is a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU Member States, n.d.). The day before the May 26, 2022 Eurasian Economic Forum meeting in Bishkek, rectors from universities in member countries agreed to form the Eurasian Network University (Belarussian State University, 2022), a virtual university network that now has 32 members from all EAEU member states (Nizhnii-Novgorod, 2024). [This should not be confused with the EU's Eurasian Universities Union, <https://euras-edu.org/>.] The member universities in Kyrgyzstan are Bishkek State University, the Kyrgyz Economic University, the Kyrgyz State Technical University, and Osh State University (Eurasian Network University, 2024). The announcement of the creation of the ENU followed by one day the declaration by the Russian Minister of Science and Higher Education, Valery Falkov, that Russia would leave the Bologna Process (Russia to Quit, 2022). The ENU thus might be seen another element of Russian soft power, an attempt to keep EAEU member states' universities within the Russian orbit.

KRSU itself received substantial attention from Russia in the second half of 2023 and the beginning of 2024. On June 1, 2023, Vladimir Nifadiev, who had been the rector of KRSU since it was founded in 1993 was removed (Podolskaya, 2023). On September 13, 2023, Denis Fomin-Nilov was appointed the new rector (Osmonalieva, 2023a). On September 19,

2023, plans for building a new campus for KRSU were announced (Orlova, 2023). On October 5, 2023 during Putin's visit to Kyrgyzstan, his first international trip since the International Criminal Court had issued a warrant for his arrest, the Russian Government and the Cabinet of Ministers of Kyrgyzstan signed an updated agreement covering KRSU's operations in Kyrgyzstan (Government of Russia, 2023). On October 17, 2023, an agreement between KRSU and Far Eastern University in Russia was announced; the agreement included retraining for KRSU faculty at the Russian university (Osmonalieva, 2023b). On October 27, 2023, the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Russia, Konstantin Mogilevsky, gave a speech at a conference in Kyrgyzstan in which he emphasized the strong ties between the two countries in the field of education and their "common intellectual space" (Mogilevsky, 2023, p). On December 8, 2023, the new rector of KRSU gave an interview in which he said that KRSU had "advanced illnesses which will be painful to treat" but that he had plans to make it a university that students from Russia would want to come to (Kudryavtseva, 2023, p.1). On January 31, 2024, the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan approved the agreement the Cabinet of Ministers had signed on October 5, and on February 7, 2024, President Japarov also signed that agreement (Alybekova, 2024).

The new agreement limits the tenure of the rector to a maximum of two five-year terms. The rector also cannot be more than 70 years old and the agreement clarifies that the rector is chosen by the Russian side. The university will be run by a council of six members from Russia and six from Kyrgyzstan. The agreement also spells out land and property agreements and includes the legal basis for financing construction, which is necessary for building a campus and dormitories (Government of Russia, 2023; Alybekova, 2024). The conditions of the agreement, and the plans laid out by the new rector, presage a more activist KRSU than had been evident in the last two decades.

Following Chankseliani's (2020) insight, the Slavic university's interests, as a jointly founded institution of the two governments, more likely parallel those of the Russian government, whereas AUCA, despite its current links to US and international partners, is a Kyrgyzstani institution, founded by Kyrgyzstanis. Russia has economic and cultural interests in Kyrgyzstan, as well as political ones, including a military base in Kant. The cultural interests affect higher education institutions in terms of languages taught, languages of instruction, how history is taught, and other elements of the curriculum, although, as will be discussed later, resentment toward being considered "the near abroad" is growing in Kyrgyzstan among a number of commentators.

Even at the individual level, professors at the two institutions are affected by the conflict. The new rector of KRSU, Denis Fomin-Nilov (2023), reportedly told faculty not to communicate with or teach at AUCA, although some KRSU faculty deny this (personal communications, January 2024) and at least one professor from KRSU is teaching a class at AUCA in the Spring 2024 semester. Although KRSU is not a branch campus of a Russian university but rather a jointly-established university (Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, n.d.; Knight & Simpson, 2022), Chankseliani's (2020) observations based on research on Russian International Branch Campuses are relevant here: KRSU is not an independent institutional actor, but rather, using her term, a "tool" of the Russian government to advance its interests in Kyrgyzstan. Khaydarov (2023), in his recently published chapter on Russian IBCs in Uzbekistan, agrees: "I argue that Russian IBCs serve Russia's political and economic interests rather than contributing to Uzbekistan's academic interests and the internationalization of HE" (p. 209).

The "scale" dimension of the Moscovitz and Sabzalieva (2023) framework also provides insights into the dynamics occurring between AUCA and KRSU. Moscovitz and Sabzalieva offer options of global, regional, national, local, and individual. The scale of the relationship between AUCA and KRSU is not simply institution-to-institution but rather nation-to-nation. This suggests the need for further research and theorizing in the evolving field of Transnational Education, defined as the movement of programs, providers, and institutions to a host nation, in contrast to traditional forms of mobility, where people – students and faculty – do the traveling to an institution's home or host campus (Knight, 2010; Knight, 2016). Many of the publications on transnational education have focused on its economic dimensions (see, inter alia, Lane & Kinser, 2013) and fewer have looked at political interests. Although some consideration has been given to changing relationships between guest and host nations – the case of US international branch campuses in China is an example – the relationships between guest campuses in the same host nation has barely been considered. At the same time, the Kyrgyzstani case is

particularly complex in that AUCA is not an international branch campus but rather a Kyrgyzstani institution, initially established by Kamila Sharshkeeva and other Kyrgyzstani academics as a kafedra of the Kyrgyz National University (AUCA, n.d.b). Only later did it become free-standing and acquire US and international partners, such as Bard College in the US (AUCA, n.d.a) and the international Open Society University Network (OSUN, n.d.a) So AUCA can hardly be told to “go home” – it is home, even if some in the Jogorku Kenesh (national legislature) would like to brand some of its partners and associates as “foreign agents” (Putz, 2023a; Putz, 2023b).

The role of what Moscowitz and Sabzalieva (2023) call “Agents” and Dakowska and Harmsen (2015) call “Actors” is relevant here. Moscowitz and Sabzalieva state that Agents may be governments; higher education institutions; faculty, staff, and students; nonstate entities; civil society; or “anomalous geopolitical spaces” (p. 8). The “agents” in the case of KRSU and the Russian International Branch Campuses operating in Kyrgyzstan are not individual institutions or administrators making choices about setting up branch campuses and interacting with other players on the ground; rather, the agents are governments, with national interests (see Moscowitz & Sabzalieva’s “interests” category) at play (Chankseliani, 2022; Gogotishvili, 2023; Knight & Simpson, 2022). Dakowska and Harmsen, who were writing specifically about change in Central and Eastern European universities, in terms of internationalization and Europeanization, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the advent of the Bologna Process, are interested in the roles of international organizations and national actors as “policy entrepreneurs” and “norm entrepreneurs” in times of change (pp. 16-17). National actors, they suggest, can either “download external norms” or try to “upload” national norms into international debates, or the national actors can try to implement a complex balancing act between national traditions and new ideas and mandates from abroad. Dakowska and Harmsen, along with other authors in the special issue of the *European Journal of Higher Education* they edited, are interested in who the national actors are and why they make the policy choices they do. As noted below, the study of such motivations is a potential area for future research regarding the choices individuals in Kyrgyzstan have made in the era of the war, particularly those who might be considered “norm entrepreneurs” in the case of decolonization, discussed below.

AUCA’s Partners and Connections

The situation becomes more complicated when an internationalized Kyrgyzstani university is embedded in a web of external relationships. The American University in Central Asia, as noted, is partnered with Bard College in the US (AUCA, n.d.a). Bard, in turn, founded Smolny College at St. Petersburg State University in Russia.

Smolny College, a collaboration between Bard College and St. Petersburg State University, was founded in the mid-1990s and became Russia's first liberal arts college. It offered dual- degree programs, hosting numerous student and faculty exchanges and providing courses through virtual classrooms. Despite political challenges, it continued to thrive until June 2021, when Bard College was labeled an "undesirable organization" in Russia, marking a significant attack on the liberal arts model and institutions (Bard College Berlin, 2024, paragraph 2.)

With the closure of Smolny, both US and Russian faculty and administrators there relocated, and some relocated to Kyrgyzstan. Michael Freese, the Dean of Student Affairs at AUCA, directed Bard programs at Smolny for nine years before he was deported from Russia when Smolny became “undesirable” (Moscow Times, 2021; AUCA, 2022). Three former Smolny faculty now are teaching at AUCA, with their salaries reportedly paid by Bard (personal communications, January 2024). This would be an example of Ergin and colleagues’ concept of “forced internationalization” (Ergin et al., 2019). Whether or not the former Smolny professors are pleased to be in Kyrgyzstan, and whether or not AUCA administrators, faculty, and students are pleased to have them, their movement took place not by their own choice, but rather because of the decisions taken on a scale, to use Moscowitz and Sabzalieva’s (2023) term, that is far removed from them as individuals or institutions; the scale, rather, is national and international.

AUCA also is a member of OSUN, the Open Society University Network, founded by Bard and Central European University, which has the Open Society Foundation as its “philanthropic partner” (OSUN, n.d.a.). Among the goals of OSUN is to “foster critical thinking and intellectual inquiry to strengthen the foundations of open societies amidst a

resurgence of authoritarian regimes” (OSUN, n.d.b.). Actors linked to AUCA are embedded in a particular set of values, recalling Dakowska and Harmsen’s (2015) concept of the role of norms in the changes in Eastern and Central European universities brought about by internationalization and Europeanization after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. As Dakowska and Harmsen’s framework would suggest, national actors at AUCA at times likely have complex roles to play, balancing the norms of influencers with conflicting values. This is because the web of organizations AUCA is connected to, and their norms, are not the only values and influences found in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan is a young country – 45% of its population was under 25 in 2022 (CIA World Factbook, 2024) and one that cannot provide well-paid employment to all of those of working age.

International labor migration continues to serve as a safety valve that decreases pressure on the labor market and resources (healthcare, education, and pensions), while also reducing poverty through much-needed remittances. The main destinations for labor migrants are Russia and Kazakhstan, where wages are higher; almost a third of Kyrgyzstan’s working-age population migrate to Russia alone (CIA World Factbook, 2024). Moreover, as noted, Russia has a military base in Kant (Tiwari, 2023) and six branch campuses of Russian universities operate in the country (Bilim Aki Press, 2024). Vladimir Putin stated in a recent speech:

Currently, over 16,000 university students from Kyrgyzstan are studying in Russia, including 7,000 with the Russian government’s grants. The government quota for Kyrgyzstan in the 2023/24 academic year will be 1,000 places with such grants (President of Russia, 2023). Clearly, then norms and influences that contrast with those that AUCA and its partners espouse are present in Kyrgyzstan, and it is not only external actors that espouse these contrasting values.

Changing Migration Patterns

The war has had an impact on Russia’s influence in Kyrgyzstan and in ways that affect higher education. While changing labor migration numbers and migrants’ motivations can be difficult to document, reports of that some migrants, particularly those holding Russian passports, being forced to fight in Ukraine, and the deaths of others, plus the diversification of possible labor migration destinations (Agence France-Presse, 2023; Aki Press, 2024b; Ismailbekova & Almazbekova, 2023; Lillis, 2022; Ozat, 2023, Ziener, 2023) all may mean that Russia is no longer seen as the most desirable option for young people seeking to earn a decent wage. Those with limited education and skills, including language skills, have fewer alternatives than do those with higher education, English or other language skills, and family resources. However, some migrant families are returning to Kyrgyzstan and are bringing with them children educated in Russian schools who now seek to enroll in Kyrgyzstani universities. At AUCA, for example, in the Spring 2024 semester, 73 students with Russian citizenship are studying, almost all from families returning due to the war (personal communication, February 2, 2024). This would be another example of forced migration, although in a milder form for all concerned than Ergin and colleagues’ original conceptualization of the idea, based on thousands of Syrian refugees now living in camps in Turkey who speak Arabic and not Turkish, who do not have families who are established in their host country, and who were uprooted without their necessary documents proving prior education and credentials (Ergin et al., 2019).

Changes in destinations for labor migration and changes in families’ choices about staying in Russia could have implications for higher education in Kyrgyzstan. If destinations other than Russia become favored for migrant work, then languages other than Russian might gain greater emphasis in schools, although English already is widely taught. This, in turn, would have implications for the teachers of those languages and those preparing to become teachers. If the numbers of children educated in schools in Russia, without academic knowledge of the Kyrgyz language and Kyrgyz history are enrolling in Kyrgyzstani schools and universities, then more teachers in those fields might be needed. Moreover, it will be interesting to see what attitudes these new students have toward both Russia and Kyrgyzstan. Will they have absorbed Russian chauvinism? Or will they have faced sufficient discrimination that they will be happy to be among their compatriots and eager to learn their own language and history? Or will they fall somewhere in between? In any case, they and their prior

education will provide challenges for Kyrgyzstani educators. Without intending to be, the returning students might be “norm entrepreneurs” (Dakowska & Harmsen, 2015).

Decolonization

Languages taught, languages of instruction, and how history is taught connect to the broader idea of decolonization, which Gorshenina (2021), in a comprehensive chapter on the subject, defines as “The process of liberation from colonialism and of gaining independence, as well as the process of overcoming (post)coloniality.” (p. 178). Postcoloniality, in its turn, she defines as “The intellectual, ideological and cultural consequences of colonialism that remain after the formal end of a colonial order.” Much has been written about decolonization in Central Asia, although Smagulova, speaking specifically about Kazakhstan, is quoted by Konurbaeva (2023) as saying:

decolonisation ... lies in the horizontal plane – and is mentioned by the civil society, and various activists, artists, feminist movements view their activities through the lens of decolonisation. However, there is no intergroup dialogue between them (para. 3)

This seems to be the case more broadly, as decolonization is discussed separately in the arts (Baibolova, 2021), politics and conflict resolution (Lottholz, 2022), the impact on feminism (Kravtsova, 2022), media (IWPR, 2023), language and culture (Marat, 2023), and other topics. Doolotkeldieva (n.d.) and the 2023 Esimde conference (Esimde, 2023) are exceptions, discussing decolonization from multidisciplinary perspectives. Yet specific treatment of decolonization in higher education curricula remains rare. Those curricula in Kyrgyzstan still are designed by groups appointed by the Ministry of Education, and innovation comes slowly.

Four authors who discuss decolonization in academic contexts are Bissenova (2023), Doolotkeldieva and Ortmann (2024), Kassymbekova (2022), and Niyozov and Bahry (2022). Bissenova writes about anthropology, Doolotkeldieva and Ortmann about area studies, Kassymbekova about history, and Niyozov and Bahry about academic research. Of the three, only Kassymbekova mentions the Ukraine war. She discusses how the location of Ukraine and Belarus in Europe has caused German and other European historians to examine Ukrainian and Belarusian history in terms of European themes. In addition, the invasion of Ukraine has led to renewed attention of the study of imperialism. That renewed attention may also be taking place in Kyrgyzstan, but documentation thus far is lacking.

Actors and Actions Also Present Elsewhere

The Russian “relokanty” (relocated individuals who left Russia due to the military mobilization) seem to have had a minimal effect on higher education internationalization in Kyrgyzstan, which is different from the situation in Uzbekistan, where even before the mass military mobilization (Kakasenko, 2022), some professors with international backgrounds assessed the situation and decided to seek options elsewhere (personal communications, July 2023; January and February, 2024). Many of the relokanty in Kyrgyzstan appear to have jobs that they could do remotely, and those who do not have such positions usually are not qualified to be professors (Matusevich, 2023). Sharshenova (2023) notes that:

in 2022 Central Asian republics witnessed waves of Russian migration following stages of military mobilisation in Russia. Their experiences are quite different from Central Asians’ experiences in Russia. The 2022-2023 migrants from Russia usually come with either a secure remote job or some savings. Central Asian governments quickly developed special visa and tax regimes to facilitate their arrival. Kyrgyzstan offered “digital nomad” programme for Russian and the Eurasian Economic Union’s professionals and their families. While life in migration

certainly comes with difficulties, one cannot ignore the stark difference in the experiences of an average Central Asian Gastarbeiter and an average Russian Relokant. (para. 5).

On February 2, 2024, *Aki Press* reported that 2070 individuals had received “digital nomad” status in Kyrgyzstan (*Aki Press*, 2024). Although citizens of 12 countries are eligible for this status, it seems likely that the majority of those becoming digital nomads are Russian relokanty.

Ukrainian Migrants

Ukrainian males of appropriate ages must serve in the military and cannot leave their country. As such, many of the Ukrainian academics who have left are female (Strelnyk & Shcherbyna, 2023). Few of these scholars appear to have settled in Kyrgyzstan, even temporarily. Their movement instead appears to be westward into Poland and further to other European countries. The few academics who did arrive in Bishkek often leave, sometimes mid-semester, when visas to European countries come through (personal communications, January 2024). Colleagues in the IT sector in Uzbekistan also report that many IT relokanty who initially arrived in Uzbekistan, as they could come without a visa, have moved to places paying higher salaries, often elsewhere in Asia (personal communication, January 2024).

South Asian Students and Forced Internationalization

A number of articles discuss South Asian medical students who left Ukraine and resumed their medical studies elsewhere, with Kyrgyzstan mentioned simply as one country in a list of places they have moved to (e.g. Shirodkar, 2023). In one article that quotes a student who relocated to Kyrgyzstan (“Ukraine in turmoil” 2023), only the low cost of studying in Kyrgyzstan is mentioned. If the forced migration of South Asian students from Ukraine to Kyrgyzstan resulted in changes of curricular content rather than simply changes in the number of attendees, this has not yet been reported. The flows of South Asian students to medical schools in Kyrgyzstan – estimated at 13,000 from India and 8,000 from Pakistan in 2021 (Imanalieva, 2021) as well as to many other nations worldwide, can be studied in terms of the Moscovitz and Sabzalieva (2023) categories of scale, interests, and agents, and the Dakowska and Harmsen (2015) idea of norms. That migration, however, is not forced migration of South Asia students and forced internationalization of universities in Kyrgyzstan; it predates the war and is due to the enormous youth population in South Asia, a growing middle class with higher education aspirations, and the inability of South Asian higher education institutions to accommodate the growing numbers. Academic and economic entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan in this situation have internationalized enrollments and staff willingly, for mutual benefit.

US Education Abroad Students

Education abroad organization such as American Councils, SRAS, and Bard which traditionally place college students in Russia no longer are doing so because of the war and US sanctions. American Councils and Bard students can study Russian as well as Kyrgyz at AUCA; SRAS students take their language classes at the London School in Bishkek. The implications of the larger numbers of US students studying in Central Asia than in the past are of course difficult to predict. However, the author of this article recently served as a reviewer for the Fulbright Program’s English Language Teaching Assistant programs in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and found a not significant number of students who had studied abroad in each country as undergraduates and who, like the Wake Forest student mentioned at the beginning of this article, now are eager to return. The war may have the unintended consequence of creating more US citizen Central Asian specialists.

Relevance of Theoretical Frameworks

The four theoretical frameworks introduced at the beginning of the paper all offer options for analyzing these issues and suggest multiple areas for future research on the effect of the Ukraine war and other geopolitical events on the internationalization of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The “scales” dimension of the Moscowitz and Sabzalieva (2023) SIAOS framework (Scales, Interests, Agents, and Opportunity Structures) connects to each of the other three frameworks and to all of the events in question. The scale of the conflict is international. This affects structures (Dakowska & Harmsen, 2015), of course most clearly in terms of the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ukraine itself, but also in Kyrgyzstan as schools and HEIs enroll the children of returning migrants and HEIs employ some relokanty as well as foreigners who have been forced to leave Russia – new faculty who may or may not stay even for a full semester as political, financial, and family exigencies mandate moving on. Such movement represents forced internationalization (Ergin et al., 2019) for all concerned. The “scales” dimension of the Moscowitz and Sabzalieva (2023) SIAOS framework also applies to Chankseliani’s (2020) notion of Russian IBCs not operating on an institutional level but rather with directives from the level of government. This observation is relevant as well to the jointly-established KRSU. Finally, Moscowitz and Sabzalieva (2023) and Dakowska and Harmsen (2015) discuss actors or agents. However, only Dakowska and Harmsen discuss the idea of norms and changes in norms. This idea connects to decolonization and how the war in Ukraine may be changing some of the norms in higher education in Kyrgyzstan. That issue, along with a number of others, requires more research.

Additional Research

Although a focus on AUCA and KRSU provides insight into some effects of the war on the internationalization of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, as they are connected to two of the major players, many other relevant issues have not been considered and deserve research.

One category for additional research is other higher education institutions, both public and private, both in the capital and those outside. Of particular interest would be the Russian international branch campuses, to see what motivated the university administrations to locate in Kyrgyzstan and if Chankseliani’s (2020) thesis of decisions being made by the government and not by individual institutional administrators holds. This would, however, likely be a difficult question to research; the relevant actors are unlikely to want to be interviewed. Another category for research on higher education institutions would be those in the Issyk-kul region, as anecdotal reports suggest that some of the relokanty who could work anywhere moved on from Bishkek to the Issyk-kul region, where off-season housing was cheap and plentiful and the natural environment is clean and inviting. Whether any of those relokanty or their family members are teaching at or enrolling in local universities and if so, if their presence is having any effect on local norms (Dakowska & Harmsen, 2015) has not yet been researched.

Moving the individual scale of geopolitical effects (Moscowitz & Sabzalieva, 2023), a number of types of people would be worth interviewing in order to obtain a fuller perspective of the effects of the war on higher education in Kyrgyzstan. Here, too, it is worth recalling Dakowska and Harmsen’s (2015) concept of “norm entrepreneurs” and to consider how some individuals make choices not only for themselves but rather also are able to shift the public conversation to the consideration of new norms, such as a role for Russia in higher education that is different not only in scale but also in kind, more than thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. One group to study would be the faculty and administrators who were in Russia and needed to move. Another group would be non-faculty relokanty and their families, to discover why they chose Kyrgyzstan. A third would be the students who attended school in Russia and now are enrolled in Kyrgyzstani universities. The classmates and professors of such students also might have insights that could broaden a researcher’s perspective on the impacts of the war. A fourth group might be, as Sharshenova (2023) makes the distinction, “our” Russians (ethnic Russians who are Kyrgyzstani citizens) and their impressions of “Russian Russians” in higher education. An additional group might be parents and prospective students and the factors that weigh into their choices of where to study. In the past,

some students and families chose schools and universities with Russian-medium of instruction, with the assumption that Russian fluency and cultural knowledge would be useful for a future that might include migration to Russia for work and perhaps citizenship. Anecdotally, because of the war and changes in labor markets, researchers and educators hear of students and families making different choices, but whether these anecdotes hold up more broadly needs research.

Also, as mentioned previously, the Kyrgyzstani case suggests the need for further research and theorizing in the evolving field of Transnational Education (Knight, 2010; Knight, 2016). What happens when two or more guest campuses in a host nation represent governments conflict with each other? What are the issues that arise if the guest campuses are not independent actors, but rather are “tools” of their governments, as Chankseliani (2020) suggests that Russian international branch campuses are? And what are the impacts of institutional statuses: AUCA as established by Kyrgyzstanis, the Slavic university as jointly established by the Kyrgyz and Russian governments, and Russian international branch campuses as not jointly established but also not independent actors?

A final category of needed research is the effect of the war on changing norms in higher education institutions and on decolonization more broadly. Are professors or curriculum committees at individual institutions, or staff working in the Ministry, thinking about modifications in how history is taught, in language requirements, or other elements of the curriculum? Such changes are not yet reported, but may be under discussion.

Conclusion

The internationalization of higher education in Kyrgyzstan has been affected by the war in Ukraine in some ways that are unique to Kyrgyzstan and in other ways that parallel the effects in other countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus. A unique situation in Kyrgyzstan is the existence of both the American University in Central Asia and the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University. AUCA has links to Bard College and thus to the now banned Smolny College in St. Petersburg, as well as to the Open Society University Network (OSUN). KRSU was jointly established by the Kyrgyz and Russian governments, and that agreement recently was renewed and modified, as discussed above. As such, Kyrgyzstan is home to two institutions – Kyrgyzstani institutions, not branch campuses – that are allied with opposing sides in the conflict.

Kyrgyzstan also is distinctive in the degree to which large numbers of migrants and their families depend upon employment in Russia for financial survival. This dependence has led some families to privilege Russian-medium schools over Kyrgyz language ones, and for Russian citizenship to be sought after. However, Russian citizenship now can mean forced military service, injuries, and death. Some families thus are returning to Kyrgyzstan, bringing with them children educated in Russian schools. Moreover, the shock of seeing Russia invade another country that once was part of the Soviet Union has caused considerable rethinking in academe and elsewhere about what Kyrgyzstan’s relations with Russia were in the past and what they are now. The concept of decolonization is widely discussed, although it seems not to have had a major impact on higher education curricula thus far.

In other ways, Kyrgyzstan’s experience parallels that of other countries. Russian *relokanty* avoiding mobilization arrive, as Kyrgyzstan is a country they could come to without a visa. Some stayed and worked remotely and some moved on to other countries. A small number are teaching in Kyrgyzstani universities, but in many cases their situations are not stable. Some displaced South Asian medical students have arrived in Kyrgyzstan and US study abroad students who cannot study in Russia are arriving in larger numbers than before.

Many questions related to the effect of the war remain to be studied, on many levels: institutional case studies, the experiences of professors and students, the reactions of newcomers and the reactions of residents. On a theoretical level, the issue of having two campuses in one country that are each affiliated with a different side of a conflict seems like a new concept that deserves further exploration.

Despite the questions that remain to be answered, the four theoretical frameworks used to analyze the available data have proven useful. Moscowitz and Sabzalieva’s (2023) SIAOS model suggests analyzing the changes brought about by the war in terms of their differing Scales, the Interests of those involved, and who the Agents are. Considering what

Opportunities may be available and for whom leads to some intriguing hypothesizing. Dakokowska and Harmsen (2015) discuss Structures and Actors, but also Norms – for whom are norms changing, why, and in what ways? Chankseliani’s (2020) idea of Russian International Branch Campuses as not being independent Actors or Agents but rather representative of the Interests of the state adds a new insight to the analysis of their presence and their interaction with other higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, Ergin and colleagues’ (2019) discussion of “forced internationalization” helps researchers to frame the actions of students, faculty, and administrators who are internationalizing not according to a plan but rather according to the need to support others whose lives have been disrupted.

Vladimir Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has had many far-reaching consequences. Effects on higher education are not the most dramatic or disturbing, but those effects are likely to have long-term influences on the thought patterns of more than one generation.

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The Internationalization of Ukrainian Universities: European, National, and Institutional Dimensions

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Abstract

This article examines how European regionalization influences Ukrainian public universities by exploring the Ukrainian education strategy and institutional internationalization and marketing policies. The study outlines specific historical and geopolitical conditions that have determined the development of the higher education system in Ukraine. Using a case study, the author analyses university development policies within regional, national, and local environments and examines challenges to and supports for the implementation of these policies. The analysis shows how the combined conflicting influences of the Bologna Process and Soviet legacies have affected Ukrainian universities. The article relies on the study results obtained before the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It also offers an analysis of higher education internationalization reforms during the recent events of Russia's war against Ukraine. The study contributes to the understanding of internationalization efforts in an East European country under multiple, sometimes contradictory, influences of the Bologna Process and the Soviet past.

Keywords: European regionalization, institutional theory, internationalization, regional, national, and local influences, Ukrainian universities

У цій статті розглядається вплив європейської регіоналізації на українські державні університети. Особлива увага відводиться дослідженню української освітньої стратегії, інтернаціоналізації та маркетингової політики університетів. У статті окреслюються конкретні історичні та геополітичні умови, що визначають розвиток системи вищої освіти в Україні. Використовуючи кейс-стаді, автор аналізує стратегію розвитку університету в регіональному, національному та місцевому середовищах, досліджує супутні труднощі та розглядає допоміжні фактори реалізації цієї стратегії. Аналіз показує, що Болонський процес та радянська спадщина чинять суперечливі впливи на українські університети. Стаття, в основному, спирається на результати дослідження, отримані перед повномасштабним вторгненням Росії в Україну, хоча також аналізує інтернаціоналізацію вищої освіти під час останніх подій війни. Дослідження сприяє розумінню зусиль з інтернаціоналізації вищої освіти у східноєвропейській країні під численними, іноді суперечливими, впливами Болонського процесу та радянського

минулого.

Ключові слова: європейська регіоналізація, інституційна теорія, інтернаціоналізація, регіональні, національні та локальні впливи, українські університети

Introduction

In 2022, Ukrainian education marked a thirty-year process of withdrawing from Soviet policies and practices. In its attempt to embrace internationalization, Ukraine committed itself to reforming its higher education system in accordance with European standards. These educational transformations brought significant changes in Ukrainian universities. While Ukrainian internationalization policies in general have been widely discussed (Gomilko et al., 2016; Kostrobiiy & Rashkevych, 2017; Nikolaev, 2017; Osipian, 2014), a more comprehensive understanding of Europeanization effects on Ukrainian universities has not been undertaken. The integration of Ukrainian education within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) challenged universities to balance global/regional, national, and local influences (Oleksiyenko, 2021). The response of Ukrainian universities to European regionalization is best understood through their histories, traditions, strategic abilities (Zakharchuk, 2020, 2021), and specific present-day political and socio-economic realities.

This article analyses how European regionalization influences Ukrainian public universities by examining their internationalization strategies. It focuses on university efforts within regional, national, and local environments. The study outlines specific historical and geopolitical conditions that have determined the development of the higher education system, explores the Ukrainian education strategy, and analyses university internationalization and marketing policies. It then examines challenges to and supports for the implementation of these policies. The study incorporates the results of a more comprehensive examination of European regionalization influences on university governance conducted before the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Zakharchuk, 2021). Finally, it offers an analysis of higher education reforms during recent events in Russia's war against Ukraine.

Literature Review

Historical and Geopolitical Influences

From 1917 to 1991, the Soviet regime imposed cultural, linguistic, political, and economic colonial policies to control Ukraine. During that period, the country survived collectivization, three famines—including the Holodomor genocide of 1932-1933 that killed millions of Ukrainians, mass repression, mass resettlement, and the execution of the entire generation of the country's intelligentsia. These extreme measures sought to generate total obedience of the people and to eradicate Ukrainian national self-consciousness (Dziuba, 1998; Oleksiyenko, 2018; Rozenas & Zhukov, 2019).

Oleksiyenko (2018) used the term "soldierism" (p.197) to describe educational realities in Ukraine under the Soviet regime. The education system resembled a military organization with centralized control over all aspects of university life, including rigid administrative hierarchy, extreme bureaucracy, excessive control over students, surveillance of faculty, and severe censoring of curriculum content. Educational administrators were transformed into "obedient performers of the government's will" (Lunyachek, 2017, p. 87) who executed orders without questioning superiors' commands. The Soviet regime attempted to transform Ukrainian higher education into an instrument of Soviet political ideology. Additionally, the Soviet Union launched the internationalist policy to eviscerate any trace of national identity. According to this policy, separate nations were to be deprived of their own national identities and forced to merge into a nationless mass under Soviet-wide Russification (Dziuba, 1998). Dziuba (1998) noted that such continuous oppression turned out to be a prolonged nightmare for the Ukrainian nation, deprived of its history, culture, and language. The lack of a national education led to the distorted knowledge of Ukrainian history and the eradication of Ukrainian national tradition. The Ukrainian language was regarded as inferior and prohibited in public institutions. This internationalist policy eradicated the remnants of national identity in both the Ukrainian collective and individual consciousness (Dziuba, 1998).

Since its independence in 1991, Ukraine has been rediscovering its national identity and gaining a place on the global stage. Ukraine's geopolitical position between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Russian Federation has always affected Ukraine's national and international policies. For thirty years, Ukraine had been trapped in the tense

relationship between Russia and the West (Haran, 2013; Kubicek, 2008). While the Ukrainian people favoured a Euro-integration policy, Ukraine continued to experience Russia's destabilizing political and economic pressures. Ukraine underwent significant power upheavals starting with the Orange Revolution in late November 2004, the collapse of pro-Russian governing coalitions, a short period of democracy, the threat of authoritarianism, the Revolution of Dignity (Haran, 2013), and climaxing with Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territories and a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

As a nation that had been oppressed and terrorized for decades, independent Ukraine has been rediscovering its identity since 1991. Ukrainian higher education has also encountered challenges in reforming its education system inherited from the Soviet times. Thus, the higher education reforms have attempted to infuse national values into its education and eliminate the Soviet education legacy.

Factors Shaping Internationalization of Ukrainian Higher Education

Several factors determined the focus and scope of higher education internationalization in Ukraine. First, it was virtually unknown in the international arena after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Dziuba, 1998; Kubicek, 2008). Having gained independence, Ukraine began to seek collaboration in higher education, but it was new to these internationalization processes.

Second, Ukraine was trying to step away from its Soviet legacy in education and create a national identity (Myshchysyn, 2008). In response to isolation and uniformity during the communist era, Ukraine diversified its international cooperation in higher education. Independent Ukraine searched for international collaborations not only with the neighbouring European states but also with Asian, African, and North and South American countries. Over the years, the scope of Ukraine's international cooperation increased dramatically. As Kremen and Nikolajenko (2006) exemplified, Ukraine signed international agreements with 46 countries by 1999. In the next several years, this number increased to more than 120 agreements with institutions in 60 countries. The geography of those agreements ranged widely; however, Russia remained in a leading position as its international partner (Kremen & Nikolajenko, 2006).

Third, Ukraine's political orientation towards Euro-integration shifted the focus of educational reforms to prioritize European regionalization (Kvit, 2017; Wynnycky, 2015). Since 2005, Ukraine has been participating in the Bologna Process, the largest intergovernmental initiative to strengthen connections between higher education systems in Europe. Thus, the Bologna Process has influenced educational policies and determined the trajectory of its internationalization (Nikolaev, 2017; Sovsun, 2017).

These three factors have had significant implications for Ukrainian universities. An unproductive mixture of higher education reforms became a main consequence. Gomilko et al., (2016) explained this phenomenon as an unviable crossbreeding of post-colonial, post-totalitarian, liberal-democratic, and national educational trends. The researchers characterized the resultant hybrid as a post-totalitarian bureaucracy with a "post-colonial complex of inferiority and humiliation" (Gomilko et al., 2016, p. 182).

The lack of a coherent national development and internationalization strategy and a clear vision of university development (Kvit, 2017; Sovsun, 2017) became evident in the internationalization of higher education. Kvit (2017) admitted that Ukraine joined the Bologna Process without a national consensus on the necessity to reform its education. Thus, it was hardly possible to expect that higher education in Ukraine would develop successfully when neither society nor the universities comprehended what role international cooperation should play in its institutional development (Sovsun, 2017). A pro-European education policy had been implemented without considering the policy outcomes, its relevance to Ukraine's educational problems, and its value to the stakeholders. Thus, Ukrainian universities responded cautiously and remained rigid to the Bologna reforms.

The shortcoming in the analysis of Ukraine's internationalization of higher education originates from a lack of empirical studies on global, national, and local influences on Ukrainian universities and their response to such influences. While many scholars focused on the analysis of national education reforms (Kostrobij & Rashkevych, 2017; Nikolaev, 2017; Sovsun, 2017; Wynnycky, 2015), little research has been conducted on how Ukrainian universities responded to internationalization. Furthermore, the very analysis of the institutional-level transformations lacked an empirical component

and was predominantly grounded in literature reviews. This paper addresses the existing gap in scholarship by exploring global, national, and local influences that have shaped internationalization in Ukrainian universities.

Theoretical Framework

'Glonocal' analysis in combination with the institutional theory guided the inquiry. In the global environment, higher education is simultaneously affected in three dimensions: the global/regional, the national, and the local (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). The 'glonocal' analysis is used to understand how the layering of these three elements influences the extent to which a university can successfully achieve its objectives. Institutional theory conceptualizes organizations as actors that follow policies and practices that have been successful in their institutional environments. For example, universities conform to external pressures such as government laws and regulations (coercion), imitate successful practices from other universities (mimesis), make decisions based on professional values, backgrounds, and beliefs (normative influence), and compete with each other (Beckert, 2010; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). In addition to the four institutional influences, the strongest social forces and past arrangements affect organizations' actions. The past determines outcomes and trajectories for the future, and embedded legacies and structures condition organizational development (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Pierson, 2000).

The 'glonocal' analysis within institutional theory allows for examining Ukrainian universities within the global/regional environment of the EHEA, the national dimension of the Ukrainian system of higher education, and local university settings. European regionalization forces member-state universities to adapt to internal regulations. Universities have to adhere to market-oriented policies and adopt entrepreneurial governance models to function successfully within the EHEA and compete internationally. However, European isomorphism does not cause the same outcomes in every university. The national context and different organization-specific conditions affect the course of the changes. Global, national, and local connections reinforced with embedded legacies and past arrangements shape university development trajectories. While the Bologna Process acts as a convergent force in shaping university governance structures and practice in Europe, the Soviet legacies and inherited governing models act as divergent forces causing the uniqueness of outcomes in the Ukrainian national setting.

Ukrainian public universities are envisioned within three dimensions. The EHEA constitutes the global/regional dimension and pressures universities to conform to the Bologna requirements. The Ukrainian national education system represents a national dimension that influences universities through embedded structures and legacies. Finally, universities are locally bounded by the discourses and politics in their own institutional networks. Thus, the inquiry on the university internationalization strategies is situated in a complex of the fundamental tensions between Europeanization policies, inherited Soviet structures in Ukrainian higher education, and local institutional discourses and processes.

Methodology

The research was conducted in Ukrainian universities between 2019 and 2021. The qualitative case study examined the internationalization of higher education in three Ukrainian public universities (Behavioural Research Ethics Approval #1221). Document analysis and individual interviews were employed to collect the research data. The analysis of the Bologna-related documents provided insights into the actions, principles, and guidelines of the Bologna Process. Those documents included declarations and communiqués, starting with the Bologna Declaration (EHEA, 1999) and finishing with the most recent Rome Ministerial Communiqué (EHEA, 2020). Particular focus was placed on the analysis of two versions of state laws, national development strategies, university statutes, and their mission and vision statements. The *Laws "On education"* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1996, 2017), *"On higher education"* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2002, 2014), and the national strategies for developing higher education were examined at the national level. University statutes and development strategies were analyzed at the institutional level to acquire insights into the changes in Ukrainian state policies in higher education, strategic directions for internationalization, and institutionally specific practices and policies to promote international cooperation.

Overall, eleven individual interviews were conducted at the three research sites. University presidents, provosts, and other senior administrators were selected based on their administrative role. Those who had worked in administrative positions for more than six years were assumed to have extensive knowledge of their universities' responses to internationalization. They could reflect on the institutional changes associated with the Bologna-oriented legislation after 2014.

To understand university internationalization, the following three Ukrainian public universities were selected as research sites: National Aviation University (NAU), Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University (TVHNPU), and Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University (ZIFSU). They all functioned in the EHEA and the Ukrainian system of higher education and were influenced through the initiatives and agreements between the EHEA member-states and the Ukrainian state legislation. All three universities complied with the Bologna principles in their activities and had similar rights and responsibilities granted by state law. The universities were established around the same period – the first half of the 20th century and were assumed to have undergone the same historical influences. They functioned as Soviet educational institutions for most of their history and abode by the administrative principles of the state's centralized control over every aspect of university life, administrative hierarchy, and extreme bureaucracy. The universities were located in mid-to-large-sized regional centers. Finally, for the first time, the universities were able to develop their own strategies between 2016 and 2019.

Results

Responding to European Regionalization Policies

Interpreting the findings, I inquired about the degree to which the Bologna Process had pressured the three research sites to converge to European internationalization policies. Ukraine's responding to the European internationalization policies was discussed within three themes: (1) the increasing role of internationalization, (2) the marketization of higher education, and (3) re-conceptualizing national identity (Zakharchuk, 2021). I used institutional theory to explain the transformation in Ukrainian higher education as a shift from the Soviet to the European educational model. Responding to Europeanization was perceived as a transition from the relative isolation during the Soviet times to the global openness and competitiveness offered by the Bologna Process. Such visualization makes it possible to illustrate an intersection of the Soviet legacies and the Bologna Process in policymaking and to consider historical, social, and political conditions in Ukraine.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukrainian higher education still functioned according to the inherited Soviet principles of top-down administration and central planning. Soviet higher education was required to meet the demand of economic planning (Smolentseva et al., 2018). Central supervision over higher education eliminated competition and weakened the relationships between educational institutions and industry. The concepts of institutional autonomy, internationalization, marketization, as well as global competition were separated from higher education. When Ukraine joined the Bologna Process, the universities had to account for internationalization policies within the EHEA, the orientation toward the labour market, and local, regional, and global demands. Ukrainian universities were pressed to align with the EHEA governance models and practices. The internationalization in three Ukrainian public universities is shaped by the policies and practices within a global/regional environment of the EHEA, the national dimension of the Ukrainian higher education system, and the local university settings. However, no clear division exists between these isomorphic influences, as the institutional contexts within each of the dimensions are interrelated and interdependent.

Global/regional Dimension

European governments initiated extensive collaborations and implemented educational reforms inside and across the European region to secure Europe's position as a global higher education market. This wide range of collaborations and reforms, known as the Bologna Process, aimed at (1) opening access for European students and graduates to European higher education and the regional labour market and (2) securing the competitiveness of European higher education at the global level. The first goal was achieved by standardizing key educational elements, such as degree structures, transferable

credits, and academic qualifications in the EHEA member-countries. The Bologna Process promoted the consolidation and international openness of the EHEA while “strengthening dialogue between public authorities, academia, student representatives, and civil society” (Parliamentary Assembly, 2012, p. 1). Education in participating countries had to account for academic mobility, autonomous university governance, students’ participation in university administration, public responsibility for higher education, and the social dimension in education (EHEA, 1999, 2009). However, such a harmonization of European higher education not only promoted the alignment of the key educational elements but also invoked competition among the EHEA member-countries. The second goal introduced a distinct orientation toward the national and global market and society into all Bologna-driven reforms.

The internationalization of Ukrainian higher education was marked by the Ukraine’s targeting the economic and political integration with the European Union. Ukraine chose a pro-European direction to increase the quality of higher education, the mobility of its students and faculty, the employability of its graduates, the amount of its external funding, and the number of its international partnerships (Strategic Advisory Committee: Education, 2014). The implementation of the European higher education policy in Ukraine began in May 2005. The Bologna reforms required transforming structural elements in education and higher education governance and re-assessing the quality assurance system and internationalization policies. However, all Bologna-associated reforms in the Ukrainian higher education system primarily pursued country’s socio-economic development and integration into European and world education. Ukraine hoped that Europeanization would break a long-lasting relatively inward educational orientation and introduce a comparatively outward educational strategy.

National Dimension

Ukraine still has not developed a national strategy for internationalization in higher education. Reforms related to internationalization were somewhat loosely outlined in the laws “*On education*” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2017) and “*On higher education*” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2014), *National Doctrine on the Development of Education* (President of Ukraine, 2002), and *National Strategy for Development of Education in Ukraine until 2021* (President of Ukraine, 2013). These legal documents conveyed the idea that from now on Ukrainian education policy was aimed at integrating national education into the European and global education space. Given the demands of the global labour market, Europeanization was conceived of as a necessity for Ukrainian higher education.

Primarily, the new legal framework in higher education defined state policy on internationalization, outlined its main directions, and delimited international for-profit activities. Guided by the law, the state partially financed university international cooperation, including agreements with international partners, membership in international organizations, and engagement in international initiatives. Although the *Law “On higher education”* (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2014) became a benchmark for educational reforms, it was criticized for preserving some authoritarian elements which interfered with a complete educational transformation. The main concern for some was that the Bologna innovations were not compatible with the influences from the Soviet past (Gomilko et al., 2016; Kostrobij & Rashkevych, 2017; Sovsun, 2017).

However, the prospects of increasing competitiveness of Ukrainian higher education in the European labour market guided educational reforms. The *National Development Strategy* recognized that Ukrainian educational services did not align with the needs of society, its graduates, and the labour market (President of Ukraine, 2013). The global labour market did not need the obedient soldiers following the superior’s commands; instead, it required creative minds and critical thinkers with in-depth theoretical knowledge and the ability to apply it independently in non-standard and ever-changing settings. To address this demand, the Ukrainian higher education called for the restoration of the lost connections between education, industry, and the state. According to the national vision on Ukraine’s sustainable socio-economic development, international partnerships and academic mobility within the EHEA became solutions not only to enhance education quality but also to secure the country’s socio-economic development (President of Ukraine, 2013; Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2014). Ukrainian universities were encouraged to adopt marketing philosophies and develop their strategies on the basis of their market performance.

Such reorientation prioritized humanistic values over a command economy and promoted a reconsideration of pedagogical ideology in general. The policy emphasized European humanistic values, democratization, and humanization of the educational process (President of Ukraine, 2013). Following the national agenda, the three research sites also redefined their values. ZIFSU accounted for dramatic changes in the country's history and re-assessed values, priorities, and prospects for modern citizens (Academic Council of ZIFSU, 2019). TVHNPU also envisioned the university's strategic direction in rebuilding its academic and research activities based on the idea of human-centeredness (Academic Council of TVHNPU, 2016).

Alongside the internationalization and marketization of Ukrainian higher education, the revival of national values occurred gradually over several decades. The new national education policies promoted democracy, humanism, cultural diversity, and tolerance and encouraged the development of Ukrainian culture and national self-identification. In fact, Ukraine's pro-European direction in higher education was legally guided by the principles of the priority of national interests, the preservation and development of the intellectual potential of the nation, tolerance towards the achievements of other educational systems, and the adoption of those achievements to the needs of the Ukrainian education system (President of Ukraine, 2002).

Institutional Dimension

While the *Law "On higher education"* provided general internationalization guidelines, each research site developed more specific activities. The geographical focus of their international partnerships varied considerably – from European-focused and those that expanded to other continents. Similarly, internationalization initiatives included but were not limited to academic mobility, cooperation with universities and organizations, and research projects (Academic Council of NAU, 2018; Academic Council of TVHNPU, 2016; Academic Council of ZIFSU, 2019). For all three universities, academic mobility became one of the targets of their internationalization strategies, and they established bilateral cooperation agreements with their European partners. Faculty and students participated in European mobility programs, such as Horizon 2020, *Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies (TEMPUS)*, and Erasmus+.

Even though the geography of the universities' cooperating partners varied, the three research sites prioritized Polish institutions as their primary international collaborators. Each university had developed and maintained strong ties with Polish partners at the institutional and departmental levels. Such cooperation included academic mobility, dual diploma programs, and study visits. The universities established joint programs with Polish partners that allowed students to study in Poland and receive diplomas from two higher educational institutions (TVHNPU, n.d.; ZIFSU, n.d.).

While universities' partnership lists were similar, the nature of those partnerships differed slightly. Educational partnerships became a focus for TVHNPU and ZIFSU. For example, one of the TVHNPU priorities was cooperation with the European Association of Universities, including universities in Austria, the Czech Republic, Greece, France, and Poland. TVHNPU also launched a Confucius Institute program to facilitate Chinese language and culture learning through academic programming and promote educational and cultural exchanges. In general, TVHNPU had 35 agreements of cooperation with universities in Asia, Europe, and North America (Academic Council of TVHNPU, 2016). ZIFSU also encouraged its academics to participate in international competitions and mobility programs (Academic Council of ZIFSU, 2019). ZIFSU even established the Department of International Relations and Regional Affairs to promote international cooperation at the European and global levels (ZIFSU, n.d.).

By comparison, NAU targeted strategic partnerships through cooperation with aviation industries and international organizations. Among those organizations were the *Airports Council International*, *International Air Transport Association*, *International Civil Aviation Organization*, and *International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations*. For several decades, two *International Civil Aviation Organization* training centres had already operated at the university. Joint projects were launched with technical universities of Great Britain, Spain, Holland, Germany, France, South Korea, and China (Rector of NAU, 2018). NAU was also developing industrial cooperation with China to train aviation specialists. At the regional level, NAU sought partnerships with the *European Civil Aviation Conference*, the *European Union Aviation Safety Agency*, and the *European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation* (Academic Council of NAU, 2018).

While internationalization actions were well-outlined in the universities' development strategies, some senior administrators assessed that the implementation of those actions would benefit from more comprehensive planning. The universities should have adopted a holistic approach to internationalization instead of a simple imitation of some European structures and practices. Such copying was often not productive and lacked in-depth understanding. For example, establishing separate units to manage international cooperation could not bring about the intended outcomes, as the structural changes alone were not enough to change the nature and quality of practice. One participant complained that any international cooperation could hardly be called a result of coordinated institutional effort; it mainly happened due to the efforts of proactive individuals:

A great deal of international cooperation is not taking place... All collaboration [is] at the correspondence level. International partners send us some suggestions; we send them ours. Close cooperation occurs only at the level of separate researchers and teachers. When our researchers [...] become interested in some grants or programs, they contact international colleagues directly. After that, the collaboration between the departments is established and institutes or faculties become involved. (Interview C)

Alongside internationalization, market-oriented approaches guided the universities' decision-making. Marketization prompted universities to operate as market-oriented organizations aligning their policies with business and commerce impacts. Their marketing agendas were set toward student-customer orientation and global, European, national, and local economic cooperation. Thus, NAU's orientation toward global and European cooperation manifested through establishing the Quality Board to align the university's development strategy with global market requirements. NAU cooperated with several leading international aviation organizations to meet regional and global labor market demands (Academic Council of NAU, 2018). In comparison, ZIFSU focused more on the needs of national and local labor markets when it licensed and opened new educational programs. The university systematically analyzed its graduates' employment and facilitated two-way communication with employers and the Association of University Alumni (Academic Council of ZIFSU, 2019).

A transparency policy became a part of the universities' market-oriented strategies. Following the *Law "On higher education,"* NAU, TVHNPU, and ZIFSU disclosed information about university governance, strategic directions, economic activities, and academic and research records. They opened access to university statutes, development strategies, and annual budgets, including financial reports and reports on university performance. As an interviewee explained, "the consequence [of the marketization] is the transparency of the educational process, even for reducing and preventing corrupt schemes, increasing employment opportunities, and improving quality" (Interview D). This transparency policy was crucial for universities' survival and maintaining their reputations in the national and international markets. Another interviewee elaborated on the topic: "Now every respectable university must also care about its image policy and university branding" (Interview J).

The theme of universities becoming market-driven organizations was brought up multiple times during the interviews. Marketization changed education philosophy. To survive and develop, universities were forced to resemble private businesses and, thus, be governed as ones. The curriculum was adapted to different stakeholders' needs. Internal policies and regulations were adjusted for universities to compete with each other. One senior administrator reflected on such influences:

The industry does not only serve as a customer of experts, but it also influences teachers' ways of thinking: how they should work at universities so that a future expert becomes the one wanted by the industry in five years. [...] A global market is a global market; there are already global players, and no longer simply regional but global problems. (Interview A)

Senior administrators perceived internationalization and marketization through the lens of past Soviet practices. The previous experiences of the abnormal internationalist policy during the Soviet times had marked participants' attitudes toward Ukraine's internationalization within EHEA. Europeanization influences were discussed in relation to "reconceptualizing national identity and preserving Ukrainian national values" (Zakharchuk, 2021, p. 112). Thus, the

participants' past-dependent opinions were divided over the interconnectedness of internationalization and reconceptualization of national identity. On the one hand, integration with Europe was opposed to the Soviet uniformity. On the other hand, some senior administrators questioned the difference between Europeanization and Soviet colonialism.

The supporters of the first stance contrasted the internationalization within the EHEA with integration with Russia and the oppressive educational policies. The internationalization of Ukrainian higher education was perceived as a political and social shift away from Soviet influences toward the revival of Ukrainian cultural traditions. In this regard, two revolutions and the Russian war against Ukraine were interpreted not only as Ukraine's response to Russia's invasion but as a struggle for national survival and the preservation of Ukrainian national identity. Senior administrators kept referring to the Soviet totalitarian policies under which Ukrainian culture and language had been prohibited and those who opposed had been persecuted, tortured, or killed. One participant remarked:

[W]e were going through very difficult times. The Orange Revolution. We survived it. It became 'before,' 'during,' and 'after.' When the wave rose, then fell, that wave brought something to its surface... And this entails both language issues and national cultural issues. Students need to be citizens of their own country, educated in certain values which they are responsible for defending. (Interview G)

Some senior administrators connected the events of Maidan with the emergence of social discourses on democracy and individual liberty. They emphasized that the recent social and political transformations introduced the concept nation-building in education and redefined the role of education according to these democratic and liberal tendencies in society. For instance, one interviewee commented on such changes,

It seems these challenges in the state mainly helped. We have gone through several revolutions [...]. As a result of these revolutions, some things changed locally [at universities] as well. Some things changed in governance. From a certain authoritarian mode of governance, we went towards democratization. (Interview C)

However, another participant complained that meaningful changes could not happen right away, as revolutions alone are not enough. Social transformation should start in peoples' minds by breaking from the collective consciousness of the oppressed nation:

'The ruin is not on the streets; the ruin is in our minds' [a quotation from *Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, a revolutionary writer born in Ukraine during the Soviet times]. The generations must change, the consciousness and the feeling that something depends on your thought, your voice, and your action should emerge. (Interview I)

The supporters of the second stance were less favorable to European integration. They doubted whether it would be any different from the Soviet oppressive internationalist policy. The participants emphasized multiple distinctions between the Soviet and the Ukrainian and between the Ukrainian and the European. These differences fueled their concerns that the government might concede the newly rediscovered national values in the name of conforming to Europeanization policies. Some senior administrators expressed the following: "[T]here are plenty of advantages in unifying educational programs, courses, education systems, but there are many disadvantages because many institutions lose their identity, their history, their system of education" (Interview C) and "Ukrainian educational traditions must be taken into account and not lost" (Interview F).

While some participants perceived internationalization as a step away from the Soviet past, others were afraid it might interfere with nation-building and rediscovering national identity. However, all senior administrators were unanimous that the long-lasting Soviet policy of self-isolation had finally been broken when Ukraine joined the Bologna Process. At last, scholars could promote their research beyond national borders – freely communicate with their international partners, co-publish together, participate in international conferences, and present their works to international audiences. Moreover, Ukrainian academics could access uncensored information in international journals, repositories, and archives through global databases and search engines.

Challenges of Responding to Europeanization

The new institutional reality of the EHEA forced all three research sites to adopt the market-driven approach. However, the emerging policy priority on internationalization and marketization significantly challenged Ukrainian universities. It not only promoted competition between universities at multiple levels but also served as a ‘push’ factor for Ukrainian students to seek education abroad. Ukrainian universities faced competitive isomorphism at multiple levels. At the national level, universities competed for state funds and endowments, which depended on the university’s position in national rankings, for research funding and highly qualified staff, and for tuition-paying domestic students. At the international level, the competition was predominantly for being present in global rankings. Only a handful of Ukrainian universities were included among the best universities in the world. At the same time, such a representation could secure international funding, attract international students, and enhance international collaborations. The senior administrators from all three research sites admitted that the financial capacities of their universities were insufficient to compete effectively in the global market. To appear in global rankings became a secondary concern for the universities; they primarily struggled to remain visible among hundreds of Ukrainian universities. One senior administrator explained:

We do not say that we can compete today with European universities or with American ones. We have different financing. We must realize clearly that an American university, which is among the top ten in the world ranking, has a budget of tens of billions of dollars, while we have only a few tens of millions. (Interview A)

Senior administrators from NAU and TVHNPU talked about being internationally competitive. For instance, NAU aimed to become one of the top 100 Technical Universities in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and enter the global top 1000 universities in the QS World University Rankings. In comparison, ZIFSU focused all resources predominantly on national and local competition. Operating among over 200 Ukrainian universities, ZIFSU required administrative changes and revisiting governing practices to secure its position within local education markets. ZIFSU representatives recognized that the university could not possibly dream about competing at the global level with their current funds, and maintaining their ranking at the national level was their sole priority at the moment. Ultimately, all respondents concluded that participating in an endless competition and enhancing universities’ reputations posed extreme pressure for university administrators and academics. This situation was described as follows: “We are constantly in the race and constantly competing” (Interview H), “Every self-respecting university has to prove its existence not only in the city, district, in the region, but also beyond these borders” (Interview J), and “It is difficult for us to compete in the global market” (Interview A).

The second challenge Ukrainian universities faced was the outflow of students seeking education abroad. Ukraine’s joining the EHEA opened European universities to Ukrainian students and increased their employment prospects outside Ukraine’s borders. The national and university development strategies pointed out that the brain drain had become a national issue to be immediately addressed. Analytical center CEDOS reported alarming statistics: in the 2014/2015 academic year, Ukrainian students at foreign universities numbered 59,648, which constituted an increase of 129% from 2009 (Slobodian & Stadnyi, 2016). No recent data has been published to provide updated numbers and the scope of students’ outflow from Ukraine.

All three universities acknowledged the brain drain as a threat from internationalization and emphasized the need to regulate students’ outflow from their respective regions. The senior administrators could not but admit that internationalization had broadened the opportunities for Ukrainian students to study abroad. At the same time, integration with Europe promised to attract international students to Ukrainian campuses. However, while that promise was still on the horizon, increasing brain drain became a reality. The outflow of Ukrainian students challenged the universities more than ever:

Now there is a demographic fall in Ukraine. Moreover, a considerable number of citizens leave. They have a right to self-realization in life, work, and study in other countries. The number of students in our university has been decreasing in recent years. (Interview I)

The decreasing number of domestic students caused significant difficulties for the three research sites. Those difficulties included but were not limited to more competitive admissions campaigns, domestic student recruitment and retention, decreases in salaries for faculty and staff, and insufficient income to maintain the facilities or launch new

programs. Despite the universities' intentions to solve the existing problems, the senior administrators had no shared understanding of how to reduce the brain drain or attract international students.

Discussion

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has dramatically impacted the internationalization of Ukrainian higher education. While Ukrainian universities have been at the forefront of major disruptions in their usual operations, few studies have assessed how the war has impacted universities' internationalization. The updates on universities' operations in these extraordinary circumstances are drawn mainly from news releases on university websites.

Russia's heavy shelling of Ukrainian cities has affected the activities of all educational institutions. Most Ukrainian universities continue their usual activities as best they can and have adjusted to challenging circumstances. The universities in the occupied territories have had to evacuate to safer regions controlled by the Ukrainian government. The universities in Mykolaiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, and other cities in the line of fire have suffered the most. They have faced challenges to their survival yet continue providing educational services while adapting to radically new conditions (Skrypnyk, 2022). The university representatives admitted that the community was the cornerstone that allowed them to continue working. Under the heavy shelling, the universities have prioritized safeguarding their students and staff over preserving their infrastructure (Skrypnyk, 2022).

When the war started, Ukrainian universities were allowed to determine independently the duration of their academic year. Universities could also adjust the teaching mode and the duration of academic calendar depending on the military situation in a region (Kumber, 2022). If located in the temporarily occupied territories or in the territories along the front lines, universities shifted to distance education. In other regions, a mixed format of online and in-person education was made possible. Located in northern and western Ukraine, the three research sites focused on maintaining a resemblance of normal educational processes. In particularly dangerous periods, they reverted to distance education and continued in-person classes whenever possible. During air raids, staff, faculty, and students had to retreat to shelters until the raids ended (Blyzniuk, 2020; Lobur & Prokopiv, 2022; Rector of NAU, 2022).

Retaining students and teachers became difficult for Ukrainian universities. By September 2022, more than three million Ukrainians, 8% of which were students, were forced to leave the country to seek international protection (Zharykova, 2022). Many international students had to evacuate quickly. Some domestic students were forced to take academic leave. When they returned to the universities, they found that they had lost their financial support (Kabanets, 2022). The universities addressed the problem with several measures. First, they transferred to a hybrid form of work. Second, they intensified international partnerships and searched for opportunities to offer in-person education for their students in foreign universities (Skrypnyk, 2022).

Some Ukrainian universities tried to create alliances, both domestic and international, predominantly with European universities. The goal of these partnerships was to develop joint educational programs and centres for the collective use of equipment (Kabanets, 2022). In cooperation with international organizations, Ukrainian Global University has been launched by leading Ukrainian educational institutions and the Ukrainian government (UGU, n.d.). This initiative connected Ukrainian students and academics with educational institutions worldwide. Seventy-one educational institutions have already partnered with Ukrainian universities to ensure that Ukrainian students and scholars receive quality educational opportunities under these wartime conditions.

The overall internationalization trajectory of Ukrainian universities also changed. When Russia invaded, Ukrainian universities terminated all relationships with Russian and Belarus organizations. Moreover, Russia and Belarus were excluded from the Bologna Process. The Bologna Follow-Up Group emphasized that the Russian invasion of Ukraine ran counter to the EHEA values and goals and fundamentally violated obligations and commitments undertaken since 2003 (Bologna Follow-Up Group, 2022). Among possible European partners, the close alliance between Ukraine and Poland proved to be the most beneficial choice for international cooperation (Madzhumdar, 2022). The strengthening of the Ukrainian-Polish educational partnership has been rooted in the political and economic support between the two countries.

Information on the impact of war on academic mobility at the three research sites was insufficient to draw firm conclusions. The universities' news releases have indicated that many students and some faculty volunteered to join the territorial defence and the Ukrainian army to defend the country's sovereignty (Blyzniuk, 2020; Lobur & Prokopiv, 2022; Rector of NAU, 2022). Other local news sources have reported on multiple students' fundraisers to support Ukrainian soldiers, student initiatives to weave camouflage nets, media campaigns to raise international awareness about the war in Ukraine, and events to promote national culture and history.

Because of the war, nationalist discourses in Ukraine have shifted from the political fringes into the mainstream. Despite the international perception of the Ukrainian resistance struggle as an attempt to preserve its freedom and maintain its democracy, Russia's war against Ukraine has had a more contextualized and 'sacred' meaning for Ukrainians (Motyl, 2022; Rees, 2022; Shevtsova, 2022). As an oppressed nation, Ukrainians understand the sacredness of the war through their experience of past Soviet mass repressions and genocides, and they hold Russia accountable for the current attempt to renew its attacks on a fully distinct ethnic society (Motyl, 2022; Rees, 2022). The Russian government continues to use "the so-called 'denazification' of Ukraine and the need to free the country from the radical nationalists" (Shevtsova, 2022, p. 132) as a central argument to justify its military invasion. This myth of Ukrainian nationalism fueled discussions about Ukraine's history, traditions, and language while Ukrainians were re-establishing their national identity reshaped by the years of Russia's misinformation and its war against Ukraine. Over the past several years, the discussions of nationalist ideals have intensified in universities as students and faculty rediscover concepts of the Ukrainian nation and nationhood.

Implications and Conclusion

For the past eighteen years, the internationalization of Ukrainian higher education resembled an "interplay between the Bologna Process and the Soviet legacies" (Zakharchuk, 2021, p. 120). Ukrainian universities were embedded and functioned in the institutional environments formed by the EHEA and the Ukrainian educational system. Both pressured Ukrainian universities to either change through the Bologna Process or to remain rigid, preserving Soviet education legacies. The combined conflicting influences affected the three research sites in multiple ways. For example, Europeanization promoted change toward market orientation and accelerated higher education internationalization. NAU, TVHNPU, and ZIFSU developed or renewed their marketization and internationalization strategies. Their policies tended to reject Soviet governing practices in favour of more open and democratic EHEA values.

At the same time, the Bologna Process challenged universities by promoting strategic competition at the local, national, and global levels and facilitating a brain drain from Ukraine. Internationalization was commonly perceived as helpful in reviving Ukrainian national identity, but sometimes there were doubts. Would Europeanization be any different from the Soviet oppressive internationalist policy? Would Ukraine be forced to sacrifice the national values in the name of adapting to European ideals? These fears sometimes provoked resistance to changes.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine sped up all that could only have been achieved in normal times by years of educational reform. Over the last two years, social and political movements inside the country reverberated in academia. Critical thinking and civic values of democracy, social justice, free speech, liberty, and equality found their way into education and became cornerstones of modern Ukrainian higher education. Reconceptualizing national identity manifested itself through shifts towards reviving national identity, and re-examining worldview, curriculum, and pedagogy.

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Understanding the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Context of the War in Ukraine: Critical Conversations from Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The paper argues that the War in Ukraine is promoting and accelerating the Westernization of the region's higher education. The paper employs Mignolo's (2011) geopolitics of knowledge as the theoretical framework to illustrate how internationalization promotes the adoption of Western/English liberal education and how the War in Ukraine is speeding up the process. Using focus groups, I capture conversations with local graduate students in Kazakhstan to demonstrate that Western education is acquired to 1) accelerate the de-Russification of Kazakhstan by moving away from the former imperial power, 2) use English to undermine the Russian language and cement Kazakhstan's independence from Russia, 3) acquire internationally recognized English credentials for global/Western competitiveness and modernity. The participants in this study framed their decision to pursue university graduate studies as freedom from the Soviet system, de-Russification, and modern development, underscoring the high value that some graduate students have for an English credential.

Keywords: de-Russification, geopolitics of knowledge, higher education, internationalization, Kazakhstan, modernity, war in Ukraine.

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақалада Украинадағы соғыс осы аймақтағы жоғары білімнің батыстануына ықпал етеді және жеделдетеді. Мақалада Миньолоның білім геосаясаты (2011) интернационализацияның Батыс/ағылшын либералды білімін енгізуге қалай ықпал ететінін және Украинадағы соғыс бұл процесті қалай тездететінін бейнелейтін теориялық негіз ретінде қолданылады. Фокус-топтарды пайдалана отырып, батыстық білімнің 1) Қазақстанды бұрынғы империялық басқарудан ашақ орыссыздандыруды жеделдету, 2) орыс тіліне нұқсан келтіру және Қазақстанның Ресейден тәуелсіздігін нығайту үшін ағылшын тілін пайдалануға алынғанын көрсету үшін 3) жаһандық/батыстық бәсекеге қабілеттілік пен қазіргі заман үшін халықаралық танылған ағылшын біліктіліктерін алуға сатып алынатынын көрсету үшін Қазақстандағы жергілікті студент-түлектермен әңгіме жүргіздік. Осы зерттеуге қатысушылар батыстық жоғары білім алу туралы шешімдерін кеңестік жүйеден, орыстандырудан және заманауи дамудан босату ретінде тұжырымдап, ағылшын біліктілігі бар диплом алған кейбір түлектердің маңыздылығын атап өтті.

кілтсөздер: дерусификациялану, білім геосаясаты, жоғары білім, интернационалдандыру, Қазақстан, заманауилық, Украинадағы соғыс, батыстандыру

Introduction

The article argues that the Ukrainian War is accelerating the process of Westernizing Central Asia. I specifically refer to the internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan to illustrate the de-Russification process as Western/English epistemology becomes highly valued. Academics and researchers rarely consider questions that address the relationship between political developments and education. Such topics are considered sensitive, and in the modern era of academic surveillance, tenure requirements and self-censorship (Smith, 2006) the field is under-researched and under-theorized. The War in Ukraine is currently a global topical issue. Political commentators present the conflict as between the liberal democratic West and autocratic Russia (Lewis, 2022). In the process, world opinion is divided, with many countries in the Global South, like in Africa, taking a nonaligned neutral position in public (Nzuki, 2023). The Central Asian countries, all former Soviet republics, have adopted a pragmatic policy as Russia is their largest source of imports (except for Kyrgyzstan) (Jordanova, 2023). Kazakhstan adopted and maintains a neutral position urging the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Russia is the former imperial power in the region. Ethnic Kazakhs have not forgotten the poor treatment received from the Russians during the Soviet times (Nurpeis, 2003). For those who view Kazakhstan as a Kazakh nation in which ethnic minorities should assimilate, the idea that the country should continue to free itself from Russian and Soviet influence is strong. This section of the population holds rather negative perceptions of Russia and the Soviet past and sees Russian power as oppressive and colonialist (Tsoy, 2022). Consequently, some see the Russian invasion of Ukraine as the return of the Soviets, an attempt to resuscitate the defunct Soviet empire. Sentiments against the Russians are common, especially among young Kazakhs, indirectly fueling pro-Western thinking. This unmasks the pro-West development policies, in which, for the last 30 years, Kazakhstan has developed strong economic, political, and academic ties with Western countries to achieve the de-Russification of the country (Bhavna, 2007; YU, 2017) masked in the development and modernity discourses.

There seems to be no public debate within universities about the War. Bayetova (2022) observed that most university officials have declared their support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people on social media platforms and websites worldwide. University websites in Kazakhstan are silent and appear uninterested. There are no public lectures or seminars on the War in Ukraine. Unlike the US and European universities that have cut partnerships and financial ties with Russian universities, partnerships with Russian universities continue to blossom.

Alongside these political developments is the internationalization of higher education that sees Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan, adopting Western/English education and other European/Western education policies (Hwami et al., 2024). Since its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan's development policies have been a balance between its Soviet past, the need for a stable relationship with Russia, and the desire to modernize and be a member of the European Community (Sordi, 2017). Joining the Bologna process, adopting English as a medium of instruction, and the many educational initiatives that expose Kazakhstani youth to Western epistemology all fall under the internationalization banner. Not only is Kazakhstan sending students to study abroad, but it is also a growing destination for international students and faculty (Kuzhabekova & Lee, 2018). Some of the studies on internationalization in higher education captured in this Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education have examined national strategies on internationalization and the justification of these strategies (Zhang, 2020), international mobility (Mendes, 2022), institutional social capital in internationalization (Chan, 2018), strategies that contest the Anglo-American mainstream conception of internationalization (Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2019), among other themes. Kazakhstan, Central Asia, and the former Soviet Union are invisible in this publication except for a rare comparative analysis with other academic markets (Ros, 2021). Also missing is the deployment of critical-oriented theories in studying internationalization using empirical approaches. Concerns persist regarding the global dominance of Western epistemology that undermines and replaces local and indigenous knowledges

in the non-Western world. The universalization of Western epistemology and its appropriateness outside the Western world are growing concerns (Santos, 2018). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) referred to the international in the internationalization of higher education as Western and English. Furthermore, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021, p. 78) observes that the dominant approaches to internationalization of higher education are based on “colonial vertical conceptions of internationalization” and Eurocentric worldviews, ideas and practices. Given these moral concerns, this study focuses on how the War in Ukraine promotes and speeds up the Westernization of the region's higher education at the expense of local knowledge. Lured by the institutional, cultural capital inherent in English university credentials, the elite utilize their family socioeconomic advantages to access international higher education.

The context of this study is important since most internationalization research foregrounds developed countries with limited research on non-Western countries. Rarely has comparative and international higher education been empirically studied in a war context. I address this gap and also theorize internationalization by employing the geopolitics of knowledge conceptual tools in an empirical qualitative study. It is, therefore, significant because it offers a space for new contextually relevant internationalization theories to emerge, thus providing the opportunity for a deeper understanding of comparative and international education, especially why, where and whose knowledge questions about epistemology. I draw on Mignolo's (2011) geopolitics of knowledge theory to show how the internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan promotes Western epistemology. Simultaneously and politically significant, it challenges the dominance of Russian epistemology, including the language. Geopolitics of knowledge refers to the idea that knowledge is power and that certain geographical places produce more influential knowledge than others (An & Zhu, 2018). The framework posits the need to question the privileges of knowledge systems considered universal or international and applied without questioning the social contexts (Shahjahan et al., 2022). The framework further reveals epistemological origins and how ideas are used to influence other people (Mignolo, 2011). Mignolo's geopolitics of knowledge concept can reveal the social dynamics of higher education, including the distribution of power and status and the role of institutions in shaping these processes. Second, his theory of geopolitics of knowledge can illustrate the where, why, and by whom questions of higher education knowledge. Therefore, amidst important developments in Kazakhstan, namely transitioning from a Soviet republic to a modern globally competitive nation-state, this article draws on Mignolo's (2011) concepts as an analytical framework to examine how internationalization, the War in neighbouring Ukraine and the evolving landscape of the Kazakhstani higher education system contributes to the reproduction of Western and English knowledge in Kazakhstan. The War in Ukraine speeds up the processes. This article specifically addresses the following two research questions:

- 1) How does the War in Ukraine influence pro-Western views among Kazakhstani students?
- 2) What is the impact of Westernizing higher education on traditional Russian influence in the sector?

I argue that through internationalization, the local elite in Kazakhstan acquire Western institutional capital to 1) accelerate the de-Russification of Kazakhstan by moving away from the former colonizer, Russia, and join the global elite that is defined by the use of English and belief in liberal values, 2) use English to undermine the Russian language and cement Kazakhstan's independence from Russia, 3) acquire internationally recognized English credentials and create a new elite social class in Kazakhstan and globally, a marker of modernity. Although this study is based in Kazakhstan, its findings are relevant to a broader context in Central Asia, Africa and beyond. Using Mignolo's (2002, 2011) conceptual tools, I demonstrate the authority and influence of knowledge produced in the West. I start with an introduction to the Kazakhstani context, then present Mignolo's conceptualization of geopolitics of knowledge, the research design and findings, and finally, the conclusion and limitations.

Literature Review

Internationalization Trends in the Higher Education System of Kazakhstan

In non-Western countries, internationalization studies primarily focus on students' mobility to Western universities, known as internationalization abroad, mainly a preserve of the rich or those who can afford it (Knight, 2004). Another form of international education, internationalization at home, involves the internationalization of the curriculum where domestic students and researchers engage with counterparts from different countries to foster students' international and intercultural skills within their home country, offering an inclusive opportunity for students who may not have the means to study abroad to develop intercultural competencies (Leask, 2016). Higher education internationalization in Kazakhstan aligns with Mignolo's (2011) concept of the geopolitics of knowledge, which refers to a particular form of influential knowledge that is produced in a specific geographical place (West/Europe) and other people from different parts of the world make an effort to acquire this knowledge. In 2010, Kazakhstan became the first Central Asian country to join the European Higher Education Area following the implementation of the Bologna Process, which has significantly influenced international student mobility through various short-term programs such as Erasmus+ (Sordi, 2017). Privileged individuals with advantages and dispositions stemming from their backgrounds tend to benefit from the internationalization process, as it often favours students and institutions with more significant financial resources, language skills, and social capital (Hwami & Bedeker, 2024). For example, internationalization resulted in opportunities for Kazakhstani universities to engage in joint international educational projects, student and faculty mobility through joint research programs and training, double degree programs, international accreditation, and the establishment of Nazarbayev University (NU), and the Bolashak Scholarship Programme (Hwami, 2024).

Three outstanding internationalization policy programs can be observed in Kazakhstan. First, the Bolashak programme, a state policy initiated in 1993, is a policy to promote internationalization abroad by training future leaders in business, public policy, science, engineering, medicine, and other vital fields (Nazarbayev, 2006). It covers all study-related undergraduate and graduate degree costs; the Washington Times called it the "best scholarship programme in the world" (Burton, 2016). Interestingly, most recipients study in Western English universities, further explaining the significance of where knowledge is produced. The second notable internationalization strategy was the establishment of Nazarbayev University (NU) in 2010 with a dual mission: To integrate science, education, and industry, to support the country's development and to advance international best practices (Koch, 2014). NU uses a model of strategic foreign partnerships with institutions such as Duke University, University College London, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Wisconsin (NU, 2023). It is well-equipped with high-quality infrastructure, and about 70% comprises international faculty from Western universities (Hwami, 2023). Finally, Kazakhstan has implemented Trilingual Education, stipulating Kazakh as the official state language, Russian as the language for interethnic communication, and English as a means of global integration (Prilipko, 2017). Since then, the availability of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in universities has significantly risen. The number of universities in Kazakhstan offering EMI degrees increased to 42 out of 125 tertiary institutions in 2018 (Goodman & Karabassova, 2018). The shift to EMI in Kazakhstani universities necessitates students with Russian and Kazakh as their mother tongues (L1) to exhibit competence in English language skills and academic discourse and practices. Adopting the English language further demonstrates the power of Western knowledge, in this case, English.

All these policies further promote the movement of academics (students and faculty, and in some instances, professional administrative staff) from other countries to Kazakhstan. Many international students from the region, including some from Africa, prefer Central Asia (Kazakhstan) as a destination for graduate studies due to lower tuition fees and generous scholarships. Faculty members are mainly from the UK and the US and are motivated to contribute to education and good working conditions (Kuzhabekova & Lee, 2018). This is further evidence of the high value placed on Western education, as argued by Mignolo's concept of geopolitics of knowledge. International students are attracted to English universities in Kazakhstan, and faculty are drawn by the fact that they impart Western English education.

The Importance of English Credentials to Students from Non-English Speaking Countries

The OECD (2024) indicates that the USA, the UK, and Canada are the top destinations for international students. China, India, and South Korea are at the top of the list of countries that send students to Western/English universities. Studies, mainly from the sociology of higher education, have examined how elites in the Global South employ international education to maintain their socially and economically advantageous positions, particularly in the current global context of credential inflation (Wright & Lee, 2019). Other studies have shown that the middle classes rely on the qualifications bestowed by higher education institutions to maintain their class identity and advantage (Brown, 2000). Research has also established that specific geographical locations can be so valuable in the struggle for class advantage that they become forms of capital in themselves, what Borjesson et al. (2007) called "place-specific symbolic capital" (p. 2). In other words, "spatial location determines access to crucial social goods and, in particular, these different kinds of education may have enormous significance for future life trajectory" (Byrne, 1999, p. 110). However, access to geographical locations where specific institutional capital can be acquired is only open to some (Ayling, 2021). These are exclusive places; only a few from the Global South enter these institutions. As the OECD (2024) statistics show, these highly valued institutions are mainly in the USA, UK, and Canada. Some have argued that because of the rise in credentialism and the ubiquitous nature of hegemonic discourses that typically frame the West as technologically, scientifically and intellectually more advanced than Global South countries (Mignolo, 2011), there has been an increase in both the number of international institutions using international/Western curriculum in the Global South (Adams & Agbenyega, 2019) and Western universities with off-shore campuses in the Global South (Nigel, 2018), and the establishment of Western institutions in non-English speaking countries, for example, NU (Hwami, 2023). The availability of Western international branch campuses or off-shore campuses has arguably made it easier for students in the Global South to acquire a desired Western/English degree. In Kazakhstan, these institutions also attract international students who find living and studying in the country less costly, although socially challenging (Mukhamejanova, 2019). Also, institutions such as NU provide grants and free education to international students (Hwami, 2023), thus making them attractive to international students.

Theoretical Framework

Internationalization as Western Epistemology: A Geopolitics of Knowledge Theoretical Framing.

Geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo, 2011) refers to how geopolitical power dynamics influence knowledge production, distribution, and validation. It centres around understanding how geopolitical and colonial histories deeply influence the production and circulation of knowledge. Mignolo (2021) challenges the dominance of Western epistemology, advocating for a critical perspective on knowledge that recognizes the colonial and imperial legacies shaping global intellectual spaces. The concept recognizes that knowledge and its legitimacy are not neutral or universal but are shaped by historical, cultural, and political contexts, often privileging perspectives from dominant geopolitical regions (such as the Global North) over others (Shahjahan et al., 2022). Additionally, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021a) posits that the concept critically addresses the imbalance and inequality in the global circulation of knowledge, highlighting how specific epistemologies and narratives are marginalized or silenced due to their origin outside the centres of geopolitical power. The geopolitics of knowledge is a challenge for everyone, especially the Global South, to consider who gets to produce knowledge, whose knowledge is considered valid, and how power relations affect the global dissemination and acceptance of knowledge (Mignolo, 2002).

Understanding the internationalization of higher education from this lens in the context of the War in Ukraine encompasses examining how geographical and political considerations influence knowledge production, circulation, and legitimization. To Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021b), the concept unmasks Eurocentric epistemological orders, which reinforce the colonial vertical conceptions of internationalization of higher education, where Europe and North America are seen as the centres of knowledge and education. This perpetuates the idea that the international is Europe and North America, marginalizing other knowledge systems and perspectives from the Global South. Mignolo (2021) amplifies the concept by observing what he refers to as the coloniality of knowledge, meaning the imposition of Western epistemologies and ways of knowing, often devaluing or erasing indigenous knowledge and practices. This process of distortion and destruction is a

means of asserting Western dominance. The West or, Europe and North America are part of the belligerents in the War in Ukraine. Thus, deploying Mignolo's concept to analyze higher education internationalization in Kazakhstan in the context of the War in Ukraine illustrates how this process promotes a specific representation of the world deemed universal and modern, reinforcing the hierarchical global education system dominated by the West (Grosfoguel, 2002). This framework allows for a critical reading of the influence of the War in Ukraine on internationalization beyond mere knowledge production to include considerations of who produces knowledge, why, and where it is produced (Hwami, 2024). While Mignolo's geopolitics of knowledge concept urges a departure from traditional Western-centric epistemologies to embrace a more pluralistic, decolonial approach that recognizes and values the diversity of knowledge systems across the world, the War in Ukraine, I argue, seems to have complicated this call. The War in Ukraine may end up entrenching the coloniality of knowledge, establishing a Kazakhstan/Central Asia centred around Western epistemologies and perspectives while marginalizing and silencing other ways of knowing, Central Asian knowledges. This is observed globally, and Eurasia is just a new front witnessing Western epistemological hegemony, a region that was historically untouched by Western colonization. Table 1 illustrates the geopolitics of knowledge concept.

Methodology

Research Design

The data for this paper is from a larger three-year (2021-2023) qualitative research project that focused on understanding the experiences of graduate students undergoing what is generally referred to as international education in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstani students studying at Nazarbayev University (NU) participated in the phase of the study captured in this paper. The study employed a transcendental phenomenological research design, which aims to examine one's experience of a phenomenon and the contexts or situations in which one experiences it (Moustakas, 1994). This study is anchored in critical interpretivism, which centres graduate students' experiences while acknowledging broader social, cultural, and historical forces that shape their experiences. In such a critical interpretive study, "the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, and reports detail views of informants" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). This article's data come from students studying at NU because their proximity to Ukraine makes them more interested and concerned about the War and its consequences. While the study was initially not directly about the War in Ukraine, it was a topic that eventually had to be incorporated, and it dominated conversations during the data collection process.

Table 1

Geopolitics of Knowledge

Questions	Eurocentric/Modern Conceptions	Contemporary Internationalization Practices
Where does knowledge come from?	Matter/idea/ontology conundrum/mind-body dualism	Epistemology frames ontology/reality is made of knowledge (Western reality)
Who produced the knowledge passed on as international in the modern higher education curriculum?	Non-situated knowledge/un-embodied knowledge/objective knowledge	Euro-America/Eurocentrism (Knowledge circulation, origins not important)
Does knowledge have a geography?	Unsituated knowledge/universality/God-complex/God's-eye-view	Ignores situated knowledges/geopolitics of knowledges. The myth of knowledge circulation.

Is there a place for biography/experience in knowledge generation?	Objective knowledge/impartiality/detachment/disinterested knowledge	Some histories are not important. There are no alternatives. There is a template developed from Western history/experience for others to copy and paste.
Does ideology matter in knowledge?	Neutrality in knowledge production/non-political knowledge/scientific knowledge	Power/knowledge dynamics are ignored. Coloniality of knowledge is ignored.

Notes: Adapted and edited from Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021a).

Data Collection

The Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee (NU IREC) granted ethical approval for this study. An email was sent to all graduate students from one faculty inviting them to participate in focus group sessions. The sample included 210 participants. The NU Office of Academic and Graduate Affairs provided the email list. The data came from three focus group sessions with seven students each, the standard recommended number for focus groups (Krueger, 2002). Twenty-one graduate students positively responded to the call to participate in focus group sessions. All twenty-one identified as ethnic Kazakhs were available for the sessions held in places near the NU campus in the city of Astana. The focus group sessions took about 3 hours and were conducted in English. The aim was to encourage balanced contributions and provide a comprehensive understanding of their experience in international education, shedding light on their experiences and perceptions related to the dominance of Western/English education in internationalization initiatives and views towards internationalization in the context of the War in Ukraine. The focus group sessions were held after the outbreak of the War in Ukraine. As a result, the topic was discussed under ideas of partnerships with Western universities, the adoption of the English language in Kazakhstan and internationalization patterns in the region.

Although the research site, NU, is a unique institution in Kazakhstan and Central Asia as a publicly well-funded Western-oriented autonomous institution (Hwami, 2023), similar sites are gradually emerging. Local institutions adopting EMI are growing in number and are attracting international students. Also, Western university branch campuses are increasing at the government's invitation (Nurmaganbetova, 2023). This means the findings from NU could be representative of the broader emerging higher education landscape in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Pseudonyms were used for all research participants to respect research confidentiality and anonymity (Saunders et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

Focus group transcriptions were done by three people (me and two research assistants) and later compared for accuracy. I developed a set of deductive codes addressing or related to the War in Ukraine and the conceptual framework. For example, the value of English education, the importance of where international knowledge is produced, who produced knowledge, the value of local languages, and what these internationalization initiatives mean regarding the ongoing War in Ukraine, among other themes. The next stage in the analysis involved developing a list of codes based on emerging patterns or themes identified from a close reading of transcripts. Comparisons within the focus groups and between focus groups were the primary approaches to creating themes. Since the instruments were all structured, most data were categorised by focus group questions and relatedness to the War in Ukraine. Rather than coding line by line (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I assigned codes to chunks of data (e.g., phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) to offer context for the statement (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). For example, desired international destinations, the value of an English credential, and the value of the English language vis-à-vis Russian and Kazakh. Under each sub-theme, the participants' views were sought in the context of the War in Ukraine (e.g., seeking participants' views towards the English or Russian language, whether the war is affecting this key internationalization activity) as elaborated in the findings section below. Once coding was completed, data were sorted

by codes and clustered into themes to determine patterns and connections to Mignolo's (2011) geopolitics of knowledge conceptual framework and the War in Ukraine.

Positionality

Given the interpretive nature of this study, I must acknowledge how my lived experiences, social identity, and subjectivity influenced the design and execution of this study. I identify as a Black man who grew up in Southern Africa in one of the most racially segregated countries. I am a faculty member at an international research-intensive university in Kazakhstan. I acquired university graduate education and initial university faculty practice in Canada. I am interested in relations between developed and less developed countries, the lack of meaningful development in the non-West, and neoliberal influences. As an international educator, I see similar features in the curriculums of universities in Africa, Canada and Central Asia, resulting in me asking how the same education can be relevant to these different social contexts. In reading all these discourses, I wear "a global South perspective that we must see the global through the lens of colonialism and slavery" (Banerjee-Dube cited in Christian, 2019, p. 170). I am, therefore, an outsider researcher in Central Asia. These social realities and experiences influenced this research in that my identity, experiences and university affiliation affected my reading of the participants' voices. The paper captures the participants' voices as quotations to enhance and protect the study's validity (Creswell, 1998).

Findings

In the context of the War in Ukraine, the participants of this study have been exposed to Western education and values. While considered one of the dominant interpretations of the War, that Russia is at War with Western countries and NATO on Ukraine's territory, Kazakhstani graduate students' views were largely pro-West and critical of Russia. I present these emerging themes/findings in the following sections with representative quotes from pseudonymized participants.

Where and Who Produces Knowledge: The Western or Russian University

The geopolitics of knowledge concept posits that some geographical places produce knowledge that is considered valuable. The issue of where knowledge is produced and by whom (Mignolo, 2011) is topical when critically examining internationalization in higher education. The War in Ukraine is reportedly disrupting student movements, and Russia was a popular destination for students from Kazakhstan. The data from this study show that graduate student participants increasingly desire to go to Western universities for their studies, not Russia. Participants were asked: Would you prefer to study in Western Europe, North America, or Russia rather than at Nazarbayev University? The following responses were captured. "I think studying abroad would be a great opportunity. It would be more like a scholarship to develop as a professional" (Kuttubayeva). Another response was: "I would definitely go if I could study in the West. Even though I said I am patriotic, I believe education in the West is better. Yeah, I think we all have this perspective that Westerners provide better knowledge." (Rauza). For Hamliya, "I will definitely choose a US or UK university because their education is recognized all over the world." Kanat, Nurziya, and Aissulu expressed similar sentiments. When asked what about studying in Russia? The participants persistently referred to Russia as their former colonizer. Moreover, Davran talked more directly about the War in Ukraine. "Who would want to go to Russia? We hear there is a professor here at NU supporting Russia on his Facebook page. Why do such a thing?" Other focus group participants showed support for this view.

The high value placed on Western and English educational credentials in non-Western countries has long been established, with some viewing them as guarantees for top professional positions and social class capital (Ayling, 2021; Holloway et al., 2012). The continued vast movement of students from non-Western countries, primarily non-English speaking Asia, supports the view that Western universities are the centre of modern epistemology (OECD, 2024). The geopolitics of knowledge concept alleges that the internationalization of higher education promotes a particular representation of the world that is considered universal and modern (Mignolo, 2011), and the interest towards acquiring

Western education credentials supports this view. Kazakhstan is no exception to this observation but the War in Ukraine is accelerating the adoption of Western at the expense of Russian epistemology. “We need Western knowledge to run Kazakhstan’s modern industry and not Russian education” (Nursulu). Rauza corroborated this: “Studying in the West is what we all would like to do to develop Kazakhstan. Our history under Russian colonialism makes it challenging to support them or to go and study there. It is not my first choice, not at all.” The student participants expressed their high value on Western English education, providing empirical evidence to the geopolitics of knowledge thesis. Notably, no one indicated that they would like to study in Russia. As indicated above, all the twenty-one participants identified as ethnic Kazakhs, and none were Russian. Ethnic Russians comprise 15% of Kazakhstan's population (Loftus, 2023).

Internationalization, Universal Western Epistemology and the War in Ukraine

Arguing from the geopolitics of knowledge perspective, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021a) posits that Eurocentric epistemological orders reinforce the colonial vertical conceptions of internationalization of higher education, where Europe and North America are seen as the centre of knowledge and education. Mignolo (2011) argues that there is an imperial form of understanding the world where only Western-defined ideals are considered developed and modern. The data captured in this study showed that graduate students consider Western education the only one worthy of study because of its relevance to modern development. This is corroborated by research evidence from other parts of the non-Western world where an English/Western credential is the most sought after as it brings advantages in class competition for scarce goods and services (Kim, 2016; Waters, 2005). The supremacy of the West, Western education and Western-educated faculty is widely recognized and admired by Kazakhstani graduate students. For instance, “the presence of international faculty, some of whom are very successful in academics and industry, for example, one who worked at NASA and the other at Rolls-Royce Motors, brings immense international expertise to the local Kazakhstanis” (Nurziya) including developing open-minded and tolerant Kazakhstanis (Gullala, Aknu, Zhanat, Aizat). The importance of understanding the imbrication of the global and the local was indicated by some participants (Aigul, Serik, Raushana, Azza). These expressions were presented with constant reference to the Soviet past as a time of colonial rule, backwardness and lack of meaningful development. For example, Anar said, “My father told me that Kazakhs were not allowed to be international during the Soviet times. We were only allowed to interact with fellow Central Asians. Only Russians and Ukrainians were allowed to interact with other nations. Now we are free, and to develop, we need Western education and good relations with the West.” Extending this historical perspective, Davron said, “The Kazakh language was suppressed, and we spoke only Russian at school. But now we are independent; I am changing my identity and using Kazakh everywhere possible.” These historical experiences explain the emerging trend in Kazakhstan, where students prefer to study in the West and not in Russia. The War in Ukraine is cementing an anti-colonial and anti-Russian attitude that is very strong among the young generation, such as university students. “The Russians are the aggressors; do not forget they were in Almaty in January (Almira).” “We invited them, though,” retorted Gullala. “That does not matter; what is happening in Ukraine could also be done here in Kazakhstan”, was Almira’s response in this focus group discussion. “So, after this situation between Russia and Ukraine (the War in Ukraine), we started to remember the history that Russia once colonized us; therefore, like most of us, our first language is Russian. And after this, I started to realize that actually like this is what it takes to be patriotic. First of all, you have to know your language, your Kazakh, your mother tongue. So, to be patriotic right now means learning the Kazakh language, even though your first language was Russian. Knowing your language is one of the most important ways to save your identity. Furthermore, that means being patriotic. Yeah!” (Zilola)

The discussion about language and patriotism inevitably led to the focus group discussion on the war in Ukraine. Azza said, “We were forced to speak in Russian. Now my Kazakh is poor. I speak and write Russian better than Kazakh. It is embarrassing.” Nursulu corroborated, “The Soviet times were not good for the Kazakhs. It is difficult to support the Russians.” What is observed from these expressions is a historically developed animosity towards Russia and its imperial past. The participants observe the old imperial Russia in the War in Ukraine. Concerning the internationalization of higher education, Russian universities and language are the first casualties of this war. It can be argued that Kazakhstani students

now prefer to study in the West rather than Russia despite the huge cultural differences between the West and Central Asia. The War in Ukraine is causing the young Kazakhstanis to drift away from Russia towards the West faster than past Soviet experiences had caused. As was observed, the English language is creating a new class of people in Kazakhstan (Hwami & Bedeker, 2024; Bedeker et al., 2024). As the War in Ukraine is seen as between Russia and the West, the recipients of education under internationalization have a Western outlook towards life. The young would like to see more Westernization in Kazakhstan. To Nurziya, "The West has freedoms, and that is what we would like to see here." Laisara expanded, "We should have a democracy like it is in the West." Wearing a qualitative interpretive lens, these participants are saying they like the democratic West and not Russia. Considering the views of these participants, it will be interesting to see whether student movements to Russia will retain the pre-war volumes after the war.

The geopolitics of knowledge concept enables the reading of higher education internationalization beyond what is knowledge to who and where knowledge is produced (Mignolo, 2011; 2021). The perspective unmasks cognitive injustices, where specific knowledge systems and perspectives are privileged over others (Santos, 2018). What the War in Ukraine promotes in Kazakhstan is an adoption of Western epistemology, dealing a significant blow to the cries of the geopolitics of knowledge school. Because of the War in Ukraine, the intersecting of history and international education, an imagery of Kazakhstan's future could be made. For these Kazakhstani participants, the future is Western. This may culminate in the marginalization and exclusion of diverse ways of knowing, hindering the cultivation of a truly inclusive and diverse international higher education in Kazakhstan.

The War in Ukraine, Modernity and the International

According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021), the international in Western and English. Some scholars and commentators present the War in Ukraine as an attack on European civilization (Petrencu, 2023), thus not expected to happen in Europe but maybe in Africa or the Middle East. The West is associated with modernity. It is a view that positions the West and its values, knowledge systems, and achievements as superior and universal while marginalizing and devaluing non-European cultures and knowledge (Bedeker et al., 2024; Mignolo, 2021). Contemporary internationalization initiatives emulate Western education systems, and Kazakhstanis are very conscious. Some brand internationalization in higher education as Westernisation, specifically Anglicization (Stein et al., 2019). To Serik, "In Kazakhstan or post-Soviet countries, there is a mindset when discussing development. We are always thinking about the West." The government of Kazakhstan refers to a multi-vector policy in education that underscores diversification, international collaboration and educational modernization (Nurbek, 2024). The international is Western and English (Ndlovu-Gathseni, 2021), and modernization refers to the West, not Russia. "We need Western ideas and education to develop and maybe catch up with the First World" (Kuttubayeva). After probing questions on whether adopting Western education was not moving from one Soviet to Western neoliberal hegemony, Rauza said, "It is out of free will. No one is forcing us to study English or go to study at Cambridge or other universities in developed countries. We want to develop and be modern like the West. We have the resources. However, we were forced to learn the Russian language." To Zilola, "Russia is not a modern society. Russians are Soviets and the Soviet Union was not good for us. Russia is not good for us, but Western knowledge and technology is what we need." The association of the West with the modernity that Kazakhstan should strive to become was consistent in this discussion. For example, "Most of us are angry because of this war. We do not need it in this region. We must develop, we are behind and need to catch up and not wars" (Nursulu). Davron thought that not supporting the War in Ukraine was in line with the policy of the government of Kazakhstan. "I think what we are saying here is in line with our government's policy. I have not heard any government official, even our President, speaking in favour of the war." Serik said this was practical as Kazakhstan cannot survive without Russia: "We have to be practical, however. We cannot do without Russia. She is our neighbour, but I do not support the war. We all think that if Kazakhstan does anything that Russia does not like, we can also be invaded. What we want is not war but to develop and be modern."

Thus, these voices present Russia as an obstacle to Kazakhstani modernization, and the War in Ukraine is the evidence. From a geopolitics of knowledge perspective, these participants yearn for Western education. The participants' views are characterized by believing in the superiority of European epistemology and civilization (Mignolo, 2021).

Conclusion

This study aimed to centre and amplify the voices and experiences of Kazakhstani graduate students participating in international education in Kazakhstan in the context of the War in Ukraine. I did so by offering insight into how they understand and conceptualize the importance of English international credentials and the historical factors that motivate them. I drew on the geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo, 2011) as a conceptual framework to understand what drives students from Kazakhstan towards an English education and to shed light on the role and importance of institutional cultural capital derived from English universities. Equally significant is Kazakhstan's Soviet past, which many would instead not remember. The War in Ukraine is catalysing a process already in motion: the drift away from Russian influence and ways of life, including international education. Increasingly, Kazakhstani students are imagining international education as Western. Several significant conclusions can be derived from the findings contributing to comparative and international higher education research.

First, the concerns of scholarship from the Global South that there is cognitive injustice characterized by Western epistemologies dominating and marginalizing other knowledges (Santos, 2018) has been dealt a significant blow. Case studying Kazakhstan, the local epistemology cannot be separated from the Russian language and culture. With the War in Ukraine defined as an attack on modern civilization values and Kazakhstan students agreeing with that view, it can be reasonably argued that the foundations of Westernized Kazakhstan have already been laid down.

Second, while university choice decision-making is often framed as rational (Perna, 2006), this study's findings suggest that obtaining an English credential is the most crucial consideration for some students and nothing else. While this is common among students in the Global South, what makes this unique in Kazakhstan is that some participants in this study framed their decision to pursue university graduate studies as freedom from the colonial Soviet system. Therefore, Western-oriented international education could be instrumental in the de-Russification of Kazakhstan.

The findings show that the War is accelerating the adoption of Western values via international education offered in English/Western institutions. However, it must be added that the study participants are young and ethnic Kazakhs, a category that is generally pro-West and anti-Soviet/Russia. Also, the research site is a Westernized social entity, possibly more than any other institution in Kazakhstan. One wonders what findings a different age group (e.g., over 50) or ethnic group (e.g., Russian) would produce. Equally complicating the developments in Kazakhstan is the growing number of Russian universities branch campuses (Nurmaganbetova, 2023) and the movement of academics from Russia to Kazakhstani universities (Bayetova, 2022). These developments present the higher education terrain as fluid and there is the need to avoid rushing into conclusions caused by the War in Ukraine. Moreover, more research is needed on the long-term outcomes of academic and social experiences that fall under the banner of internationalization in uncertain environments, such as those created by the War in Ukraine.

Limitations of the Study

Like all qualitative research studies, the study's sample means the findings should be cautiously generalized. Also, qualitative interpretive research involves the researcher employing his experiences to understand participants' expressions. Other people might interpret the findings differently. Lastly, the fact that NU is a very Westernized institution should also be considered as it is the only one of its kind in Kazakhstan. The participants of this study are different to the rest of the country's student population.

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STEM Students' International Mobility in Kazakhstan in the Context of the Russia-Ukraine War Conflict

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Abstract

Using the pull-and-push model as a main theoretical framework, this qualitative interview-based study explores the changes in STEM students' intentions to pursue international mobility in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war and the factors related to students' mobility decisions in the context of geopolitical tensions. The findings suggest that in situations with military conflict, STEM students are 'pulled' and 'pushed' to make decisions under the influence of the factors located both on the receiving and domestic sides, and the decisions of whether to pursue international mobility were primarily driven by safety, financial, and social tension concerns. The study's findings offer some theoretical and practical implications of the changes in student mobility in the context of war conflict for higher education institutions internationally.

Keywords: international mobility, STEM students, war conflict

Introduction

Within the global scholarly inquiry on the internationalization of higher education, studies focusing on international student mobility attracted greater attention during the last three decades. According to estimates from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics (2022), the global number of international students has increased from 2.1 million students in 2000 to 6.1 million before the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the pandemic has disrupted this trend, more students are predicted to seek education abroad opportunities outside their home countries in the following years (de Wit & Altbach, 2021).

STEM students are one of the largest categories of international students worldwide (UNESCO, 2022). STEM talent mobility has a significant development impact on both host and sending countries. This is reflected in how many countries

strive to increase the educated and skilled STEM workforce critical to economic growth (Beine et al., 2014). The industrialized countries with low STEM enrolment rates and nations with an aging population try to attract more STEM international students who would stay and work in the receiving country after graduation (Freeman et al., 2019; Galama & Hosek, 2009;). Countries with lesser industrial capacity try to send their STEM students abroad to get a quality STEM education so that they can contribute to developing their home country's STEM innovative capacity after completion of their studies (Beine et al., 2014).

While the increasing numbers of student mobility reflect the students' aspirations to pursue education outside their home countries, they are still unable to uncover all the multitude of factors that influence the students' mobility decisions (Choudaha & DeWit, 2014). According to Choudaha (2017), three significant events influenced international student mobility in the 21st century before the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States; (2) the global financial recession in 2008/09; (3) a combination of three: the slowdown of the Chinese economy, 2016 UK referendum to leave the European Union, and Presidential elections in the US. Currently, the world is facing a new set of global, political, and social challenges, such as the recent COVID-19 crisis, military conflicts, and climate change, which might have a significant impact on international students' mobility trends. Given that many international students come to receiving countries to pursue STEM education, it is critical to understand the factors that influence STEM students' decisions in contexts affected by geopolitical challenges.

This paper takes up the question of international student mobility in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, which started in February 2022, to understand whether and how this conflict has impacted STEM student mobility since the start of this conflict. The complex geopolitical situation caused by the Russia-Ukraine war and the changing geopolitical landscape seem to have profoundly changed the established models of international mobility in the region, but it is unclear to what extent. Given that many students from Kazakhstan used to choose Russian technical universities before the Russia-Ukraine war, it is important to understand what factors determine STEM students' decisions in current reality.

The study intends to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How did the STEM students' intentions to pursue international mobility change due to the Russia-Ukraine war?

RQ2. Which factors determine the mobility decisions of STEM students in the context of current geopolitical realities?

Contextual Background

In the emerging field of International Student Mobility (ISM), limited research is specifically dedicated to mobile students from post-Soviet countries. These countries were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which had limited outbound student mobility and primarily hosted students from other socialist nations (Chankseliani, 2015). The disintegration of the Soviet Union disrupted the period characterized by restrictions on travel. There was a subsequent increase in migration, with many students actively pursuing study-abroad opportunities (Chankseliani, 2017).

Except for Kyrgyzstan, which experiences a positive net flow of internationally mobile students (3,397 in 2017), the other four Central Asian countries primarily served as source nations, according to data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (Alimukhamedov, 2020). Russia successfully recruited international students from former Soviet states due to a complex mix of motivations: (1) to strengthen its 'soft power' (Grove, 2017), (2) to improve the country's economy (Barinova et al., 2022); (3) attract talented students, particularly from STEM areas who will work in the country's strategic fields post-graduation (Belov, 2020). Between 2013 and 2019, international student enrollments in Russia increased by 40%. Before the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia occupied the sixth place among the most popular destinations for international students worldwide. It was estimated that by 2025, the income from foreign enrolments in the Russian economy will constitute around \$6.5 billion (Akhmetzhenova, 2020).

Russia's attractiveness as a core country in the region stems from its size, economic prosperity, linguistic compatibility and similar cultural environment (Chankseliani, 2015). Furthermore, Russia stands out as a provider of top-

quality higher education within the post-Soviet region, as evidenced by its strong representation in international rankings. Russia also offers highly conducive circumstances for harnessing academic potential in STEM in the region. According to Tarasova et al. (2019), Russia has notably outperformed countries like Great Britain, Denmark, Switzerland, and the Netherlands in the number of students graduating from programs focused on natural sciences, engineering, and construction. Moreover, the country has successfully enhanced its innovative capacity by developing university-industry collaborations. Most regional technical universities, established in the 1960s-70s within the 'industrialization' initiative of the Soviet Union, followed the strategy of supplying highly qualified STEM specialists for the needs of the region, paying high attention to the demands of local industry (Ershov et al., 2020)

Kazakhstan presents an interesting case for exploring students' international mobility as it is a typical sending country (Almukhambetova, 2022), experiencing a significant brain drain, especially from the Northern Kazakhstan regions bordering Russia and mainly in STEM fields. According to the National Center for the Development of HE (ENIC), the number of Kazakhstani students participating in outbound academic mobility for the last 12 years demonstrates an almost tenfold increase in outbound student numbers. Moreover, Kazakhstan takes 8th place among the top 20 countries for outbound student mobility, according to the T.I.M.E Association report (2021).

A large share of Kazakhstani students who prefer to study in Russia are students from the Northern regions of Kazakhstan that border Russia. In 2017, the total number of Kazakhstani students studying abroad exceeded 89,000, and from them, approximately 70,000 students chose to study in universities in Russia (Chankseliani, 2018). According to Akhmetzhanova & Kuzhabekova (2022), 94.6% of Kazakhstani students from Northern Kazakhstan regions chose to study in Russia, whereas only 5.4% chose Europe before the Russian-Ukraine military conflict.

Given that Kazakhstan is a typical sending country, a closer look at the change in international mobility intentions of STEM Kazakhstani students, as well as the adjustments they have made in their study plans due to geopolitical events, might offer some insights into research on international mobility and to research on STEM education as the paper also discusses the implications of the changes in student mobility on domestic higher education and on higher education in receiving countries.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by a 'push-pull' model for international student mobility (Altbach, 1998, based on Lee's theory of human migration, 1966). The model proposes that two types of factors influence students' decisions to pursue international mobility. Traditionally, the push factors are associated with the domestic country, while the pull factors are associated with the destination country. The students are 'pushed' by unfavorable higher education conditions in their home countries and 'pulled' by the scholarship and other opportunities provided by receiving countries (Altbach, 1998). The pull factors are usually country-specific and include advanced research facilities, scholarships provided to international students, employment, and migration opportunities (Li & Bray, 2007). Push-pull model also suggests that domestic higher education might not only have the negative 'push' factors, but also implement some policies, acting as reverse push factors that might keep students at home countries. Similarly, receiving countries and institutions might not always attract international students but have some negative influences that serve as reverse pull factors (Li & Bray, 2007).

There are several important considerations behind choosing push-pull model as a guiding framework for the study. First, the push-pull framework of international student mobility had never been tested in post-Soviet context. Second, the situation with the war conflict in the region suggests that students might be 'pulled' and 'pushed' to make decisions under the influence of completely different factors and pre-war factors might have enhanced/weakened in the context of geopolitical tensions. Third, this paper is one of the few studies focusing on STEM students. This framework is widely used to explore the students' intentions to pursue an international education, but there is a lack of studies exploring STEM students' decisions to pursue international mobility.

Overview of Previous Research

Many studies on international student mobility have focused on understanding the factors that pull and push students to decide to study abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Previous research identified some macro-level factors attracting international students to pursue education outside their home countries. Scholars argue that such factors as favorable immigration policies, and job market opportunities pull students to pursue higher education outside their home countries (Altbach, 1998). At the same time, such factors working in domestic side as poor quality and lack of access to educational resources, economic instability, low living standards, and lack of employment opportunities, also push students to seek higher education abroad.

Although previous studies argue that most factors influencing students' decision to pursue international mobility are located at the country level (Kim, 2015), the research also points out several factors on an institutional level, such as policies at higher education institutions aimed at recruiting more international students, as well as the availability of scholarships for international students and tuition fees (Chadee & Naidoo, 2008). Prior research also mentions domestic higher education opportunities can influence students' intentions to stay in their home countries, serving as reverse push factors. In contrast, some negative factors working on the side of the destination country, such as political instability and unwelcoming attitudes, might negatively affect the students' intentions to pursue education overseas and push them away from choosing a particular country (Li & Bray, 2007). Scholars also agree that among the most influential factors in students' choice are geographic, cultural, historical, and language proximity (Kondakci, 2011), as students still prefer to choose a context with a more accommodating linguistic and cultural background.

Previous research suggests that the internationalization of higher education has become more complicated in the context of recent global, regional, and national developments, such as health crises, religious extremism, and war conflicts (Makinen, 2023). Several views have been expressed on how the conflict and crisis might affect international student mobility. According to De Wit & Altbach (2021), some receiving countries have become dependent financially on international students and will have to rethink their recruitment policies. Both domestic and host universities in the regions affected by conflict and crisis might experience changes in mobility patterns and will have to rethink their student recruitment policies, prioritize student safety and wellbeing issues and be also able to adjust to the changing mobility flows (De Wit & Altbach, 2021).

Methodology

The study employs an exploratory qualitative research design to achieve its aims (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study was conducted between May 2023 and August 2023.

Sampling

The participants were recruited for the study via convenience and purposeful maximal variation sampling procedures, which helped to obtain the variation in participants' responses. The participants varied in their gender, region, type of STEM school, and ethnicity (see Table 1 for more information about participants). To increase the chances of recruiting graduates of STEM schools, a research assistant hired for the project also placed an advertisement on social networking sites.

Overall, 29 students who graduated from schools in 2022 (before the war started) and who graduated in 2023 (after the war started) were interviewed, so the participants of the study are 11 current mobile students and 18 prospective mobile students. Both categories of participants were older than 18. The participants were purposefully selected from 6 regions bordering Russia as majority of the school graduates from these regions chose to study in Russian universities before the start of the war. Overall, there were 10 school graduates from Astana, 6 students from the Semey, 5 school

graduates from Kostanay, 5 school graduates from Pavlodar, and 1 school graduate from each region Oskemen, Petropavl and Karaganda, respectively.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Code	Status	Gender	Region	STEM school	Ethnicity
A1	School graduate	Male	Astana	NIS	Tatar
S2	Student graduated pre conflict	Female	Semey	NIS	Russian
S3	Student graduated pre conflict	Female	Semey	Economic lyceum	Russian
S4	Student graduated pre conflict	Male	Semey	Economic lyceum	Russian
A5	Transfer student	Male	Astana	NIS	Kazakh
A6	Student graduated pre conflict	Male	Astana	NIS	Kazakh
O7	School graduate	Male	Oskemen	Physics and Maths school	Russian
A8	School graduate	Male	Astana (lived in Uralsk)	STEM school	Kazakh
A9	School graduate	Female	Astana	STEM school	Russian
A10	School graduate	Male	Astana	STEM school	Kazakh
A11	School graduate	Male	Astana	STEM school	Kazakh
S12	Student graduated pre conflict	Male	Semey	Economic Lyceum	Russian
K13	School graduate	Male	Kostanay	BIL	Kazakh
K14	School graduate	Male	Kostanay	BIL	Kazakh
K15	School graduate	Male	Kostanay	BIL	Kazakh
K16	School graduate	Male	Kostanay	BIL	Kazakh
A17	Student graduated pre conflict	Male	Astana	NIS	Kazakh
S18	School graduate	Male	Semey	STEM school	
S19	School graduate	Male	Semey	Economic Lyceum	Russian
P20	Student graduated pre conflict	Male	Pavlodar	Mainstream School	Russian Ukrainian
K21	School graduate	Male	Kostanay	BIL	Kazakh
P22	School graduate	Male	Pavlodar	NIS	Kazakh
PL23	School graduate	Male	Petropavl	NIS	Kazakh
A24	Student graduated pre conflict	Female	Astana	NIS	Korean
P25	School graduate	Female	Pavlodar	NIS	Kazakh
A26	School graduate	Female	Astana	NIS	Kazakh
P27	Student graduated pre conflict	Female	Pavlodar	NIS	Kazakh
KA28	Student graduated pre conflict	Male	Karaganda	BIL	Kazakh
P29	Student graduated pre conflict	Female	Pavlodar	NIS	Kazakh

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interviews with STEM school graduates currently pursuing higher education in Russia or planning to pursue higher education abroad before the war started were chosen as the main data collection instrument. This type of interview was chosen as it allows the researchers to understand the participants' experiences in the words of the participants themselves (Smith, 1995). The semi-structured interview approach also allowed the organization of the interview process around themes identified in the international literature on student mobility, as well as allowed for flexibility to ask some unplanned questions to obtain clarifications. The interview protocol included questions collecting information about (1) the demographic characteristics of the participants, (2) questions about students' intentions to pursue international mobility in the context of geopolitical events, (3) the factors related to their decision-making, and (4) challenges in decision making.

The invitation to participate in the interview contained information about the purposes and the format of the study, as well as the background of the researchers. The interviews were conducted in the language chosen by the participant (either Russian or Kazakh) and at a time convenient for the participants and were recorded upon obtaining written or oral consent.

The process of conducting the study was guided by ethical principles and regulations. The study was approved by the University Institutional Ethics Review Committee. Measures were taken to protect the rights of the participants at all stages: data collection, data analysis, and storage of data. Given the topic of the research, additional measures were implemented to protect the identity of participants. The research team ensured there were no sensitive questions, especially with regard to the attitudes to the Russia-Ukraine war. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any moment during the interview and not to answer some questions if they felt uncomfortable.

Data Analysis Procedures

The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and thematically coded with the help of Nvivo12 research software. The coding process was guided by the themes emerging from the literature on international student mobility, and emerging themes were registered from the interviews with participants. The lead author and 2 research assistants who are proficient in both Kazakh and Russian conducted data analysis collaboratively to ensure intercoder reliability (Lombard et al., 2002). To demonstrate the trustworthiness of the collected data and transparency of data collection, evidence in the form of illustrative quotes is used extensively in subsequent chapters of the paper.

Findings

The findings below are presented as themes emerging from the broader categories of the 2 research questions guiding this inquiry: (1) changes in STEM students' intentions to pursue international mobility due to the Russia-Ukraine war, and (2) factors that determine the mobility decisions of students in the context of current geopolitical realities.

Changes in STEM Students' Intentions to Pursue International Mobility

As participants constitute both those who were applying to universities and those who were already pursuing international mobility when the war started, this section presents information on the change in students' plans and the decision-making process.

Almost half of the interviewed school graduates who graduated in 2023 had already decided where to study by the time the interviews were conducted. Fourteen participants have already decided on HE institution, received their admission offers, or have already started their education. Nine students planned to pursue higher education in Russia before the conflict but changed their university plans due to the war conflict. Seven participants decided to stay in Kazakhstan. Three students reported that they were still planning to pursue education in Russia. The participants mentioned migration as their intention in pursuing HE in Russia.

Out of 11 interviewed students who were already pursuing mobility in Russia when the war started, a male participant reported that they transferred to Kazakhstani University due to instability associated with the war conflict. When talking about his feelings, one participant reported being 'overwhelmed' and nervous about the situation. He also shared that his parents insisted on his return, although he had to reapply to university in Kazakhstan after his arrival. Another student also mentioned that he was very concerned with the situation as the prices for rent and food started to grow. Several students displayed their disappointment with the situation as they could not transfer to Kazakhstani universities due to the regulations in Kazakhstani universities. They considered it a waste of time and money as they had to reapply to university in Kazakhstan. A comment from the participant:

The war started in February, and after that, I started to feel the change. The shops closed. I realized that the situation was getting worse. I was very uncertain whether I needed to return to Kazakhstan...

The prices started to grow for food, for rent...It was very hard as I was in doubt, then made a decision... It was a waste of time and money... (A5)

Other interviewed participants also stated they had friends who studied in Russian universities when the war started. According to the participants, most of them decided to return to Kazakhstan:

Yes, I heard from my friends...who entered Moscow universities. Almost all of them came back to Kazakhstan except for one girl. They either transferred to universities here or even dropped out of their studies. It was after the first news about mobilization (P29)

Three female students who entered Russian universities before the war started reported that they decided to continue their studies as they were confident that there were fewer risks to be involved in mobilization for women than for men. Another reason reported by these participants was that the universities where they studied were situated in regions that were not actively involved in the war conflict. Although they decided to stay, they felt anxious about the situation:

I feel the situation is different now. There is pressure, it's a war! I am not afraid to call this "a war." The place where I live is relatively peaceful and quiet, but there are places where the situation is much worse and many young people prefer to leave and the girls also leave when it is still possible to leave (A24).

When asked about the reasons why they preferred to stay than to return to Kazakhstan, a female participant highlighted that she intended to apply for a narrower STEM specialization, such as Bioengineering and Biotechnology, but only Biology majors were available in Kazakhstani universities, mostly in those situated in the capital cities and not in the regional ones. Therefore, she had to apply to a technical university in St.Petersburg and decided to stay to finish her studies.

In Kazakhstan, we do not have certain universities with certain narrow specializations. For example, a biotechnology major or, similarly, a uranium industry major is available only in 1-2 universities. These specialties are well developed in Russia ... certain specialties, I think, that are still more developed abroad. Those specialties that we need are still not developed much. For example, nuclear technologies in Russia have entire institutes, and in Kazakhstan, I could not find anything except KAZNU [Kazakh National University] (P25).

Overall, the interviewed students studying in Russia almost unanimously stated that there would be fewer students from Kazakhstan willing to pursue international mobility in Russia in the current and subsequent years. Several noted that they would have considered other destinations if they knew about the possibility of the war conflict. A quote from a female participant: After the situation changed, if I were a school graduate now, I would think a hundred times before going to Russia as this is a big risk to some extent... (P25)

Factors that Determine the Mobility Decisions of STEM Students in the Context of Current Geopolitical Realities

Pull Factors on the Receiving Side

Quality of STEM programs.

Almost a third of the participants (n=10) highlighted that they were attracted by the quality of STEM education in Russian universities and the universities' reputation. Several students highlighted STEM programs offered in Russian universities and highly qualified faculty at technical universities, especially in such big cities as Moscow and St. Petersburg. Three participants stated that if not for the war, they would still pursue education in Russia as they still considered that technical universities offer a quality education in STEM subjects and are much more advanced in some STEM fields, such as IT and mathematics. As one participant commented:

Before these geopolitical events, I thought that I would apply there [to a university in Russia], I know that Moscow State University is very good...in general, Russian universities- are quite advanced, especially in Maths, and there were many Russian mathematicians who were...the prominent scholars in their field, so yes, I was planning to apply there (PL23)

Personally, I think that the quality of teaching is higher in Russia, as they have more experience in IT. In Kazakhstan, IT disciplines are being taught only in some universities. In Russia, they have been teaching IT disciplines for a while, so Russia is much more advanced in this field (A1)

STEM Infrastructure and Capacity.

In the participants' view, the university infrastructure is well-developed in Russia, and this was one of the factors attracting students from neighboring countries. Other advantages of technical universities in Russia are the well-equipped labs, the science parks situated on campus territory, and the funding provided for STEM research. According to the participants, Russia has inherited all technical universities and the technological and research infrastructure after the breakup of the Soviet Union and it is much more advanced than in Kazakhstan, which had to build its science infrastructure from scratch. As the participant commented:

Infrastructure is more developed there [in Russia]...we might have only 3-4 universities in the city [Kazakhstan], whereas, in Russia, 10 to 20 different universities, and each of them will have much more funding, a big campus, and also companies situated on the university campus which collaborate with the university (A6)

Russia was the core country of the Soviet Union, and it already had good universities. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, like many other post-Soviet countries, was in decline after gaining independence. Even now, there are very few good universities in Kazakhstan. Russia has a bigger number of universities. Therefore, students have more choices of where to study, and accordingly, there are more opportunities...

Recruitment Policies of Russian Universities.

It seems that the aggressive recruitment policies of Russian universities and their cooperation with some STEM-focused schools in Kazakhstan were also contributing factors in school graduates' decision-making process. Several students who chose to study in Russian universities before the war started shared that they participated in STEM Olympiads and examinations organized by Russian technical universities. As a result, the winners were invited to summer schools organized by Russian universities, became more familiar with the university, and then accepted the admission offer. As one participant commented:

Yes, it turns out that the school associated with the university in Novosibirsk [Russia] has cooperated with our economic lyceum in Semipalatinsk for a long time... We passed the entrance exams. If you got a good score, you were approved, and for a week, we traveled to Novosibirsk. And there we studied in a physics school, there were all sorts of excursions, lectures, and team-building events that were very cool. (S12)

Moreover, in most cases, the high-performing students had been offered a full-ride scholarship from the university and made their decision to enter the university far ahead of the official round of applications to Kazakhstani universities. According to the participants, the whole application process to Russian universities is easy and can be done online. The participants also shared that, in their view, it was much more difficult to enter a university in Kazakhstan than in Russia as the entrance examinations to international standard universities in Kazakhstan are very competitive compared to Russian universities, which only require a test on STEM subjects. According to the participants, the entrance test is much easier to pass than Unified National Testing in Kazakhstan. In addition, the whole package that is offered for talented STEM students

from Kazakhstan is quite generous: full scholarship, accommodation, stipend, which is higher than in KZ universities, as well as the opportunity to have paid internships and live in a bigger city.

...there are international standard universities in Kazakhstan, they are very few, and it is really difficult to enter these universities. It's much easier to enter a good university in Russia. Especially taking into account that Russia offers scholarships for students from Kazakhstan. Before the geopolitical events, this offer was much better than local universities could suggest, and another factor is that cities in Russia are much more developed than in Kazakhstan (S4)

Geographic and Language Proximity and Cultural Affinity.

The analysis of interview data also identified that Russian universities were also a priority for school graduates with limited English language and Kazakh language proficiency but still willing to pursue education outside Kazakhstan. It is important to note that some participants of Russian ethnicity reported their limited Kazakh language capacity and related it to the low quality of teaching of Kazakh at their schools. Participants highlighted that the fact that there was no language barrier was an important factor when choosing the destination country.

The reason why I was going to apply to Russian University is that you just need to know the Russian language to apply. This was the main reason. And now, I am trying to learn English and Kazakh (P20).

I had a priority [of choice]: only in Russian because, honestly speaking, English, well, at school, I did not like it much because of the teachers. I also had problems with Kazakh (P20).

There will be no language barrier, like in any other foreign country because we speak fluent Russian here (A5).

Four students reported that they were inclined to study in Russia that it was easy for them to commute there from their home cities, situated very close to the Russian border.

As one of the participants from Uralsk commented:

I lived in Uralsk [Kazakhstan], and we were very close to the border with Russia. It turned out that it was convenient for me, and it was one of the closest universities. Say, Astana is 2000 kilometers from Uralsk, and Kazan [Russia] is only 500 kilometers away. That is, it was easier for me to study and live in Kazan and come to Uralsk than to Astana (A8).

...geographical location. My hometown, Semey [Kazakhstan], Novosibirsk [Russia] is almost at the same distance that Almaty [former capital of Kazakhstan] is from Semey, that is, in fact...about half a day's drive by car (S12).

When asked about other factors that have influenced their decision of where to study, one participant also stated that Russia was a priority destination for him due to his awareness of the destination country. The student noted that he would be comfortable studying in Russia due to the 'similar culture,' similar way of life, and, at the same, being outside their home country and having new experiences.

Employment and Immigration Opportunities.

Five interviewed participants, especially those currently studying in IT majors, have highlighted that they see more employment prospects in STEM and IT companies in Russia with higher salaries right after graduation and professional development opportunities. Those students (all of Russian ethnicity) highlighted that it makes no sense for them to come back to Kazakhstan, and they are planning to stay in Russia after graduation. As one participant commented:

...I do not see any reason for returning to Kazakhstan to work in my specialty. If you compare IT specialists' salaries in Russia and Kazakhstan, they differ as heaven and earth. Even now, my friends and my brother, his groupmates who have just finished their fourth year of studies...their salary is...more than a million tenge (S2)

This participant also commented that IT departments in the university where he studies, work in close partnership with Russian IT companies. The student highlighted that most students get job offers from these companies in their junior year and start working part-time, even being full-time students.

Overall, the interview data suggests that Kazakhstani students were attracted by a combination of geographical, linguistic, cultural, and education/employment-related pull factors, including the opportunity to live in bigger and more developed cities and advice from students who previously studied in Russia. An illustrative quote on the reasons why students from Kazakhstan chose Russian universities:

I think because Russia is just a bigger country, it is close to us geographically, it cooperated with us in the past, it cooperates with us now. Well, at that time, it was more developed and maybe, you know, like word of mouth, maybe their older brothers went there, also their older friends also went there, and all this started a chain reaction, that is, they liked it, and they saw that there were more job opportunities there as well. I think big cities attracted them too. (S19).

Push Factors on the Domestic Side

Low Quality of STEM Programs and Rigorous Admission.

Many interviewed participants mentioned that one of the major factors that push the students to seek higher education outside Kazakhstan is the low quality of STEM programs. As participants commented: "Most students are not happy with the education in Kazakhstan. Not in all the universities, except the top ones like Nazarbayev University [western style university in the capital city], the quality of education is good" (S12).

The students also commented on Unified National testing (UNT), which serves as an entrance examination to universities, as very rigorous and requiring a long preparation. They highlighted that it would be better to concentrate on having STEM subject tests instead of UNT, which is very stressful for school graduates.

Lack of STEM Capacity.

The students mentioned poor STEM infrastructure and lack of research funding as factors that discourage them from applying to universities in Kazakhstan. Students highlighted that more funding should be spent on STEM equipment in particular. As one student commented: "More funding should be spent on equipment and other things for the students, as far as I know, the situation in Kazakhstani universities is really bad, both with equipment and funding" (PL23). A similar comment from another participant:

I think that there is not much research, there is an absence of research in universities, so there should be more attention to research. The university should prioritize research and be asked to prioritize research (A26).

Reverse Pull and Push Factors Associated with War Conflict

The analysis of interview data also identified reverse pull and push factors, which have emerged in the context of war conflict both on the receiving and domestic sides and influenced the students' final decision to pursue international mobility. These factors are reported in the subsequent sections of the paper.

Perceived Devaluation of Diplomas and Economic Decline.

The concerns about the value of diplomas from Russian universities were named as the major counter-influence in making their mobility decisions in the context of the Russian-Ukraine war. Seven interviewed participants reported that they changed their decisions due to the perceived devaluation of Russian diplomas associated with the war and concerns that they would not be able to find a job internationally, having a diploma from a Russian university. A comment from a participant:

I was considering Russia as one of the destinations, but I decided not to apply there due to the situation. I was in doubt if their diploma would be recognized internationally as they have a lot of restrictions, sanctions, and so on (A26).

Another important factor was the economic decline and the potential influence of economic sanctions on Russia. The students were concerned that there would be a slowdown in the Russian economy under the influence of economic sanctions. It has also become evident that the war would bring economic recession to Russia and devaluation of currency, and it would potentially influence the quality of life. As one student commented: "Honestly, I considered applying to Russia before the events that started last year in February. But when this happened, and many sanctions were applied, I decided not to apply there (A1)

For some students, the fact that many internationally recognized STEM and IT companies had left Russia was an additional factor as they realized this would have a strong negative effect. Most importantly, the students were anxious not only about their future employment and internships in these companies but also about fewer learning opportunities due to the absence of access to licensed IT software, and AI learning tools and the shortage of STEM equipment, which is exported to Russia and related challenges such as the termination of bank transfers to Russia and blocking social networking sites. Some participants commented: "People say that we cannot use the cards and some social networking sites are blocked" (K16).

One student entered there, but he currently faces the problem that some services are not available in the territory of Russia, especially IT services, for example, ChatGPT does not work in Russia, and all the IT companies have terminated their contracts with Russia. So, what is the point of studying there (A1)

Increased Social and Economic tensions.

An important detail is that the students who were currently studying in Russian universities noted the changes in the mentality of the citizens and the frequent emergence of conflicts of opinion in the society after the start of military conflict. Some students even mentioned xenophobia associated with war conflict and highlighted that the growing social tension made them feel uncomfortable. Perspective mobile students mentioned potential discrimination associated with the fact that they are initially from a different country and the fact that they are international students, even being of Russian ethnicity. Some illustrative quotes:

Maybe these are just rumors or facts, I do not know, but my relatives say that there are cases of racism against Asians (A10).

...they started to feel the danger, although they were in Moscow...and they also mentioned the changes in people's mentality due to the latest events. And the conflict of opinions and interests is very common. It became a concern, they started to feel the discrimination, and they decided to leave Russia (P30).

The participants also mentioned the financial considerations of studying in big cities, the potential cut of scholarships, and the concerns about overall instability in the country:

The percentage of students entering Russian universities may decrease. First, it is difficult psychologically. Economically also, the situation is not stable, and not everyone can afford a child's education in Moscow, where the situation is so unstable. There is a high likelihood of civil war and riots...again, it is difficult for parents to send their child to a country involved in military conflict and unstable situation (K28).

Parents' Influence on Students' Decisions.

Only 7 graduates reported being independent in their decisions to pursue mobility after the start of the war conflict. It seems that in the context of geopolitical realities, the influence of family on student's mobility decisions has significantly increased, especially for the students who were the only or late children in the family or of the female gender. It should be highlighted that several female students reported they were not allowed by their parents to go to study abroad due to geopolitical events. Some illustrative comments from participants:

... I was not worried about it, I mean, once the situation started happening. I went home and talked to my parents. They said... It's fine for now...but if something serious happens and there is an emergency situation, of course, it is quite possible that I would have to go back to my country, to Kazakhstan. Of course, for the sake of my parents, so they are not worried about me (S18).

I will tell you personally about my family, there are only three of us and I am a late child... my parents are retiring this year, and naturally, they are afraid, that is, they say there is a war going on, they did not want to let me go...(A26).

Domestic STEM opportunities.

Recent developments in Kazakhstani universities were also counter-influencing the students who were uncertain about their decisions in the context of war conflict. Four students mentioned that the government increased scholarships for STEM specialties and there appeared the opportunities to get an international degree in Kazakhstani universities, which established dual degree programs with some Western partners. One student mentioned that tuition fees for some STEM specialties have become lower. Another student mentioned that the universities started to pay more attention to establishing the partnership with employers in the IT sphere, which was one factor that influenced his decision to stay in Kazakhstan:

It is cheaper and more stable in Kazakhstan now, and IT majors [at X university] are providing a connection with big companies. After graduation, it is possible to apply for a job or even to try to apply immediately (A1).

However, it was also identified that most interviewed school graduates were unaware of domestic higher education opportunities. It was also found that not all the universities have implemented measures to support Kazakhstani students willing to return and continue their studies in domestic universities in the context of war. Many students could not transfer to local universities due to the difference in the programs and strict student transfer regulations in Kazakhstani universities. The students who were on full-ride scholarships in Russia were able to transfer to Kazakhstani universities only on a fee-paid basis.

A friend of mine... graduated last year and applied/entered MGU [a leading Russian university] and got a scholarship. However, because there are uncertainties in Russia, their economy is failing, and because they are involved in the war, he transferred to X [domestic university] on a self-paid basis... (K16).

It has become obvious that most university graduates who have previously considered entering universities in Russia, stayed in Kazakhstan. However, we also noted that they were unsatisfied with their choice and considered applying to universities abroad the following year.

Discussion

Students' international mobility decisions are often viewed through the lens of push-and-pull factors (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The study suggests that in a situation of military conflict, there is less clarity with respect to which side is predominantly pushing and pulling. It was identified that Russia is no longer the priority option for STEM students from Kazakhstan but is still seen as an attractive destination, especially for ethnic Russians, those who initially planned to migrate to Russia, and those students who were not able to find a certain STEM specialty in Kazakhstani universities. The strongest pulls are the perceived quality of STEM education in Russian technical universities, universities' reputation, STEM university infrastructure and scholarships provided by Russian universities for STEM-talented students. The students were also pulled by cultural and language affinity and geographic proximity but to a lesser extent.

On the domestic side, the study identified such push factors as low-quality STEM programs and a lack of STEM capacity. We found that the low quality of STEM programs in domestic universities and low STEM capacity remain a strong push factor even in the context of war conflict. School graduates were concerned about lower employment prospects and stayed in Kazakhstan only due to 'forced immobility' (Mulvey & Li, 2023).

Although the study identified pull and push factors on both sides, there is still little clarity on how the combination of these factors influences the students' decisions in a situation with military conflict. Although pull factors remain strong, in the context of war conflict, the students are counter-influenced by safety concerns, the risk of being involved in military obligations, social and economic tensions, and rising xenophobia. It seems that financial considerations are also one of the major counter influences, as the participants were anxious about the potential cut of scholarships for international students, devaluation and growing living expenses.

The study identified that such factors as parental influence on students' mobility decisions and adaptability of domestic higher education in the context of instability have become more prominent in the context of geopolitical tensions. It was also noted that female STEM students seem to be more affected by the family in the process of decision-making (Almukhambetova & Kuzhabekova, 2021). It seems that although the government puts some efforts change into changing the students' mobility dynamics, many domestic universities were not able to reconsider their recruitment strategies to attract school graduates and were not responsive to the needs of the students who wanted to transfer from Russian universities when the war started. As Tran et al. (2023) argue, the students "caught in geopolitics-international education crisis need to be embraced, welcomed and supported" (p. 438), and crisis management is especially important in such situations (Rumbley, 2020; Yang, 2022).

Conclusion

Using the pull- and push model as a main theoretical framework, this study explored the changes in STEM students' intentions to pursue international mobility in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war and the factors related to students' mobility decisions.

The study offers some theoretical and practical contributions. The traditional push-pull model (Altbach, 1998) assumes that push factors are associated with the home country and pull factors with the host country only. It was identified that STEM students were 'pulled' and 'pushed' to make decisions under the influence of the factors located both on the receiving and domestic sides, and the students' mobility decisions have proven to be highly prone to geopolitical turbulence. The situation with the Russia-Ukraine military conflict seems to modify the typical pull-push model and the decisions of whether to pursue international mobility were primarily driven by safety, financial, and social tension concerns. This has implications for other contexts affected by geopolitical turbulence as in the situation with conflict and crisis, there is less clarity on which side is predominantly pushing and pulling and the way this combination plays out in students' decisions has become much more complicated (Mok et al., 2021).

It is still unclear whether the changing mobility patterns in the region provided opportunities for Kazakhstan to retain talented STEM students who previously used to study in Russia and whether regional universities have made all

efforts to adjust to students' growing demands. It is also unclear what the potential impact of the shifting mobility decisions on the local Kazakhstani higher education sector, in terms of challenges or opportunities to attract talented STEM (both international and Kazakhstani) students in the new context of war and future post-war in the region.

The study offers several practical implications for policymakers and university administrators internationally. Higher education institutions interested in understanding students' mobility decisions in times of conflict should develop more effective university recruitment and admission policies and adjust their regulations to address the needs of transfer students affected by geopolitical tensions. In the competition for retaining STEM talent, the universities should also apply more efforts to attract students from affected regions by providing more scholarships.

Even though the study provided some fresh insights into how the students' intentions to pursue mobility in the context of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict have changed, it is still limited in its scope, with 29 students being interviewed. More research is needed to understand how the students' mobility patterns in the region are changing amidst geopolitical turbulence and the mechanisms the universities have in place to respond to growing students' demands.

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How Geopolitics Shapes Higher Education Internationalization: Institutional Responses to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract

Values such as peace, mutual understanding, and solidarity have long been subsidiary to the aim of pursuing competition and revenue through the internationalization of higher education (HE). With the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, higher education institutions demonstrated strong support for peace and solidarity. Yet, the extent to which we are witnessing a return to an international politics rationale driving HE internationalization remains unclear. Using Canada and Germany as case studies, this paper compares how international conflict impacts HE internationalization practices from a host institution perspective. The developed theoretical framework connects HE crisis literature with novel approaches to HE institutions in global geopolitics. Data were analyzed through critical policy analysis, focusing on university presidents' statements and institutional press releases. The key finding suggests the dominance of the logic of appropriateness whereby a geopolitical rationale governs institutional responses in a context where widely shared democratic values are under attack.

Keywords: conflict; geopolitics, higher education; internationalization; Ukraine

Introduction

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, developed into a global geopolitical crisis that has impacted diplomatic, economic, and political relations around the world. Most importantly, it has been described as an education crisis, as the war disrupted educational aspirations for more than five million children and youth (UN News, 2023). The war itself shifted the operations of some higher education institutions (HEIs) across the world as universities quickly responded to provide various supports to host learners from Ukraine. In Ukraine, there were approximately 1.67 million students in tertiary education across universities and other types of higher education (HE) institutions in 2017 (WENR, 2019). According to data from the United Nations, since the outbreak of the war, over six million people left Ukraine, including students, researchers, and scholars (UNHCR, 2023). Government support from Western nations became

an essential source of assistance while other forms of support also emerged. For example, HEIs also acted swiftly enabling academic mobility to support Ukrainian students.

Morrice (2022) noted that the opening of borders and recognition of the importance of HE access for Ukrainian refugees was unprecedented, leading universities to explore innovative approaches to support displaced students. In the years following, a pivotal shift has occurred in the dynamics of institutional internationalization where host universities accept students through flexible pathways (e.g., visiting, exchange, or guest students) and provide significant financial assistance and concentrated advising supports. This humanitarian approach diverges from conventional internationalization practices where student applications go through rigorous admission processes with fees attached.

The purpose of this paper is to bridge the gap between geopolitics and internationalization by investigating the internationalization practices of host universities in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The article examines the specific actions taken by universities and target those factors that may influence institutional responses triggered by political pressure. The paper is guided by the following research question: How has the war in Ukraine impacted host institutions' internationalization practices?

Specifically, this paper examines and compares the institutional responses of universities in Canada and Germany, two countries that have hosted a significant number of Ukrainian students. By comparing institutional responses from these two federal jurisdictions with pro-active government support towards displaced individuals, the paper unveils the changing nature of institutional internationalization practices, which have been shifting from an economic to a political rationale in the wake of the Russia-Ukrainian war. Our findings suggest that the war in Ukraine has led to emphasizing a global political dimension over economic considerations in institutional internationalization responses.

How Higher Education Internationalization Relates to Global Geopolitics

Scholars show that global geopolitics have strong influence on higher education in recent times (Trilokekar *et al.*, 2020; Lee, 2021; Moskovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023; Trilokekar & El Masry, 2022). Yet, the understanding of how global geopolitics and HE are connected remains limited. Buckner and Stein (2020) also suggest that internationalization discourse lacks engagement with the political, historical, or geopolitical dimensions of international relationships and knowledge production. This article takes all of these concepts into consideration.

Geopolitics takes many forms in higher education internationalization. Most HEIs use a pragmatic institutional approach in which international students financially support HEIs. Often graduates gain employment as a valuable source of highly skilled labour within their host country (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2016). A focus on finance raises concerns around economic exploitation of and discrimination against international students (Sabzalieva *et al.*, 2022). This is even more problematic when economic exploitation is grounded in the pragmatic institutional approaches that enable unequal administrative practices and aggressive recruitment strategies (Brunner, 2017; Tamtik, 2022). A pragmatic institutional approach applies to contexts of political regionalisms, such as in the European Union, where the economic rationale of HE internationalization is very present albeit not so much in terms of direct institutional revenues. In the European Union, the internationalization of HE carries the purpose of furthering the mobility of labour, which indirectly contributes to the economic competitiveness of the region (Felder & Tamtik, 2023; Mathies & Cantwell, 2022).

In contexts of conflict, there is a shift from one philosophy that defines internationalization as purely a way for competition and revenue to another philosophy that advocates that internationalization itself promoting peace, mutual understanding, and solidarity (de Wit & Deca, 2020; Guo & Guo, 2017). Within the ongoing violent conflict in Ukraine, HEIs are demonstrating strong support for peace and solidarity while engaging in seemingly ethical approaches to hosting international students, with various supports made readily available. As a result, there is a shift towards political rationale of internationalization.

With the new wave of political activities emerging among HEIs, the relationship between HE internationalization and geopolitics comes to surface. Geopolitics involves the interplay of discourse, communication, power, and knowledge, shaping the spatialization of international politics and resulting in global hierarchies and power structures (Agnew, 2004;

Moisio, 2018). The internationalization of HE contributes to these processes, as it is a highly political endeavour centring around power and geopolitics among governments, institutions, and individuals (Lee, 2021). By promoting their educational systems through mobility, countries can enhance their political influence and reputation globally (Taylor, 2010). Cultural and ideological exchanges can reinforce and/or challenge existing political ideologies, serving as mechanisms for soft-power diplomacy (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). Brain circulation can provide advantages or disadvantages for countries' socio-economic development. Issues related to national security and national interests can directly influence internationalization decisions with new partnerships established, exchanged, or cancelled (Trilokekar & El Masry 2022). Political tensions between countries affect HE internationalization in lieu of limiting student visas, withholding research funding, and the surveillance of scientists (Lee, 2021). Immigration policies, including student visas and work permits for international students and scholars, are inherently political. HE internationalization intersects with various political interests and considerations, making it a highly political process with outcomes dependent on a country's geopolitical position.

Literature on institutional responses to armed conflict/war is scarce. Storz (2012) described the University of Toronto's initiative in WWII, where it offered permanent positions to several Jewish professors with a humanitarian response to those tensions. It must be noted that within this response, Jewish academics nonetheless experienced institutionalized racism. Guo et al (2019) described a similar humanitarianism- discrimination related to Syrian refugee students. Educational institutions hosting refugees sometimes inadvertently perpetuate tensions between minority and majority groups, creating an environment in which refugee students have encountered various degrees of exclusion and discrimination (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). Ghundol and Muthanna (2022) found institutional support for Yemeni international students studying in Chinese universities in the form of application and registration policies and tuition fee waivers. Pre-COVID, in the United States and the United Kingdom, some HEIs offered a safe place for undocumented immigrants as a way to resist police actions of immigration regulations, safeguard their students' privacy, and train staff accordingly (Allard et al., 2018; Ricketts, 2019). Each of these studies illustrate that geopolitics and institutional pragmatic needs are intertwined and can lead to complex institutional responses. The literature also emphasized the importance of considering historical context, ethical values, and resource allocation when examining the interplay between geopolitics and pragmatism in the internationalization of higher education.

Theoretical Framework: Institutional Responses to Global Geopolitical Crises

This article uses a theoretical framework that builds on Moskovitz and Sabzalieva's (2023) framework of global geopolitics of higher education. We argue that a political crisis can add a unique layer, centring around values, to the interactions between geopolitics and higher education. In crisis, decision-making is fundamentally different than it is under normal circumstances. Crisis literature focuses on decisions affecting the health and well-being of people and countries that need to be made quickly and under pressure, requiring decisiveness, flexibility, and innovation. When decisions are made under pressure, core values and norms serve as the foundational factors that institutions rely on.

Crisis literature references different types of crises within HE and then examines how universities or the whole HE sector responds to crisis. McConnell (2011) defined crises as "extraordinary episodes which disturb and threaten established patterns of working and dominant assumptions about the way aspects of society operate" (p. 63). Spillan (2000) categorized crises as follows: organizational (system breakdowns, fire), internal threats (management corruption, employee violence at workplace), external threats (terrorist attacks, negative media coverage), natural disasters (floods, earthquakes), and technology threats (computer system breakdowns, hacker invasions). According to Rosenthal and colleagues (1989), a crisis revolves around an organization's fundamental values and is seen as a threat to its basic values and essential functions, necessitating an immediate response. In the context of HE, Zdziarski (2006, p. 5) defined crisis as "an event, which is often sudden and unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution on its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel, property, financial resources, and/or reputation of the institution." Zdziarski's (2006) definition is appropriate for this paper, as the Ukrainian war might not impact the organizational survival of host universities but does influence HE operations, impact local communities (students, faculty, and staff with family ties in Ukraine/Russia), affect

financial resources (additional funding needed for crisis management), and could threaten the HEI reputation (if no action was taken). The diversity of crisis responses reflects the politics of crisis in terms of how organizations seek to cope with and address extreme events which often poses a mixture of threat and opportunity (McConnell, 2011).

At the centre of the crisis and geopolitics literatures are institutional core values, where the politics of crisis impacts how those core values can be protected. The proposed theoretical framework as shown in Table 1, encompasses the following components from these literatures: the nature of crisis and its corresponding crisis manager(s), and the institutional responses and their underlying rationales.

Table 1.

Examining Institutional Responses to Crisis and Geopolitics

	Theoretical Framework	HE Crisis Literature	HE and Geopolitics
What and Who?	Nature of crisis & corresponding crisis manager	Type of crisis and its link to HE community Guiding core values	Scale Agents
How & Why?	Institutional responses and underlying interests	Crisis politics Agency vs. systemic constraints	Interests Opportunity Structures

When addressing the questions of “What is in crisis?” and “Who ought to solve the crisis?” several factors come into play. These include the type of crisis and the specific HE community affected, both in terms of those impacted by the crisis and those who are expected to act. It is important to recognize that different types of crises have varying effects on higher education (McConnell, 2011). Additionally, contextual factors such as economic development, political regime, extent of destruction, and levels of violence all lead to distinct institutional responses (Milton & Barakat, 2016).

Unpacking a crisis includes determining the scale that is affected by the crisis and identifying the agents who ought to solve the crisis. Global, national, local, and regional forces simultaneously operate and intersect in crisis situations. Scale is important as internationalization policies are directly impacted by events occurring at a global scale, interwoven with local responses. Agents refer to the various actors and the power dynamics emerging from their formal influence, (mis)alignment of values, and capacity for action. Governments are agents in the Ukrainian conflict, as they are provincial/regional jurisdictions with legal power and a direct regulative mandate. Other agents, including international/regional organizations, civil society, and the media, have more of an advocacy capacity. The agency of HEIs is positioned in between the above two types of agency with regards to power dynamics, as HEIs have the capacity to regulate their operations but also are connected to governments through funding. Furthermore, HEIs play an important advocacy role in shaping global conversations, presenting value positions and asserting norms within their organization and in society. Institutional core values determine how institutions perceive a crisis. When values are endangered or violated, this triggers an institutional response. Actions may be driven by defending the core values, fighting over them, reconfirming them, or trading them off against one another (Boin & Lodge, 2021).

Institutional responses in times of crisis are shaped by institutional agency as well as by systemic constraints. Consequently, when examining how institutions respond to crisis, interests and opportunity structures become paramount. Interests motivate actions; they encompass economic, political, cultural, and social motivations and individual/collective desires. Boin and Lodge (2021) noted that institutional responses may affect what we chose to see (and not to see), what we value, who we identify ourselves with, what we fear, who we loathe, what values and goals we prioritize, what we feel is in our interest to focus on, and what we feel we can afford to discount. In some cases, a crisis may directly jeopardize institutional functioning, making survival the foremost concern, while in others, it may raise questions about the very legitimacy of these institutions.

Opportunity structures represent the collection “of norms, rules, institutions, conventions, practices and discourses that enable or constrain different actors and their actions” (Dale, 2015, p. 344). Opportunity structures often operate beyond

state boundaries via social media and ideas that circulate globally or regionally, while regulation typically occurs at the national level or wherever the jurisdictional authority lies. Dependence on government funding, autocratic governance structures, dominant organizational culture, or legal frameworks may provide barriers to institutional autonomy in exercising their agency and voice (Boin & Lodge, 2021). These factors highlight the significance of the “politics” surrounding how societies, political actors, and institutions navigate and cope with unforeseen external events, which often present a blend of challenges and opportunities.

Case Selection and Data Analysis

This paper employs a qualitative case study methodology to investigate the institutional responses of universities in Canada and Germany to the Russian-Ukrainian war as it relates to internationalization. The choice of these two countries was underpinned by several reasons. First, both countries have well-established policies aimed at supporting refugee students in higher education. This foundation provides a rich context for examining institutional agency and potential constraints in hosting students. Second, as two of the world’s largest economies, Canada and Germany possess substantial resources that can support displaced students and have the potential to develop robust support mechanisms through HEIs. Third, both countries operate under democratic federal governance system, which allow for a considerable degree of autonomy for institutional decision-making. This autonomy can influence the flexibility and effectiveness of institutional responses. Despite these commonalities, there are also significant differences. First, their geographical locations in different regions of the world give rise to unique geopolitical contexts, international relationships, and migration patterns. These variations can influence the experiences of Ukrainian students. Second, language differs as Canada’s bilingualism (English and French) and Germany’s emphasis on the German language present distinct language challenges for international students. Finally, both countries have distinct historical ties to Ukraine that can influence the reception and integration of Ukrainian students. Germany shares geographical proximity with Ukraine, fostering unique people-to-people ties between the countries. These connections may also impact how Ukrainian students are perceived in Germany. In contrast, Canada has a long history of Ukrainian immigration, dating back to the 19th century, particularly in its Prairie provinces (Lehr, 1987; Martynowych, 1991) in which strong community ties with a focus on cultural preservation and political advocacy. Canada has been a strong supporter of Ukrainian interests, recognizing Ukraine’s independence and providing humanitarian aid during various periods. In turn, Canada’s historical connections are deeply rooted in Ukrainian immigration, cultural preservation, and political advocacy. Germany’s ties with Ukraine are more recent and have evolved since the end of the Cold War, emphasizing economic relations and diplomatic engagement (Dietz, 2011; Stent, 1997). These differing historical ties contribute to distinct approaches and responses to Ukraine-related issues in both countries.

The research utilized publicly available policy documents related to institutional crisis response starting from February 24, 2022 from HEIs in Canada and Germany. These documents included university presidents’ statements, institutional press releases, and university association releases. 62 Canadian universities comprising of 47 comprehensive universities and 15 research-intensive universities were analysed. These universities, along with their dedicated support services, were listed and accessible via publicly available links on the Universities Canada website (Universities Canada, 2022). 35 German universities and 25 universities of applied sciences were analysed from different parts of the country (all Bundesländer). In addition, materials from six university associations and rector’s conferences in Germany were selected for review. A total of 208 documents were identified and reviewed within the Canadian context and 300 in German context. In our critical content analysis, we focused on the themes captured in our theoretical framework (scales, agents, interests and opportunity structures).

The documents helped us to take stock of the different types of support provided by universities. Data analysis involved a critical content analysis of these purposefully sampled documents (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2018). Textual analysis of a smaller pool of documents was conducted to identify the scales, agents, interests, and opportunity structures that shape HEIs’ responses to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The process involved a combination of deductive

coding using the theoretical framework and inductive coding to trace narratives surrounding geopolitics and the distribution of resources, knowledge, and power within internationalization activities.

The methodological approach of critical policy analysis (CPA) was used to draw attention to policy as a highly political and value-laden process (Allan et al., 2010). CPA investigates the underlying hierarchies and inherent subjective values within policies that shape actions. CPA also enables scholars to examine the circulation of power, how policies create “winners” and “losers,” and the strategies of resistance among stakeholders (Diem et al., 2014, p. 1072). The different policies and statements used in this research are influenced by specific historical, geographical, and socio-economic contexts (Ball, 1994; Ozga, 2000; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Policies are not value-free as they serve the interests of particular stakeholders in power and may deviate from a standard implementation path. Bacchi (2012) suggested critical examination and questioning of policies and not to blindly accept policies without critical thinking. By adopting CPA as a data analytical framework, the critical lens delved into how policy is presented, who benefits from it, and what dynamics may deviate from its initial intentions. We use this approach to enable a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding internationalization practices during times of global crisis.

Findings

The War on Ukraine from a HE Internationalization Perspective

This section identifies the type of crisis as it pertains to HE internationalization. Following is an examination of the institutional responses and the rationales behind the chosen responses. This examination encompasses scales and the agents, interests, and opportunity structures that guide institutional decisions and actions.

Defining the Crisis: Scales and Agents

The War as an Issue at International, Regional, and Local Levels

HEI statements used in this article issued a reaction to the Russian war on Ukraine and problematized the conflict across international, national, and institutional contexts. The first scale involved the location of the war on Ukrainian territory. This was reflected in expressions of concern for affected citizens and solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Second, HEIs drew connections to the regional (European for Germany, provincial for Canada) and/or international community. Finally, university statements referred to the impact of the war on themselves such as in terms of existing ties with Ukrainian HEIs and scholars or in terms of the influx of Ukrainian refugees.

HEI statements interpreted the magnitude of the crisis whereby local implications were directly attributable to a global political situation. Several universities in both countries explicitly pointed to the government of President Putin and/or the Russian government as the instigator of this aggression against the self-determination of Ukraine’s people. Universities in Canada viewed the events on a worldwide scale, noting that: “events over the past two days have shaken this world order” (UPEI). Some Canadian HEIs added that the crisis has “potential implications for world peace” (USask) and “we unite with the international community in calling for peace” (St. Mary’s U). Similar statements were made by German HEIs, their associations, and internationalization-related organizations. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) recognized that the war constitutes a crisis on a global scale. University statements related to the global impact of the war and emphasized that “Russia’s attack on Ukraine concerns us all” (HAW). German HEI statements focused mainly on the European scale. The invasion was equated to “an attack on the European idea” (UKassel), as a consequence of which shared European values such as democracy and freedom need to be upheld.

Locating the impacts of the war on Ukraine at different scales evoked different understandings of the type of crisis it represents and how it is linked to the HE community. Public statements from Canadian and German university presidents unmistakably conveyed the belief that this war posed a significant threat to fundamental institutional and societal values. Example statements noted that it is “an assault on democracy and our deepest values” (UWaterloo), an attack “to the values upon which institutions like our own are built” (QueensU), a “deeply troubling attack on sovereignty” (UGuelph), a “threat to democracy” (QueensU), an “illegal and unjust war” (UBC), and “violence, disregard for national and international law

and academic freedom, [which] pose a severe threat to the academic system” (UBamberg), and in these statements the HEI presidents pledged to “continue to defend the fundamental values of peace, truth, democracy, academic freedom, and international cooperation” (UOttawa), to persist in “supporting peace, security, and democracy” (YorkU), and to uphold the “values that form the foundation of enlightenment and science” (UJena).

With science being inextricably linked to “peace, the rule of law, and the freedom of unhindered exchange among scholars across state borders” (UBamberg), the attack on Ukraine was equated to an attack on the “cross-border community of teachers, researchers, and students all over the world” (DAAD) and, thus, on core values in the HE sector in terms of “responsibility in ensuring peace and freedom and a knowledge-based view of the world” (DAAD). Next to values that relate to the relationship between HEIs and their immediate and/or further contexts, the analyzed statements also included references to values that apply to intra-institutional relationships: HEIs “must remain places of respectful discourse even in difficult times” and HEIs will continue to be “non-discriminatory, liberal-minded places of diversity” (UBamberg). There was a connection drawn between the statements and the principles of Western liberal democratic values. As Russia is viewed as one of the main superpowers opposing liberal values, the war was perceived to have significant implications for international peace politics.

Universities in both Canada and Germany perceived that the crisis directly impacted their entire community, including students, faculty, university staff, and members of the Russian community who actively oppose the war. In this way, the crisis exposed the “vulnerability of universities as a whole, but also of individual scholars” (UBamberg). Next to expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people as such, the assessed statements particularly related to people with Ukrainian origin who are part of the HE community. A typical example was as follows: “Our thoughts are with our colleagues, fellow students and their families” (HUBerlin). In this vein, several statements in the German context put numbers to the affected community and listed the number of Ukrainian students studying at their institution or in Germany more generally and the number of existing institutional collaborations such as in research or through the Erasmus+ program.

While German HEIs emphasized existing institutional ties in research and teaching with Ukraine in a broad range of subjects, in several instances, Canadian universities highlighted their robust cultural ties and historical connections with the Ukrainian people at the provincial level. Here are illustrative examples: “Alberta’s large Ukrainian community has enriched our province” (UCalgary), “In Manitoba, with so many here having strong and historic connections to Ukraine” (UManitoba), “The University of Toronto community has a special connection to Ukraine” (UToronto). By emphasizing those close-knit academic and cultural connections, universities aimed to bridge the geographical distance separating them from global events across the world, underscoring the significance of these events in their local contexts.

Problem Solvers at the Global-Local Nexus

In terms of key agents, findings show the importance of a global-local response dynamic. Canadian universities primarily perceived their supportive role towards the government’s diplomatic efforts in addressing conflict at a global scale. Some Canadian universities articulated support for their Prime Minister and Premier (UBC; Mount RoyalU) and York University expressed a broader commitment to all diplomatic initiatives aimed at achieving peace and democracy. Support for the humanitarian work of national agencies such as the Canadian Red Cross and UNICEF Canada was also mentioned (AthabascaU; UCalgary). German HEIs similarly expressed support for (sub)national governmental policies (“We [...] join the Bavarian government’s demand for an immediate halt to the invasion” [UBamberg]) or even issued joint statements with the subnational government (e.g., joint declaration by the state and universities in North Rhine-Westphalia). Some German HEIs and their associations called on the federal government to mobilize the necessary financial means to be able to respond in a suitable manner to the influx of refugee students and academic staff. In a joint statement from March 2022, the German universities of applied sciences wrote that they “are counting on the federal and state governments to provide the funds needed to support students and academics from Ukraine and to offer appropriate assistance in a timely and unbureaucratic manner” (HAW).

In Germany we do not only find individual HEIs’ responses to the war in Ukraine but also efforts to coordinate responses. These efforts span across different (sub)national levels and involve different types of organizations. The

identified organizations include the Alliance of Science Organizations in Germany, rector conferences (German rector conference and the conference of Universities of Applied Sciences [HAW]), Länder-level associations such as Universität Bayern and cross-border networks such as EUCOR – The European Campus. Next to rector-level statements and the findings include statements of students' associations in the German context. One central identified agent is the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Upon the request of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German Länder and supported by the Federal Ministry of Education, the DAAD established the National Contact Point Ukraine where all the available support for German HEIs and Ukrainian students was and is gathered.

HEIs clearly delineated their role in supporting the diplomatic efforts locally. Universities emphasized their role as knowledge-based institutions in society with substantial expertise in the field. In the Canadian context, Royal Roads University's statement emphasized that "One of the most important roles of a university is to provide crucial expertise and insight during times of enormous crisis, and to convene conversations that can make progress toward solutions (Royal RoadsU). The President of Wilfrid Laurier University underscored: "In times like this, universities have an important role to play in contextualizing complex issues and fostering dialogue on the increasing number of humanitarian crises around the world" (WFU). The University of Waterloo saw its role "in preserving democracy by offering a safe place for free inquiry and preparing our students to be global citizens." The university highlighted its expertise in cyber-security, international relations, and European history, underscoring their relevance in making sense of the situation.

Several sub-units within the universities displayed active local agency during this period. Their actions underscored the active involvement in addressing the crisis and promoting awareness and understanding within their communities. The most important identified units included international offices, counselling services, departments such as those related to Ukrainian or Russian studies or to Eastern Europe more broadly, and student groups. For instance, the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies at the University Alberta played a pivotal role in informing the public on the contextual complexities of the situation. The Department of Russian Studies at Dalhousie University facilitated an online conversation to share historical insights on the matter. In the German case, the University of Fulda's Imre Kertész Kolleg is one example where a panel discussion on the situation in Ukraine with experts from different fields was locally organized.

The activities by university sub-units and certain groups of university members very often involved cooperation with the local community and with municipal actors. In the Canadian context, Simon Fraser University's Philosophy Department partnered with the Red Cross to coordinate donation collection efforts. Political scientists at Brandon University and Memorial University organized a forum dedicated to discussing the conflict, while non-institutional local activist groups such as Tryzub in Brandon, Manitoba helped to organize a march at Brandon University. Toronto Metropolitan University faculty established a working group of people to share news, resources, and knowledge on the topic. In the German context, we identified cases where individuals originating from Ukraine were coordinating institutional support offers and donations (UPaderporn).

Shaping Institutional Responses: Interests and Opportunity Structures

The findings reveal a diverse range of institutional supports provided by host institutions in both Canada and Germany. The supports fall into five main categories: 1) financial; 2) social; 3) educational/academic, 4) cultural; and 5) political. Findings point to four primary sets of interests that triggered institutional responses: upholding human rights, promoting peace and security, guaranteeing the functioning of local and Ukrainian HE systems, promoting cross-cultural knowledge exchange and exercising ethical leadership through political influence. It is important to note that the identified institutional responses usually appear in combination.

Table 2.

Overview of Identified Institutional Responses with Corresponding Interests and Opportunity Structures.

Institutional response type	Response	Interest	Opportunity structures
Financial	Scholarships, bursaries, tuition waivers, interest-free loans, emergency support funds, research stays	Promotion of peace, security, and human rights	Availability of funding at HEIs/by government
Social	Counselling, wellness supports, immigration help, humanitarian aid		Institutional unit-level structures in place
Educational/Academic	Support of Ukrainian HEIs in their operations (e.g., hosting entry exams) Linguistic and subject-related integration (e.g., placement initiatives)	Ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian and local HE system	Geographic proximity to Ukraine Institutional capacity (physical and digital infrastructure)
Cultural	Establishment of new institutional partnerships Events on Ukraine	Promoting cross-cultural knowledge exchange	Programmatic offers available Personal ties Cultural diplomacy
Political	Suspension of Russian study-abroad programmes Pro-active advocacy, expert panel discussions, stakeholder engagement	Ethical leadership and political influence	Supportive migration and foreign policy Active civil society

Promote Peace, Security and Human Rights Through Financial and Social Support

One central theme among institutional responses was offering financial support. Specific instruments included scholarships for Ukrainian students, financial aid, tuition awards and waivers, research internships, research stays, and emergency support funds. Additionally, universities launched fundraising campaigns and established donation platforms and emergency funds to aid Ukrainian students. A connected type of response in this regard would fall under the social category of institutional responses, where students, staff and the local community were engaged in raising funds and – in

the case of Germany – goods for the purpose of humanitarian aid. Financial support initiatives were framed within the narrative of promoting peace, security, and human rights. For example, the University of Alberta in Canada introduced scholarships with the explicit goal of ensuring: “the safety, security and the ongoing support of their [Ukrainian students] studies” (UAlberta). Western University in Canada similarly underscored its commitment to assisting students in the pursuit of “education and scholarship in the safety of our campus community” (WesternU).

Linking institutional funding decisions to core democratic values helps legitimize these unforeseen expenses and garner community buy-in. The framing used to support these decisions involved advocating for equitable educational access as a fundamental human right, with institutional interest in global engagement as a secondary consideration. Consequently, institutions opted to extend this opportunity to all students and academics who have faced involuntary displacement due to war. A concrete example is Queen’s University in Canada, which has established the Principal’s Global Scholars and Fellows Program to support international students from war-affected countries, ensuring their equitable access to education.

For both Canada and Germany HEIs, institutional responses to financially support Ukrainian students and academics depended on public funding resources. In Canada, the province of Ontario established a \$1.9 million CAD “Ontario-Ukraine Solidarity Scholarship” in 2022 in response to Russia’s military invasion. In Germany, similar scholarships were made available to Ukrainian students, researchers, and teaching staff. Next to privately sponsored support such as that given by foundations, publicly funded support were channelled through subnational funds and existing and newly established scholarship schemes of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). While the latter is funded through different ministries such as the foreign ministry, several Länder governments topped up the funding of existing programmes (e.g., BayFOR) and made funding available to employ additional staff such as for language training.

In both the Canadian and German case, the provision of financial resources to incoming Ukrainians was complemented by social support measures. Social support was comprised of various advising services such as wellness support, mental health services, immigration guidance, and assistance with funding and accommodation. As outlined in the first part of the analysis, social support has primarily been delivered locally through dedicated units at the respective HEIs such as international offices and/or municipalities.

Promote Cross-Cultural Knowledge Exchange

A next category of institutional responses revolved around ensuring the continuous functioning of the HE system in Ukraine and in the host country and, thus, relates to education as one core mission of HEIs. These institutional responses included provision for specific courses for the linguistic and subject-related integration of Ukrainian students and digital assistance for Ukrainian HEIs. German HEIs’ offered standardized entrance examinations for over 5,000 applicants from Ukraine seeking admission and continued studies at Ukrainian universities. The university entrance exams took place between July and October 2022 in six German cities, with the respective universities (HUBerlin, UFrankfurt, UHamburg, UCologne, ULeipzig, UMunich) acting as the main coordinators. This initiative was prompted after the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Sciences reached out to the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The following statement by the Minister for Education, Science, and Culture in the state of Schleswig-Holstein (Prien) demonstrated that this type of institutional response reflected an educational rationale: “By offering the Ukrainian university entrance tests in Germany, we are helping young Ukrainians to avoid breaks in their educational biography and to prepare for studying in Ukraine.”

Several German HEIs stated that they sought to maintain “scientific relations and exchange relations with [their] partners in Ukraine.” Others opted for establishing novel institutional ties with HEIs in Ukraine. The University of Ulm gave support for the HE system in Ukraine to help students and staff located there to build new institutional partnerships with the University Charkiv. In September 2023, the two institutions agreed to develop double degree programs. New partnership development was less present in the Canadian context which could be explained by to the closer geographic proximity between Germany and Ukraine and a stronger influx of Ukrainian refugees into the German HE system. The educational/academic response type furthermore depended on the institutional capacity, including the respective institution’s infrastructure, which provided different opportunities for educational offers (e.g., corresponding institutions, language centres) and for supporting Ukrainian HEIs in the delivery of their offer.

Institutional educational responses were closely connected to cultural responses because the establishment of new institutional partnerships serves both educational and cultural objectives. For example, in 2022, the University of Guelph in Canada established a new international partnership with Dnipro State Agrarian and Economic University in Ukraine to advance academic ties and “solidarity and respect for other cultures and traditions” (UGuelph). This objective aligns with Oleksiyyenko and colleagues (2023), who emphasized the significance of strengthened institutional partnerships with Ukraine from a cultural perspective, as an advanced opportunity to share histories and cultures with others. Other cultural responses included organizing events on Ukraine such as by partnering institutes of the respective HE institutions and – relating back to the educational response and the integration of topics on Ukraine into teaching content. Very often, these events entailed reflections on the political situation in Ukraine prior to, during, and after the invasion, so that the line between exchanging knowledge across cultures and exercising political influence through the organization of events was blurred.

Promote Political Influence with Ethical Leadership through Internationalization

A prominent theme in the findings was exercising political influence as an institutional response among HEIs. In addition to bringing collaborative relationships with Russian HEIs to a halt, political responses also involved universities organizing campus rallies, marches, and vigils and raising flags or displaying blue and yellow on campus buildings to demonstrate solidarity with Ukraine. Outreach activities where experts provided insights into the political situation were also present.

Implementing sanctions demonstrates an alignment with foreign policy objectives mandated by the governments. This institutional response was seen as helping to maintain positive relationships with governments and policymakers. For example, the University of Manitoba took measures to cease any involvement in the transfer of funds to Russia. The university divested a portion (0.03%) of its pension program previously invested in Russian companies, and its endowment funds no longer include such investments. The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada urged its grant recipients to immediately suspend ongoing collaborations with Russian industry partners. Similarly, while acknowledging institutional autonomy, the Alliance of Science Organisations in Germany issued the recommendation that ‘academic cooperation with state institutions and business enterprises in Russia be frozen with immediate effect until further notice’ (Allianz der Wissenschaftsorganisationen, 2022). As a result, ongoing academic relations with Russia, including joint projects and events, were terminated. The response of Freie Universität (FU) Berlin in Germany illustrated how, in the suspension of partnerships with Russian HEIs, the political and financial response went hand in hand. The suspension not only affected degree programs but also research partnerships and financial transfers to research centres such as the German-Russian Interdisciplinary Science Center (G-RISC). Politically, not only was the strategic partnership with St. Petersburg University suspended, but the university’s office at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations was also closed. The underlying rationale for these actions was to sanction Russia and to prevent any financial support helping Russia’s cause. Instead, financial support was offered to students who had to return to FU as a result of suspended relations and to Ukrainian students whose stay at FU would have come to an end but whose return was rendered impossible due to the war. Funds for the latter purpose, very often called a “Ukraine Emergency Fund,” have also been identified for other German HEIs.

Finally, issuing presidential statements across most HEIs in Canada and Germany demonstrated ethical leadership. University presidents are seen as leaders and role models in their communities. Taking a stand against the war demonstrates institutional values and sends a clear message about it to their academic communities and to the broader society. In the Canadian context, universities located in the provinces with significant Ukrainian population were the fastest to respond. Most presidential statements from institutions situated in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba were promptly issued on February 24, 2022, while other statements were issued during the following weeks from over 52 universities and colleges in total. The institutional leaders in the four provinces mentioned may have felt a greater sense of political responsibility due to close historical and cultural ties that prompted them to respond swiftly.

Universities also played an advocacy role in making sure there was no discrimination against Russian students and scholars at their institutions. Universities did not only call for the respectful treatment of people from Russia but also expressed solidarity with the open letter where Russian scholars spoke out against the war. Statements emphasized that “people who are taking a clear stance against this war at enormous personal risk deserve our great respect and recognition”

(HAW) and that universities ought to maintain respectful discourse in these trying times. These actions underscored the impact of the political activities of academic institutions.

Discussion

This article started out with the observation that, in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, HE institutions across the globe reacted with swift responses to support incoming students and academics from Ukraine. Student and staff mobility and institutional collaboration are core components of HE internationalization. The internationalization of HE over the past decades has been primarily marked by economic rationales out of which pragmatic institutional approaches have been dominant. This paper targeted public statements that show the extent to which we are witnessing a return to an international politics driving HE internationalization and, thus, a stronger emphasis on values such as peace, freedom, and solidarity. We developed a theoretical framework that combines the literatures on the respective influences of crises and geopolitics on HE. This framework captures how a crisis is perceived and who ought to solve it, and the underlying interests and opportunity structures of institutional responses. The framework was then applied to comparatively assess how HE institutions in Canada and Germany responded to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The analysis showed that the conflict in Ukraine is located across three different scales – international, regional, and institutional – and has evoked core democratic values that require protection. The analysis further demonstrated how the contextually different countries of Canada and Germany adopted a very similar range of institutional responses (financial, social, educational, cultural, and political), guided by the logic of appropriateness, aligning with values that appears institutionally correct based on the shared core values. The logic of appropriateness suggests that universities make decisions based not only on a calculation of material interests or strategic goals but also on what they perceive as socially acceptable or normatively appropriate within their institutional contexts. When faced with a situation like the conflict in Ukraine, HEIs may feel compelled to respond in ways that uphold certain values (democracy, academic freedom, international cooperation), even if doing so may not directly serve their immediate material interests or strategic goals. Our data demonstrated that universities condemned Russia's actions, expressed solidarity with the people of Ukraine, offered variety of supports to affected students or scholars, or even took more proactive measures such as suspending academic partnerships or research collaborations with Russian institutions. These actions were driven by a sense of moral duty, a commitment to upholding international norms and overall integrity of the academic community.

Conclusion

By gathering and assessing empirical data on HE internationalization during a geopolitical crisis, our study demonstrates how academic mobility is becoming a prominent mechanism of knowledge politics in the context of global geopolitics. By showing how conflict response and the internationalization of HE are connected, this study underscores the complexities and evolving dynamics of higher education's role in responding to and navigating the impacts of geopolitical conflicts. It remains to be seen how the analyzed adaptation of internationalization practices will lead to institutional transformations in HE. Yet, we can expect the surge of other geopolitical crises to impact debates about the understandings and purposes of HE in both theory and practice (Tröhler, 2023). We can also expect that the identified patterns of HE internationalization will leave traces in the processes of constructing HE spaces and regimes (Zapp & Ramirez, 2019).

While past behaviour and established institutional norms provide valuable insights into how institutions may be likely to respond to the unpredictable nature of crises in the future, the responses may vary depending on specific circumstances and contextual factors. Future research should delve deeper into those contextual nuances to add further insights into university responses to crises. For example, conducting a survey and applying quantitative methodology could also be helpful in tracing ratios on the prominence of the type of support universities have provided, i.e. financial, social, educational/academic, cultural and political support. Furthermore, the cases of Canada and Germany mirror Western ideals for universities, including liberal democratic values, which may not necessarily be applicable to all spaces beyond the European and Northern American HE areas. Next to addressing how equity and inclusivity in HE internationalization

practices are affected by geopolitics it may be worthwhile to explore HE spaces where universities ought to fulfil different purposes.

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Jacks of All Hats: Role Complexity, Ambiguity, and the Experiences of Short-Term Study Abroad Faculty

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of short-term study abroad faculty at a liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States. We distributed a qualitative survey to all faculty who taught short-term study abroad courses at the institution, interviewed four short-term study abroad leaders, two short-term study abroad co-leaders, and reviewed the practices and history of the institution's study abroad office. Study participants' experiences were consistent with role complexity and ambiguity. Role-related challenges included preparing for the program and for reentry, managing the academic side of the course, monitoring students' and faculty members' physical and mental health, and facilitating group dynamics. Perceived benefits included cultural enrichment, professional growth, and the ability to enhance students' lives. Our study suggests that tolerance and the ability to handle complexity are critical leadership skills for faculty, and that short-term study abroad faculty need support and professional development to prepare for their multifaceted and complex duties.

Keywords: Faculty, higher education, intercultural development, role theory, study abroad

Introduction

World scholars promote global skills and competencies (Bourn, 2018; Camilleri, 2016; Moreno-Jimenez et al., 2014; Oomen et al., 2016). The need for students to strengthen global competencies before entering the workforce has led to a widespread expansion of study abroad higher education programs. Short-term experiences lasting less than eight

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weeks (Nguyen et al., 2018) are especially popular. Of the 347,099 U.S. students who studied overseas in the 2018/2019 academic school year, 65% chose short-term programs (Open Doors, 2021). For the 2020 year, the numbers declined by 91%, presumably due to the impact of Covid-19 (IIE, 2022).

Traditionally, faculty do not accompany students abroad during longer (one semester or more) study-abroad programs. Students travel to their host country alone and attend university classes while living on campus or with a host family. In contrast, faculty members in short-term study abroad programs hold multiple roles and participate in all aspects of the program. During the trip, they perform regular faculty duties such as designing and teaching academic courses, monitoring students' mental and physical health, addressing behavior issues, and managing group dynamics (Eckert et al., 2013). They also plan meetings, review logistical arrangements, and coordinate other details with local providers (Goode, 2007). Thus, short-term study abroad faculty wear multiple hats: professor, counselor, group coordinator, project manager, travel agent, etc.

Extant research on study abroad addresses the impact of the experience on students (Anderson & Lawton, 2011; Kishino & Takahashi, 2019), differences between short-term and long-term study abroad (Donnelly-Smith, 2009), and general best practices (Eckert et al., 2013; Liu, 2019). The literature is more limited, however, on the professors' perspectives. The main purpose of this case study was to bring short-term study-abroad faculty voices to the forefront. Our research explores many of the challenges that short-term study abroad faculty experience planning for and engaging in short-term study abroad.

Role theory focuses on the roles applying to distinct social contexts (Biddle, 1979). Key role theory concepts such as role complexity, overload, ambiguity, and conflict may relate to short-term study abroad faculty's "multiple hats" and shed a light on their challenges. We adopted role theory as our conceptual framework. Our overarching research questions were:

1. What roles do short-term study abroad faculty play?
2. Do short-term study abroad faculty experience role complexity, conflict, and ambiguity? If so, how do these experiences manifest themselves?
3. What are the overall experiences of short-term study abroad faculty?

Conceptual Framework

Background of the Study

Study Abroad

Living an experience rather than reading about it in a textbook is a more effective way to learn (Liu, 2019). Study abroad students develop an intercultural mindset (Lilley et al., 2014; Terzuolo, 2018), experience a sense of interconnectedness (Kishino & Takahashi, 2019), and strengthen their intercultural skills (Anderson & Lawton, 2011). Other student benefits include personal development, improved grade point average, increased diversity in friendships, and employer preference in job searches (Lilley et al., 2014; Liu, 2019; Petzold & Peter, 2015). Study abroad programs, however, benefit not only students but also participating staff and faculty. Liu (2019) uncovered four areas of growth for study abroad educators: enhanced awareness of historical contexts, a deeper knowledge of national policies, a stronger understanding of student development, and the opportunity to network with other international educators.

Study abroad programs are normally categorized as long- and short-term; long-term programs last at least eight weeks or, more commonly, a semester. Short-term study abroad programs last fewer than eight weeks. Shorter study abroad experiences tend to occur during academic breaks (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Gaia, 2015) and have become the most common type of study abroad experience in the United States. In the 1996-97 school year, only 3.3% of total students studying abroad

took part in short-term programs (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). That number jumped to 65% during the 2018-2019 academic year (Open Doors, 2021).

Two major factors explain the popularity increase of short-term programs. First, these opportunities are less costly for students (Gaia, 2015). Second, short-term programs require less time commitment. Students are, therefore, less likely to fall behind in their structured academic programs, extracurricular activities, and athletics (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Gaia, 2015) or worry about personal and family obligations (Gaia, 2015). Thus, a key benefit of short-term programs is an increase in student access (DiFrancesco et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018).

Despite the steady decline of long-term study abroad participation in the last decade (IIE, 2019), some scholars claim that longer programs are more beneficial to students. For example, Engle and Engle (2004) reported greater cultural sensitivity gains after a full-year study abroad program than after a semester-long experience. Other research, however, (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Gaia, 2015; Paige et al., 2009) supports the benefits of short-term programs. For example, in Paige et al.'s (2009) study involving over 6,000 alumni from twenty universities, program duration did not affect its impact on students.

Unlike long-term study abroad programs, which generally take place at host universities, a domestic faculty member often leads short-term study abroad experiences (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). The next section explores the intersections between role theory and short-term study abroad faculty work.

Role Theory

Role theory examines the roles human beings occupy as members of particular groups and the functions and behaviors related to such roles (Biddle, 1979). Role theorists borrow terminology from the theater world (Biddle, 1986). For example, Goffman (1959) adopts words such as *performance* (an action taken by a role incumbent to influence someone else), *audience* (the person or persons whom the role incumbent is trying to influence) and *setting* (the place where the performance takes place). Role performance follows certain established standards; non-compliant role incumbents may suffer negative consequences. Even audience members who do not observe a role performance may impose sanctions if they believe deviation from role expectations has occurred (Goffman, 1959).

Role theory observes five key principles (Biddle, 1979): People's behaviors are contextual and related to their roles, roles connect people's social identities, people are aware of the societal expectations for their roles, roles are nested, i.e., certain role identities are embedded in larger ones, and people are socialized to fulfill their roles.

Role theory concepts relevant to our study include role complexity, overload, conflict, and ambiguity. *Role complexity* refers to the level of breadth and coherence of a role. Breadth means the range of behaviors a role incumbent must show and coherence has to do with how well the components of a role relate to one another (Biddle, 1979). Role complexity may lead to *role overload*, which occurs when the demands on the role incumbent exceed available resources (Coverman, 1989). *Role ambiguity* means a lack of clarity in the role functions. Role ambiguity may result from inadequate cue clarity, where a *cue* (e.g. a uniform, a title) helps outside observers identify a particular role function (Biddle, 1979). Finally, *role conflict* occurs when individuals occupy more than one role, the demands of these roles are incompatible, and role incumbents cannot perform both roles at the same time (Biddle, 1979; Edmondson et al., 1986).

Even faculty who work in the main campus have complex roles that involve research, teaching, and service components (Boardman & Bozeman, 2007). Merging these responsibilities can lead to intra-role conflict (Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016). Researchers explored the impact of role conflict on faculty experiences (Olsen & Near, 1994; Richards & Levesque-Bristol, 2016). Comparable problems were identified in a study on Mexican faculty by Surdez Pérez, Magaña Medina, and del Carmen Sandoval Caraveo (2017). Further, faculty role conflict does not refer only to the intersection between research, teaching, and service. For example, faculty have reported conflict between familial and professional roles (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006; Park & Liao, 2000).

Interpersonal relationships between faculty and students may also lead to role conflict. On the one hand, professor-student relationships outside the class environment may benefit students. An early literature review on informal faculty-student relationships by Pascarella (1980) found significant correlations between faculty-student ties and positive student outcomes such as persistence, interest in furthering studies, academic achievement, and personal development. Some universities even encourage informal connections between faculty and students (Hattaway, 2019). However, when faculty take on roles that exceed those of traditional professors—for example, the role of a friend—one consequence could be classroom incivility (Chory & Offstein, 2016).

Faculty roles may be particularly complex in short-term study abroad programs. In longer-term programs, students are likely to enroll in another university (Coker et al., 2018), thus releasing the accompanying faculty from highly intensive teaching duties. Study abroad faculty, however, are on duty the entire trip, “on-call” even during the evenings. Further, they must demonstrate roles that go far beyond their training and expertise, such as pharmacist and tour guide (Burnside, 2023). Some of these roles are critical, such as providing immediate assistance if a student experiences serious mental health problems (Niehaus et al., 2020). Thus, role complexity and conflict are particularly relevant for this study.

Ronan University’s Travel Seminar Program

The university we selected for the study—henceforward called *Ronan University*¹—is a private not-for-profit institution offering liberal arts and professional degrees to about 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The spacious campus features old buildings and residential units for freshmen and sophomores. While Ronan is in a town of about 200,000 people in the Midwestern United States, it welcomes students from most of the United States and over 42 countries.

Before 2013, Ronan offered two to four short-term faculty-led study abroad programs each academic year over spring break or summer. These programs were faculty-driven and planned, receiving minimal support from the Provost and the International Offices. Ronan approved a January term (J-term) in 2012 and the first J-term took place in 2013. The University then created a new position in the International Office to develop Ronan’s custom faculty-led study abroad programs. The International Office helped formalize processes (e.g. program approval, faculty training, risk management, budgeting, etc.) and support for faculty-led study abroad, establishing a “travel seminar” model. Travel seminars are short-term faculty-led study abroad and domestic programs for undergraduate students offered during J-term or early summer.

Since 2013, over 50 Ronan professors have offered travel seminars to 1,800 students. Each course enrolls 10 to 20 students and is led by two seminar leaders. The leaders have two options to divide their duties. In the first option, the lead instructor teaches the course and the co-leader plays a support role. Alternatively, both instructors co-teach and are equally responsible for the course. The primary reason for the two-leader requirement is safety; Ronan wishes to ensure that at least one university representative is available to facilitate seminar activities and assist the students in case of an emergency. As an additional safety precaution, Ronan encourages seminar leaders to work with third-party providers with expertise in the local environment. Third-party providers manage program logistics and provide on-site emergency support. Faculty considering a new travel seminar can also apply for a travel grant to conduct a site visit to a potential travel seminar location.

To propose a travel seminar, faculty complete a series of steps. First, they meet with the Director of Education Abroad to discuss their ideas and the program development process. Next, they complete a proposal form and submit a draft syllabus, a daily itinerary, and an academic credit calculation worksheet. The Department Chair and the Dean of the faculty member's unit must approve the proposal. New courses must also be ratified by the unit's Curriculum Committee. Finally, the Education Abroad Policy and Implementation Committee reviews all proposals and recommends the approved courses. The proposal is due 14 months before the start date of the travel seminar and seminar leaders work on proposals anywhere from 14 to 24 months in advance. Once faculty run a travel seminar, repeat offerings often require less planning.

The proposal process is just the beginning of the seminar leaders’ work. Before, during, and after the seminar, program leaders must coordinate the following additional tasks:

- Logistics—working with providers on program design, reviewing proposals with the International Office, and setting up other logistical arrangements
- Budget—assisting the International Office with the program budget, requesting travel advances, keeping track of expenses and receipts, and completing travel expense reimbursement documents upon return
- Risk Management—providing a final itinerary and a risk assessment form to Ronan International’s Risk Assessment Committee, attending the health and safety workshop, and reviewing emergency guidelines and incident reporting steps
- Marketing and Recruitment—creating promotional materials for the travel seminar, attending J-term or summer/fall study abroad fairs, holding information sessions, and responding to student inquiries
- Student orientation—developing and facilitating a minimum of three pre-departure meetings and one re-entry session with students
- Training—attending seminar leader training workshops on best practices

Ronan’s International Office offers faculty a series of training and development workshops. The workshop lineup includes one to two sessions for prospective seminar leaders. In the past, these new leader programs included panels of experienced travel seminar faculty, travel seminar planning workshops, and third-party provider discussions. Other workshops deal with post-approval topics such as general logistics, best practices for incorporating intercultural learning and critical thinking, active learning strategies, and student team dynamics. A final mandatory session covers health, safety, and risk management. At the end of the travel seminar experience, faculty and students complete feedback surveys and faculty leaders have individual debrief sessions with the International Office.

Study Design and Methods

Our research followed a case study design, appropriate when the researchers wish to “catch the complexity of a single case” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). We classify our study as instrumental (Stake, 1995) because its purpose was to benefit not only the university where we conducted the study but also faculty and administrators at other institutions.

Following best practices in case study design, we explored the case holistically using various data sources (Yin, 2003). We distributed a mixed-methods survey, conducted in-depth interviews, and reviewed existing information. We further explored published materials available to short-term study abroad faculty and sought information from co-leaders, two students, the Executive Director of Global Engagement and International Programs, and the Director of Education Abroad.

Sample Selection

First, we sent a mixed-methods survey (available at <https://tinyurl.com/RonanSurvey1>) to all 71 faculty members who led or co-led short-term study abroad seminars at the institution between 2014 and 2019. After a preliminary analysis of the data, we wrote interview protocols (available at <https://tinyurl.com/RonanSurvey2>) for both leaders and co-leaders.

Thirty participants answered our survey. The final sample comprised 16 females (53.33%), 13 males (43.33%), and one person who chose not to self-identify (3.33%). Participants’ ages ranged between 25 and 74 years. We received responses from full professors (20%), associate professors (37%), assistant professors (10%), and staff and administrators (20%). Thirteen percent of the participants were adjunct professors, “other,” or preferred not to identify their rank or position.

For the second phase of the study, we selected a purposeful sample of faculty from diverse disciplines who led study-abroad programs in various countries. We looked for short-term study abroad leaders and co-leaders with different ranks and university positions (Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Full Professor, Clinical or Adjunct Professor). The goal of the interviews was to collect rich information and elaborate on preliminary themes identified in the survey responses. We interviewed six people: four leaders and two co-leaders. Four of the interviewees were women and one was a male. The

interviewees represented various units on campus: Business, Pharmacy, Education, and Arts and Sciences. We also conducted an unstructured interview with the institution's International Office Executive Director. At that point, the institution's Director of Education Abroad joined the research team.

Subjectivities

We cannot eliminate subjectivities in qualitative studies—just acknowledge and report these to the readers (Maxwell, 2012; Mosselson, 2010). This section addresses our experiences and how these may have affected our data analysis and interpretations.

The three authors work for the institution where the study was conducted. Therefore, all interviews involved conversations with co-workers. Our proximity to the study participants may have affected the interviewers' responses. In addition, we may have a positive bias for our employer, which could have affected our interpretations.

All three authors have either led or co-led study abroad programs at Ronan University. Two authors planned and led a short-term study abroad seminar in March 2020, right as the COVID-19 crisis was taking place. Two authors participated in study abroad experiences as students. As we analyzed the data, we may have paid closer attention to information that matched our personal experiences.

We were conscious of our biases and paid special attention to data that did not match our experiences. As recommended by Barusch et al. (2011), we reviewed negative cases that ran counter to our original interpretations. We also had multiple in-depth discussions, thoroughly reviewing all excerpts (please refer to the Data Analysis section).

Yin (2003) suggests that strong case studies include a review of internal documents. To access Ronan's internal documents so the researchers could review this research study holistically, the third author joined the research team. The third author has worked in education abroad for twelve years. For the last six of those years, she has worked at Ronan University on short-term faculty-led programs. She has led faculty training and provided resources to prepare travel seminar leaders. She is, therefore, invested in preparing faculty members for a positive experience. To minimize the impact of this author's positive bias, she focused on Ronan's internal documents. She did not take part in the faculty or student interviews or in the analysis of such data.

Data Analysis and Results

Survey Responses

The survey included demographic questions (e.g. gender, age, and rank) and the following question: The Cambridge Dictionary defines a role as “the position or purpose that someone has in a situation, organization, society, or relationship.” Given this definition, did you play any roles other than that of a professor during this trip?

Most participants (26 out of 30) said “yes.” Participants whose answer was “yes” were prompted to further explain their roles and provide examples in a qualitative question. Our qualitative data analysis included both survey respondents' qualitative answers and the interview data.

Qualitative Analysis

Two members of the research team coded the qualitative data. First, they reviewed the data to gain an overall sense of the results. After the two researchers met to review their preliminary findings, one researcher (“the coder”) identified relevant excerpts, created a list of codes and definitions, and assigned excerpts to the codes. Using Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software package, the coder created an inter-rater reliability test for the second researcher.

Next, the researchers reviewed the codes once again and addressed plausible reasons for discrepancies. The researchers met for the third time and identified problems such as technical glitches (the software eliminated one code from the test), human errors, and interrelated codes. Finally, after a series of in-depth discussions to reconcile the findings, the

two researchers agreed on the codes for all excerpts. Table 1 shows the identified challenges and benefits of short-term study-abroad faculty leaders. A larger part of our analysis involves exploring the challenges for the purpose of discovering improvements and making recommendations.

Table 1
Code Applications

Role Experiences	
Role Complexity and Overload	106
Role Ambiguity and Conflict	79
<i>Total</i>	185
Challenges	
Preparation and Reentry	55
Taking It Seriously	31
Physical and Mental Health	24
Group Dynamics and Conflict	22
<i>Total</i>	132
Benefits	
A Positive Experience	41
Professional Impact	38
Cultural Enrichment	22
Making a Difference	17
Compensation	11
<i>Total</i>	129

Qualitative Themes

We organized our results according to three major themes. These were Role Experiences, Challenges, and Benefits. Following are descriptions of each theme and a detailed review of each code including participants' representative comments.

Role Experiences

Short-term study abroad faculty members play complex and multifaceted roles. This theme includes general connections between participants' testimonials and role theory. The two main role-related themes were *Role Complexity and Overload* (the multiple hats worn by program leaders and co-leaders) and *Role Ambiguity and Conflict* (difficulties reconciling the study-abroad leader/co-leader roles and those of traditional faculty members).

Role Complexity and Overload

The code Role Complexity and Overload was present in 106 excerpts. This code refers to faculty perceptions of the complexity of their work and the feelings of exhaustion caused by the quantity of roles. Faculty-identified roles included professor, logistics manager, travel agent, tour guide, map reader, chaperone, mentor, friend, confidante, safe keeper, meal companion, conflict resolution expert, surrogate parent, disciplinarian, enforcer, safety officer, counselor, nutritional consultant, fitness consultant, first-aid supply keeper and administrator, doctor, nurse, and even unexpected (and humorous)

roles such as “money-lauderer,” “shoe advisor,” “late-night carouser,” and “fellow human hiking up a mountain.” Some roles required specialized training the faculty member did not have. As one participant explained:

[I played the role of a] counselor—even though I’m not a trained psychologist and technically should not play that role. However, students get anxious, they get depressed, they need help, and we can’t just say sorry, wait until I find you a trained psychologist speaking another language to talk to you.

Role complexity led to role overload, the perception that the professors lacked the resources to handle the multifaceted role challenges. Here is how one faculty member described the problem:

It is ten times the stress, and 20 times the work. I get much less sleep on travel seminars, and every moment of wakefulness brings decisions to be made, plans that need to be reworked, phone calls or texts that need to be written/read, people to speak with, and so much more. In three weeks we are not just faculty but a multitude of other roles and then in a few short days when we return we have to have the new semester’s curriculum ready to go and grade final projects from the travel seminar.

Participants described an intensive teaching experience and little time to rest. One professor explained:

“Often we are not ready for the sheer exhaustion that may take place. At home, we may go to our families and relax. There, we are on stage almost the entire time.”

The absence of downtime and the support of loved ones, therefore, contributed to faculty exhaustion. Being continually on stage also meant sharing with students moments of vulnerability, emotion, or distress. One professor contrasted the emotions students saw in her during the trip to the way she presented herself on campus:

“There were times when I got emotional—teary-eyed when learning about social injustices during a museum tour, for example—and it’s pretty rare that students get to see that raw emotion from me.”

Role Ambiguity and Conflict

Faculty described their roles as ambiguous and sometimes at odds with one another. For example, faculty reported difficulties reconciling a more traditional “judging” role (grading, enforcing the course rules) with that of a flexible and approachable facilitator. Here is how one program leader described the problem:

I think the biggest challenge. . . was that balance between needing to enforce rules and make sure people weren’t out of line with needing to also balance the fact that I’m your instructor and I need to be approachable so that we can engage in this material in a productive way.

Faculty described the grading process as tricky, arguing that travel experiences are hard to quantify or incorporate into traditional assignments. For example, one professor wondered how she could grade students while also asking them to “forget about grades and learn lessons [she could not] possibly test in traditional assessments.”

The proximity between faculty and students during the travel seminar increased, leading to a blurring of the lines between professor, travel companion, and friend roles. The groups found themselves in unusual situations, as they went snorkeling together or socialized after a day of excursions or meetings. One professor explained:

There’s an informal nature to travel; dressing differently than you would in a classroom, seeing one another in environments that you wouldn’t normally [eating, sleeping, swimming], creates a different dynamic between student and professor. Couple this with more extensive opportunities to learn about the personal lives of students lends itself to a more informal environment that nurtures friendship [meals, long hours on a train, etc.].

Such blurring of the lines, however, did not affect all professors equally. Some did not have difficulty keeping a distance. When asked whether the professor and the friend roles ever collided, one faculty explained:

I have never had trouble maintaining that distinction. The downside of that is I am not always as approachable as I could be, and thus some learning/growth/formative opportunities are missed, but generally speaking, students do feel comfortable enough with me to be themselves without incurring “parental” judgment and without the worry that I might be too familiar.

Role ambiguity also affected co-leaders, who felt uncertain of their responsibilities and roles. One co-leader reported imposter syndrome experiences:

I felt very weird. I didn't feel like I had authority and it wasn't so much that I needed to, but it was more just a weird relationship. The power dynamic was strange on the trip cause I felt like, okay [the program leader] is in charge, I'm here and I'm sort of in charge, but not really. So I had this weird relationship with the students where I was sort of a friend and sort of an instructor, but they didn't really look to me as their instructor. They look to [the program leader].

Arguably, professors' roles on campus are also ambiguous, involving not only teaching but also mentoring and advising students. Here is how one student interviewed for this study explained her expectations of a good professor:

I feel students are going through so much in their four years at college. Professors can be and should be someone that students can reach out to if needed and not just in a professional way or an educational way, but like be there for students personally too if they need it.

Study abroad program leaders and co-leaders, however, needed to be “there for students personally” for much longer periods of time. Further, program leaders teach in an unfamiliar environment, without the benefit of a classroom or a predictable daily schedule. Professors who have not led study abroad experiences often misunderstand these circumstances. One professor explained:

There are challenges explaining the inevitable committees back home that there's value in the experience that far transcends the typical academic papers. On the other hand, people who are not used to J-term trips want our syllabi to include the same “typical” assignments courses back home include.

Challenges

The combination of role complexity, overload, ambiguity, and conflict results in a highly demanding experience for short-term study abroad faculty. This theme includes the following codes: *Preparation and Reentry* (preparing for the course and for the upcoming semester while also handling other responsibilities), *Taking it Seriously* (helping students reconcile the academic and the travel experiences), *Physical and Mental Health* (monitoring students' and faculty health during the trip), and *Group Dynamics* (handling cliques, student difficulties, and conflict between leaders or between the leaders and the hosts).

Preparation and Reentry

A frequent challenge reported by participants was the extensive preparation needed for the study abroad experience. The following is a representative participant comment: “They [the short-term travel seminars] were very rewarding and enjoyable, but also time-consuming to plan and physically and mentally exhausting to conduct.”

Participants also worried about the burden placed on students the semester preceding the travel seminar. Faculty acknowledged that meetings and activities held prior to the trip promoted group cohesion and helped the students get ready culturally and academically for the experience. Faculty expressed concern, however, at the excessive work for students:

Asking students to commit intellectual resources and time to complete readings, assignments, and other academic work in the fall prior to the travel seminar when most are already carrying a full load and/or working is ethically problematic. I want them to be prepared for the trip, but at the same time, it is unfair to add to their fall semester obligations and not give them credit for it.

A common preparation concern had to do with the decision to hire a third-party educational travel provider to handle most logistical problems. Here is how one participant explained the dilemma:

A travel seminar leader has two choices: (1) use a third-party provider so it is easier to put the trip together, but harder to populate because the trip will be expensive, or (2) build the course from scratch so the trip is more affordable, but it is very time-consuming to build a course from scratch. It is almost like having another three-credit course added to your teaching load while you are planning.

Many participants argued that planning a trip on their own was demanding. Third-party providers know the study abroad location well and coordinate logistics such as housing, transportation, and food. Engaging third-party providers, however, adds costs to the trip reducing student access and hindering recruitment. Some participants also suggested that third-party providers reduced faculty control over their course. Here is how one participant justified the decision to build his own trip: “The experiences are always richer, more 'real', and the trip doesn't feel like a checklist.”

Co-leaders expressed fewer concerns with preparation. One co-leader reported: “My colleague was basically in charge. He did all of the work, he set up the syllabus, the assignments, the schedule, everything. And I just basically had to go along to facilitate and to be with the students.” The co-leaders’ reduced workload, however, was a double-edged sword; they had less work but also missed the opportunity to help the leader plan a successful experience. Here is how one co-leader described the problem: “Because of how I came into this trip and I really didn’t help with the planning, I just was there as another body initially. I feel like the academic objectives could have been stronger throughout the entire trip.”

Some participants worried about the start of the spring semester. A representative comment was: “By the time you get back, you're pretty tired and the spring semester starts.” Preparation and reentry challenges seemed more severe for staff members who took on program leader or co-leader roles. These professionals were not “on break” during the January or May months when the short-term seminars took place. Instead, they continued handling normal administrative responsibilities during the travel experience. The work accumulated and made reentry difficult. One staff member recalled: “Things didn't just magically slow down when we got back, they actually ramped up. So having to finish all the grading and everything that goes along with just closing out a J-term course was really challenging.”

Academic and Disciplinary Issues

Participants' concerns with disciplinary issues and ensuring the academic integrity of the course varied. Some faculty reported no problems and said that students behaved in an exemplary way. Others shared concerns with alcohol or conflicts with the hotel staff in the host country.

Disciplinary concerns could be connected to the 24/7 nature of the short-term study abroad faculty role. When teaching on campus, faculty members do not feel responsible for what students do outside the classroom. One faculty member pondered:

I'm not their parent and I don't wanna play their parent, but it's also like I still have nervousness about their safety. We have a meeting of course before we leave and we talk about a lot of things, I tell them, "look, if you're drunk on the street in the middle of like this country, how the heck am I supposed to find you?" Normally I'm not responsible for their logistics, with them getting up and getting somewhere on time. But if you're not on the bus, we all can't go anywhere, you know?

Physical and Mental Health.

Faculty worried about students' health and safety. Here is how one faculty member recalled the experience:

I have had many, many students with stomach illnesses, from travelers' diarrhea to short-term, but serious seeming, food poisoning. It is always a challenge to know when the best thing is to take them to the clinic (usually my choice) and when to just give them Pedialyte and let them sleep it off. We once slept in a rainforest hut and when the sun went down the floor was covered in scorpions and spiders, and I thought the students were going to have heart attacks (we were in hammocks).

Another professor worried about students who forgot their medications and did not adjust well to the location: Students didn't take their asthma medication [and the travel seminar location] has a really high pollution and so they all needed their inhalers and none of them brought them. And so that becomes your problem then, right? You have to help figure that out for them.

Student mental health was also a reason for concern. Faculty reported a range of student mental health problems from the simple and mundane (homesickness, minor levels of stress) to more serious emotional issues such as severe anxiety and depression. In the meantime, faculty coped with their own health and energy problems. The word *exhaustion* appeared frequently in the data. Faculty felt, however, that they needed to role model resilience:

I'm tired. It's one o'clock in the morning and I get to sleep and everybody's stressed out. But you have to model how to act. They're all looking to you to see what you're going to do.

One example of resilience was hiding a physical problem from students to avoid affecting their travel experience. One faculty had a serious foot problem, causing severe pain as she walked. She recalled: "I was trying to manage my own pain but not communicate that to anybody because I didn't want them to know that I was struggling."

Group Dynamics

Faculty sometimes struggled to manage group dynamics such as student cliques or conflict. For example, one professor recalled: "Group dynamics are the most challenging. I had a student with an extremely negative attitude that jeopardized the dynamic for everyone." Others reported problems related to students' incompatibilities or frustrations with one another:

On-campus, students are in class together for 75 mins and then they mostly go their own way and often don't see each other again until the next class. On a travel seminar the people who don't click or get along see each other constantly, every day, all day, for a couple of weeks, and stuff always seems to boil over. While I try my best to let students figure things out on their own, I have had to step in on occasion.

Conflict emerged not only among students but also between the program leader and co-leader or between the faculty and the local providers. Problems included misunderstandings on each other's roles, personality differences, and labor division. One faculty member explained: "My co-leader is a great ideas person and not a great detail person. And so a lot of the administrative burden kind of fell to my side." Another professor recalled "conflicts between faculty members and organizers that happen behind the scenes."

Benefits

Despite the challenges, the faculty still found the overall experience worthwhile. This theme refers to the benefits experienced by professors during the short-term study abroad experience. These were coded as: *A Positive Experience* (general enjoyment of the experience), *Professional Development* (the perception that the experience impacts professors academically or enhances student-professor relationships), *Cultural Enrichment* (gratitude for the ability to travel and gain a global perspective), *Making a Difference* (the perception that the experience benefits students), and *Compensation* (comments on the compensation received).

Personal Enjoyment

Faculty recalled their experiences as pleasurable and worthwhile. We identified 41 instances of positive feelings and reactions in the qualitative data. Examples include: “I had the best time, I learned a lot, I had positive interactions with the people, the students were great,” and “At a personal level, I strongly feel this experience has taken away a few years out of my age [i.e. made me feel younger] and thus, may have added a few years to my life!” Another professor described the short-term study abroad teaching experiences as “not for the faint of heart” but “magical” and added: “I cannot think of too many experiences I've had as a professor that were harder and yet more rewarding.”

Professional Development

Faculty members felt that the experience benefitted them professionally. Many expressed becoming better professors, improving their relationships with students, or even seeing their students differently, both during the trip and back on campus. One professor explained:

I really enjoyed getting to know the students at that level. It's just such an intensive experience and you're spending so much time with people and I wish there was a better way on campus to be able to recreate that in an authentic way.

Another professor told a poignant story of how the study abroad experience helped him see a different side of students' lives. He understood the students' difficulties with time management and handling financial problems. As a result, when an on-campus student faced serious problems, he dealt with the situation differently.

I have a student in my class, she's a single mother. Every morning she's about 10 to 15 minutes late arriving in my class. She came up to me after the first class and said: I will be late every day because this is the only way I can get my daughter to the babysitting place. I had no difficulty saying, Oh, that's all right. And the next question she asked was, would it be possible for me to sit down with you and go over those things that I miss? And I very gladly offered her that time. I probably would not have done that [before the study abroad experience]. I would've said, that's your responsibility. Gotta be here at eight o'clock.

Cultural Enrichment

Faculty appreciated the cultural opportunities and enrichment afforded by the experience. Several participants felt that teaching an international course improved their cross-cultural competencies. One professor explained: “I did not have the opportunity to study abroad in my undergraduate experience. On a personal level, I got to fulfill something that was missing from my college experience.”

Making a Difference

Faculty welcomed the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in students' lives. These professors appreciated seeing students, many of whom had never traveled overseas before, have a life-changing experience. One professor encouraged other faculty not to “underestimate the power these trips have on the students.” Another faculty member added:

“I have seen students blossom during these experiences. I think they have begun to understand what it means to engage others in a cross-cultural experience.”

Compensation

Faculty members' perceptions of compensation as a benefit were mixed. Some felt the extra compensation was adequate and an incentive to teach a travel seminar. Others complained about “woefully inadequate” compensation for the duties performed. One participant was particularly critical and recommended: “Don't do it for the money because the compensation does not cover the hours needed to get it up and running.” A co-leader expressed resentment because “the lead professor was getting the full stipend to take care of everything. I was simply compensated at the level of a chaperone for the trip.” Yet another participant suggested that the only reasonable compensation was a course reassignment.

Discussion

A study abroad experience may be a defining moment in one's life (Liu, 2019). The benefits of study abroad programs for students have been well documented by the literature (the reader is directed to Donnely-Smith [2009] and Gaia [2015]) and universities have a heightened interest in developing students' cultural competency (Mason & Thier, 2018). Short-term study abroad gains such as personal development, intercultural learning, and educational growth will remain after the experience is over (Donnely-Smith, 2009; Gaia, 2015; Liu, 2019).

The experiences of study abroad faculty, however, are less known or discussed in the literature. This study adds to the body of literature by bringing the voices of faculty and the benefits and challenges inherent to their complex, ambiguous, and sometimes conflicting roles. Faculty and staff who lead short-term study abroad courses wear multiple hats: professor, travel agent, parent, counselor, etc. Both role overload and exhaustion are possible consequences. The resulting faculty exhaustion could affect not only the faculty members' experiences but also their students'. After all, students on the trip need attention. Further, both before and during the trip, faculty must also attend to the needs of students back home.

Balancing students' needs and managing multiple responsibilities may not only add to faculty experiences of role overload but also prove impossible under conditions of distress. Faculty may thus face a vicious cycle. The role is complex, potentially causing exhaustion. Exhausted faculty members may be unable to handle the complex role.

The complexity of the short-term study abroad faculty role may lead to ambiguity and conflict. Professors struggled to reconcile roles such as travel coordinator and professor, disciplinarian, and team member. Some faculty also had trouble reconciling their roles abroad with traditional expectations of on-campus professors. Typical professor roles do not involve being available 24/7 for the students, teaching and grading in an unfamiliar environment, and interacting with students in casual settings. Further, the academic system of checks and balances requires curriculum committees to authorize international coursework. Professors reported problems having courses approved and misunderstandings of the uniqueness of the experience for students and faculty.

Preparation represented a significant hurdle for professors. Another obstacle was reentry and planning the following semester. Staff members reported even greater challenges balancing their regular workloads with study abroad preparation and teaching responsibilities.

A different angle, however, may be considered. The ability to effectively handle complexity is valuable in today's “VUCA” (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) environment (Shliakhovchuk, 2019). Switching roles, thus, enhances faculty leadership capabilities. In addition, complexity enriches faculty-student relationships by humanizing faculty in students' eyes (Burnside, 2022). During a study of students' perceptions of faculty roles in short-term study abroad programs, Burnside (2022) found that returning students were more comfortable interacting with faculty as “human beings.”

Short-term teaching abroad experience is indeed beneficial to faculty professional development. Those who coordinate short-term study abroad programs attest that these programs enrich their research and professional development

(Liu, 2019) and provide international contacts and networking opportunities (Raczkowski & Robinson, 2019). A short-term study abroad program can facilitate additional teaching experiences and research projects, supporting tenure and promotion efforts (Keese & O'Brian, 2011). Indeed, faculty participants in our study appreciated their short-term teaching experience and listed professional development as one of their greatest rewards.

Limitations and Topics for Future Research

Since this study focused on faculty perceptions, we did not have the participation of other stakeholders such as students and local providers. Future researchers might expand their case studies to incorporate these voices. For example, the students may view their professors differently during the trip. Thus, short-term study abroad programs have the potential to affect the student-professor relationship upon reentry. Institutions could explore how the students view their professors before, during, and after the study abroad course.

Even though we sent invitations to all professors who taught short-term study abroad programs, the study sample may have been biased towards successful professors. It would be interesting to interview professors who led only one short-term trip and chose not to do so again. Failure stories often give us considerable insight on barriers and challenges that may have been overcome by successful role incumbents and then forgotten.

Our participants' responses suggested variations in personality traits, most notably extraversion and agreeableness. Extraversion involves sociability, friendliness, and comfort with people. Agreeableness refers to people's focus on their own versus others' needs and overall levels of trust and tact (John & Srivastava, 1999). Our study did not address personality traits or include a personality assessment. Future research on the personalities of short-term study abroad faculty might be helpful, shedding light on possible relations between personality and role manifestation. For example, a professor whose extraversion and agreeableness scores are high might have a harder time differentiating the friend and professor roles.

This study focused on one Midwestern liberal arts private institution. Researchers could replicate our study in other institutions, focusing on faculty experiences and the impact of role complexity, overload, ambiguity, and conflict. In particular, we recommend studies involving different regions and faculty and student demographics to explore issues pertaining to diversity and inclusion during short-term study abroad experiences.

Implications and Conclusion

After reviewing the survey and interview data, we offer four recommendations for institutions engaged in short-term study abroad programs: (1) clarify the professional benefits for faculty or staff leading or co-leading a short-term study abroad course, (2) review and define the program co-leader roles and responsibilities, (3) ensure that program leaders and co-leaders expectations on the work requirements are realistic, (4) review the preparation offered to short-term study abroad leaders and co-leaders, and (5) implement a mentorship program.

Institutions should ensure that the benefits of leading a study abroad course are clear to faculty and staff. For example, does teaching a study abroad program help faculty applying for promotion and tenure? What professional rewards are available for staff and administrators? Further, the challenges and importance of leading study abroad courses and developing international curriculum work should be communicated to other institutional members, especially administrators and members of promotion and tenure committees.

Institutions should also review the co-leader's role and compensation practices. First, institutions could discuss faculty experiences and better define the leader and co-leader's roles. Stronger job descriptions could then be developed to help eliminate any issues of an unfair workload and improper compensation. Since compensation matters, the tendency is for leaders to take a major preparatory and teaching role (and, thus, justify the salary differences between leaders and co-

leaders). These compensation practices could create a difficult dynamic during the course and intensify co-leaders' perceptions of role ambiguity.

Institutions might pay special attention to the significant preparation work involved in short-term study abroad. Faculty and administrators should not underestimate the time needed not only to prepare for the short-term study abroad experience but also to recover from it and get ready for the following semester.

Finally, institutions should consider in-depth preparation for leaders and co-leaders in short-term study abroad courses. The multiple roles identified by faculty could guide such preparatory work. Pairing inexperienced faculty with experienced mentors might be beneficial. Implementing a mentorship program would facilitate providing new program leaders with support and useful advice.

Ultimately, short-term study abroad faculty are “jacks of all hats,” facing complex challenges, multifaceted responsibilities, and a difficult to define role. Despite these difficulties, our study participants still recommended the experience and found it worthwhile. “They are the best teaching experiences that I’ve had in my 20-plus years of teaching,” explained a faculty member, “because they are the most impactful experiences for my students.”

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Realities and Challenges of Internationalizing Administrative Staff in Japanese Universities

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Abstract

This study examines the realities and challenges of internationalizing administrative staff in Japanese universities empirically due to the increasing globalization of higher education. The functions and roles of the administrative staff from the policy perspective, with the implementation of mandatory staff development (SD) and reforms to the standards for establishing universities, have been considered. This study attempts to describe the following three aspects: the international nature, working and training overseas experience, and administrative staff's educational background. The open data were obtained from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science website. The results of revealed that acquired insights can also become useful inputs for developing university policies concerning recruitment guidelines, methods, staff training, and "human capital development" in Japanese universities. This finding contributes to the policy making and SD of the internationalizing administrative staff in various countries in terms of foreign nationality, overseas experience, and educational background.

Keywords: administrative staff, international experience, Japan, Top Global University Project, university internationalization

Introduction

The importance of the internationalization of universities has been highlighted in various studies (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Jafar & Sabzalieva, 2022; Rumbley et al., 2012). In this rapidly globalizing world, several universities are propelled to undertake measures and formulate strategic approaches toward internationalization (Cheng, et al., 2017;

Nolan & Hunter, 2012; Stromquist, 2007); there are some discussions on “meaning of internationalization” (Knight, 1994, p. 1) and “the term foreigner and its impact on prejudice” (Asbrock et al., 2014, p. 1).

Internationalization of Universities’ Administrative Staff

University campuses are composed of not only students but also faculties and administrative staff as main constituents, and the internationalization of these staff members is positioned as an important challenge for examination and consideration (Ota, 2011). Among faculty members, the focus has been on the academic profession (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Welch, 1997), international movement of researchers (Teichler, 2015), and international comparison of international faculties (Huang, 2021; Huang & Welch, 2021). Concerning students, attention has been directed to student mobility (Banks & Bhandari, 2012; Brooks & Waters, 2011; Hugonnier, 2017) and actual international experiences (Baik, 2018) and their effects on the undergraduate curriculum and graduate education (Ammigan & Langton, 2018; Bista, 2019).

However, Brandenburg (2016, 2017) highlights that there has been relatively little consideration of the internationalization of administrative staff. In this context, the focus on the roles and functions of administrative staff has increased since the 2000s, mainly in Europe and North America (American Council on Education [ACE], 2012, 2017; Systemic University Change Towards Internationalization [SUCTI], 2017).

In Germany, the July 2007 Center for Higher Education (CHE) working paper *How to Measure Internationality and Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions! Indicators and Key Figures* included “general administrative staff/nonacademic staff” (Brandenburg & Federkeil, 2007, p. 18) as one of its “indicators for internationality and internationalisation” (Brandenburg & Federkeil, 2007, p. 12). German researchers acknowledged and highlighted the role of administrative staff in university internationalization (Brandenburg, 2017); Swedish researchers also highlighted a heightened presence of administrative professionals in international areas (Karlsson & Rytberg, 2016, p. 1).

In the United States, nongovernmental organizations lead in creating and presenting guidelines, conducting mapping surveys, and developing an international index for measuring the internationalization of institutions such as universities. ACE developed indices for internationalization, including the 2003 *Internationalizing the Campus: A User’s Guide*, a guideline for professional faculty and staff involved in internationalization, and *Measuring Internationalization*, released in 2005 as the results of their investigations (Noda, 2013). In particular, *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses* (2017) includes the ratio of funding provision for “staff professional development abroad” (p. 14) as part of the staff development (SD). Further, NAFSA refers to the CHE working paper mentioned above in *Measuring and Assessing Internationalization*, indicating specific goals and measures for administrative staff in university internationalization efforts (Green, 2012).

Potential Issues with Internationalizing Administrative Staff in Japanese Universities

Internationalizing universities in Japan has been a source of academic interest since the 1970s (Ebuchi, 1997; Kitamura, 1984; Kobayashi, 1979; Maeda, 1968), and the subject continues to draw notable attention in both case studies and policy (Horie, 2002; Kitamura, 1997; Ninomiya et al., 2009; Yonezawa, 2009; Huang, 2021). If we look back at the major Japanese policies on university internationalization, “the International Student 100,000 Plan” of 1983 is regarded as an event that set the process in motion (Yonezawa, 2009). “The International Student 300,000 Plan” was announced in 2008 with additional policies such as the “Global 30” in 2009, “the Inter-University Exchange Project” in 2011, and “the Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development” in 2012 (JSPS, n.d.). Since 2014, the “Top Global University” (TGU) Project has been promoted to an unprecedented degree in terms of its financial scale and duration (JSPS, n.d.; MEXT., n.d.; Shimmi & Yonezawa, 2015).

Most of the policies have focused on faculty and students, with significantly related research being conducted (Hennings & Mintz, 2015; Huang, 2021). However, as established, the administrative staff members are major actors in the context of internationalizing Japanese universities (Kimura, 2015; Ota, 2011). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)’s *University Administrative Staff Issues* (MEXT, 2017) introduces an example of administrative staff handling international duties and contacts with overseas universities and creating and organizing application materials for establishing joint degree programs as systematized in November 2014.

In the School Basic Survey, MEXT classified the Japanese university administrative staff as clerical, technical, medical, and academic (MEXT, 2021, p. 3). The administrative staff members are defined as those handling general affairs,

accounting, and human resources (MEXT, 2021, p. 3); there were 91,701 administrative staff members in 2019, which is approximately 37% of all the administrative staff (MEXT, 2019). Article 41 of the University Establishment Standards regulates “administrative staff organizations” as follows: “Universities are to establish suitable clerical organizations employing dedicated staff to handle their administrative work” (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications [MIC], n.d.). However, researchers have observed that in recent years, these administrative duties have become more advanced and specialized in nature (Kaneko, 2008, 2017), symbolized in policy by the report on the University Governance reform (Council Summary) issued in 2014 by the Central Council for Education (CCE) University Subcommittee. The report notes that with regard to administrative staff, “each university is to make use of, according to its circumstances, personnel with advanced professional skills,” and it reconfirms the importance of SD simultaneously (CCE, 2014, pp. 18–19).

Although considerable research has focused on faculty and teaching staff in universities, few studies have been conducted on administrative staff in Japanese universities. To understand the realities related to issues of internationalizing administrative staff, acquiring more encompassing data on the situation, including the profile, skills, and various overseas in-service training of administrative staff, is essential.

Brandenburg (2016) emphasizes two primary elements, namely, “recruiting staff with prior international experience” and “SD,” (p. 16) Accordingly, the primary purpose of this study is to examine the realities and challenges of the internationalization of administrative staff in Japanese universities based on the data which were obtained from public information

The following two research questions were addressed:

RQ1. What are the realities of administrative staff in university internationalization?

RQ2. What are the challenges and implications for internationalizing administrative staff at the universities?

Literature Review

This literature reviews organize previous studies on the realities and challenges of the internationalization of administrative staff in Japanese universities. Specifically, this study focuses on the following three points:

Need for Recruitment of Administrative Staff with Foreign Nationality

Recruiting the constituent members of a university is an important issue. Universities in Japan and abroad, called on to internationalize rapidly, are influenced by the indicators set by global university rankings to make every effort to recruit able and diverse constituent members. Regarding administrative staff, the staffing issue in student affairs and services has been discussed in the United States since the late 1990s (e.g., Winston & Creamer, 1997; Winston et al., 2001). Winston and Creamer (1997) observed that “the connection between the quality of staffing practices in student affairs and the quality of educational services delivered to students is direct and powerful” (p. 12), hinting at a connection between staffing practices and related duties. This staffing issue has a direct influence on recruitment.

At universities in Japan, in addition to the international fluidity of faculty, recruitment issues such as hiring foreign faculty (Kitamura, 1984, pp. 110–114) and improving their status (Kitamura, 1982) have been a subject of interest. Contrarily, there has been limited research on administrative staff recruitment. This is because Japanese universities, particularly national universities, even after their incorporation in 2004, tend to hire individuals who pass the National University Corporation Staff Employment Exam (CRUMP, 2010), and thus, the issue of recruitment has not been raised as a major point.

For example, “the National University Corporation Staff Employment Exam” website lists among administrative staff duties, “assignment to university secretariats or academic department offices, etc., to handle duties including general affairs, human resources, financial work and accounting, student affairs and support, research support, international exchange, and affiliated hospitals medical support” (National University Corporation, 2021). This description indicates that international exchange and other areas related to university internationalization are just one aspect of the diverse duties of administrative staff. According to MEXT’s survey report on leading university reform (MEXT, 2015, p. 11), “employment policies and plans for specialized staff” are generally “similar to those for administrative staff overall.”

In short, there appear to be challenges to recruiting and maintaining advanced specialized staff for international duties. Internationalizing universities is focusing on language skills (Yonezawa, 2018), communication skills, understanding

of diversity, and international experience in multicultural work environments among international administrative staff (Katsuhira et al., 2013). Additionally, even in Japan, many universities are beginning to provide English-medium degree programs, which require not only faculty but also administrative support staff.

International Oriented Training and Professional Development at Japanese Universities

In universities worldwide, duties are becoming more advanced and specialized, and expectations are increasing as never before for the roles and functions of administrative staff. CHE's working paper noted above refers to "international administration exchange programs" and "internationally oriented further training programs" as indicators of internationalization (Brandenburg & Federkeil, 2007, p. 18).

In Japanese universities, interest in and needs regarding the training, self-education, and development of qualities and skills of administrative staff have been on the rise since the early 1990s (Oba, 2006, pp. 275–276). Training and professional development for administrative staff mainly concern "general training," "assistance with self-education funding," "dispatch to universities," "financial aid for university study," "awards and capacity evaluation," and graduate school "master's courses" (Yamamoto, 2008a, p. 135). MEXT identified that SD, i.e., "institutional approaches for faculty and staff quality improvement, including management and education/research support," was active for universities at 78.5% in 2014 and 88.4% in 2018 (MEXT, 2020, p. 43). The five most common training purposes were "deepening basic knowledge and understanding on university issues" (77.3%), "gaining knowledge of duty areas" (67.7%), "supporting academic education" (42.3%), "improving communication abilities" (41.8%), and "improving management abilities" (40.7%) (MEXT, 2020, p. 43). University internationalization presently requires recruitment aimed at staff with foreign language abilities, knowledge, skills, and problem-solving ability (JSPS, 2010). For example, the International Affairs Department of Nagoya University requires "not only language ability but also knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity as well as 'high communication ability' dedicated to achieving communication and reaching goals" (Katsuhira et al., 2013, p. 87). Cross-university training programs include MEXT's Long-term Educational Administrators Program for International Exchange, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), and International Academic Exchange Training (International Fellows) program, coupled with local training initiatives utilizing individual universities' overseas bases and offices.

Administrative Staff's Educational Background and Related Graduate School Education

As observed earlier in this report, in contrast with faculty educational backgrounds, administrative staff backgrounds have rarely been the subject of research. This is partly related to national universities, "longtime existence of civil service exams" and "the subsequent mechanisms for hiring and promotion, and particular qualities of the former Ministry of Education" (Yamamoto, 2008a, p. 133). However, due to the corporation of national universities in 2004, individual universities at present can conduct their recruitment and promotion to acquire human resources with diverse backgrounds.

The main studies among the scant survey research on the educational backgrounds of administrative staff are by Yamamoto (2008b) and CRUMP (2010). First, Yamamoto (2008b, p. 5) studied the 2006 JSPS Grant-in-Aid and found that among the respondents (N = 1,405), there were 1,041 college graduates, 64 with master's degrees, 4 with doctorates, and 296 others (junior college, high school, etc.); there were 74.1% college graduates, 4.6% master's degree holders, 0.3% doctorate holders, and 21.0% others. This shows that the administrative staff members with master's or doctoral degrees are a minority, a trend that was also found in the National University Administrative Staff Survey. Among all respondents (N = 5,909), 68.8% held bachelor's degrees, 26.0% reported other educational backgrounds (junior college, technical college, vocational school, no response, etc.), and 5.2% held graduate degrees (CRUMP, 2010, p. 6).

Although researchers on the latter survey did not distinguish between master's and doctoral degree holders, their finding is consistent with Yamamoto's results for advanced degree holders, and the proportions of bachelor's degree holders were similar as well (Yamamoto, 2008b, p. 5). However, neither of the above surveys provided basic data on whether administrative staff with overseas degrees (bachelor's, master's, or doctoral) or their statuses. Since administrative staff handling international duties require advanced skills and should communicate frequently with universities overseas (Katsuhira et al., 2013, pp. 94–99), international departments likely have a significant need for staff with overseas bachelor's and/or graduate degrees.

Additionally, the opportunities for graduate study are increasing (JUAM, 2021, p. 144). In the 2000s, Japanese universities began establishing graduate curricula targeting administrative staff, which at present number approximately 10 schools (Kaneko, 2017, p. 12). In addition to master's or doctoral courses, universities (e.g., the University of Tokyo and Hiroshima University) are offering diverse methods of learning, including studies focused on individual subjects, certificate programs, and distance learning (Kaneko, 2017, p. 14). In fact, in the National University Administrative Staff Survey cited above, 40% of administrative staff was reported to be interested in graduate study, with 8.3% "very interested" in "attending a master's program" and 30.4% "interested if given the opportunity" (CRUMP, 2010, p. 114).

In recent years, some universities began dispatching their specialist staff not only to Japanese training programs but also to overseas master's degree courses. For example, Waseda University (one of the Japanese private universities), to "cultivate human resources able to contribute to university policy decisions, taking one year away from the workplace to enter graduate school in Japan or overseas and acquiring a master's degree (MA/MBA etc.) in a field closely related to university administration" dispatched administrative staff from the Faculty of Science and Engineering to the full-time MBA program at the University of Oxford (Waseda University, n.d.).

Theoretical Framework

With regard to the role of administrative staff members in university internationalization, as stated by Brandenburg (2016, 2017), their roles are extremely important. Moreover, Hunter et al., (2018) posit:

Building commitment to internationalization among both academic and administrative staff requires a carefully thought-through strategic process involving the whole institution and providing appropriate human resource development. (Hunter et al., 2018, "Internationalisation and administrative staff", para. 3)

Here, it is reaffirmed that universities intending to commit to internationalization must also commit to the "human resource development" of administrative staff (Hunter et al., 2018). It is important to develop university administrative staff skills, capacities, and resources. When it comes to the internationalization of universities, it is necessary to take stock of the reality surrounding administrative university staff and analyze how to develop these human resources using theoretical approaches.

In this aspect, this study proves valuable by modifying Brinton's conceptual framework of a "human capital development system" (Brinton, 1988, p. 305; Brinton, 2008, pp. 52–53) to examine the provision of professional development opportunities for administrative staff as an organizational initiative and offering consideration points in exploring how this can be practically realized.

For example, Brinton (2008) defined "human capital development system" as a framework in which "individuals master and use the necessary skills and capacities as members of society," categorizing individuals as the "self-led type" who "take responsibility" and the "other-led type," who require involvement from other "stakeholders" (parents, schools, corporations, etc.) (p. 53). Brinton (2008) stated clearly that "In Japan, when individuals master and use the necessary skills and capacities as members of society, parents, schools, and corporations played a major role." (p. 68)

Thus, focusing on "members" of "schools" (Brinton, 2008, p. 68) including universities, this study modified Brinton's conceptual framework of the "human capital development system" to establish our conceptual framework where individual administrative staff "can master and use the necessary skills and capacities as members" (Brinton, 2008, p. 53) of Japanese universities.

Methodology

This study investigates the characteristics of Japanese university administrative staff as members of the university including whether they have any training or working experience overseas, and if they hold oversea university degrees. This study has adopted qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Frick, 2009, p. 255) by government policy documents and related reports of Japanese higher education and the case study data of applicants and recruit information for university administrative staff. As Frick (2009) points out, we "can use the analysis of documents as stand-alone method" (p. 255). With reference to Kariya's (2017, pp. 51-64) analysis of the reality and challenges of Internationalizing faculties, this study analyzes these documents and reports which were obtained from public information available on the JSPS website, in

particular from the TGU Project plans and “2019 Follow-Up Results” (JSPS, 2019). This project prioritizes “support for universities that are thoroughgoing in their efforts to internationalize,” including 37 leading Japanese universities (MEXT, n.d.; Shimmi & Yonezawa, 2015). Especially, this analysis focuses on the open data from 13 Japanese universities, namely, Hokkaido University, Tohoku University, University of Tsukuba, the University of Tokyo, Tokyo Medical and Dental University, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Nagoya University, Kyoto University, Osaka University, Hiroshima University, Kyusyu University, Keio University, and Waseda University.

It is important that these JSPS’s documents (JSPS, 2019) can reveal trends and shifts over several years among administrative staff in major Japanese universities. In this respect, these document analysis of this study aimed to indicate the characteristics of Japanese university administrative staff in terms of four ratio (ratios of international administrative staff to total number of full-time administrative staff, ratio of training or working, including staff development overseas to the total number of full-time administrative staff with at least one year, ratio of Japanese administrative staff with a degree from a oversea university to total number of full-time administrative staff, and ratio of degree courses at graduate level conducted in foreign languages only to all degree courses). Additionally, in the “descriptive methods” (Frick, 2009, p. 17) this study analyzed the detailed case example of the mid-career applicants and recruit information on Ritsumeikan University and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU). This analysis allowed potential issues and problems pertaining to university administrative staff to emerge.

Results

As witnessed so far, it is important for the internationalization of universities in Japan (Yamada, 2021; Yonezawa, 2009), Europe (e.g., Zhang, 2021), and North America (e.g., Veerasamy, 2021), to focus on administrative staff and understand the actual situation and conditions surrounding them.

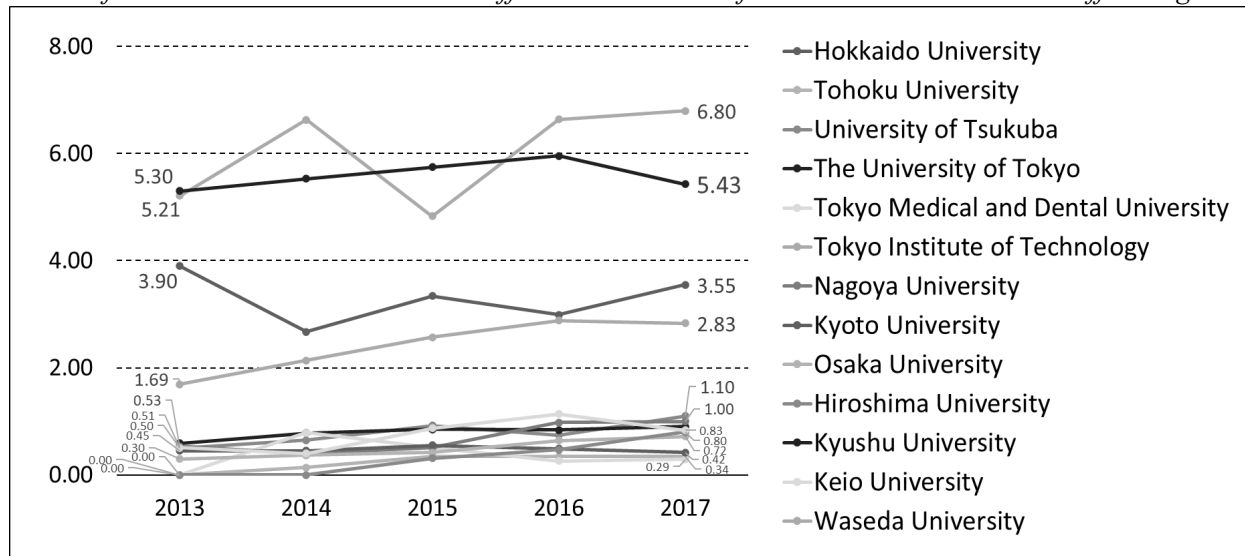
This section discusses and shows the realities and challenges of internationalizing Japanese administrative staff by applying and developing the modified conceptual framework of their international training and/or working experience.

Characteristics of Japanese University Staff

Figure 1 presents the ratios for administrative staff of foreign nationality over a period of five years, 2013–2017. Looking at individual universities, Tokyo Institute of Technology increased by 1.59%, from 5.21% in 2013 to 6.80% in 2017, while Kyushu University showed a minute increase, from 5.30% in 2013 to 5.43% in 2017 (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Ratios of International Administrative Staff to Total Number of Full-time Administrative Staff during 2013–2017 (%)



Source:
Based on

JSPS (2019, pp. 17–18)

There are nine universities that had almost no international staff in among leading universities in 2017. Although much still remains to be done in terms of using survey among universities, there has been no notable increase in the rate of foreign nationality staff (Figure 1).

One possible reason for this is the assumption that the administrative staff at Japanese universities will take part in internal meetings, prepare documents, and conduct various interdepartmental arrangements in Japanese; considerably, “it is rare to hire people from other countries for essential administrative staff posts” (Onishi & Oda, 2016, p. 111). Therefore, we can witness that the workplace system and environment at Japanese universities makes it difficult to recruit and retain international administrative staff.

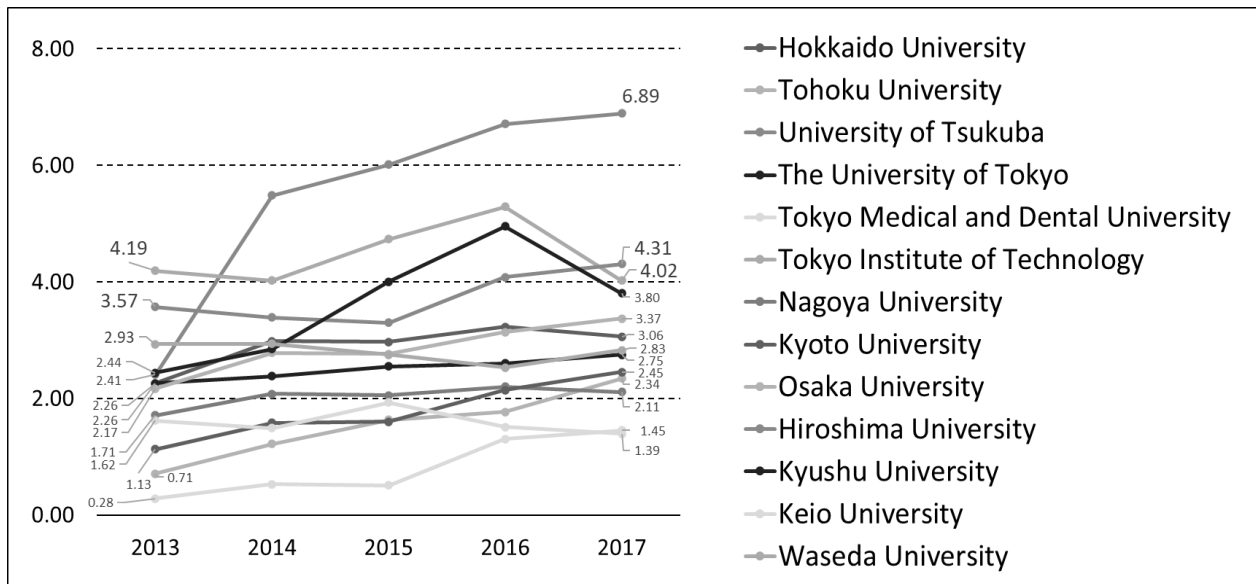
Japanese University Staff with Training and Work Experience in an Overseas Environment

The need for administrative staff training and professional development is increasing among Japanese universities, and SD is taking place in diverse forms, including within individual universities and university organizations as well as university collaborations and individual study programs (JUAM, 2021). However, in accordance with university internationalization, the existing domestic and in-house training, and focus on training and workplace experience overseas (Maeda, 2016), we address the status of work and training overseas among the administrative staff.

Figure 2 presents the proportion of Japanese administrative staff members with at least one year of total work experience or training overseas over a period of five years (2013–2017). Additionally, some universities expanded their opportunities for overseas study and work. Considering individual universities, Tohoku University increased by 1.63%, from 0.71% in 2013 to 2.34% in 2017, while Tokyo Medical and Dental University increased by 1.17%, from 0.28% in 2013 to 1.45% in 2017. Hiroshima University increased by 0.74%, from 3.57% in 2013 to 4.31% in 2017. Tohoku University, Tokyo Medical and Dental University, and Hiroshima University are among those with no previously noted staff of foreign nationality (Figure 1). However, they are apparently working to enrich their Japanese staff’s overseas training and work experience, which suggests that each university has its approach to the internalization of administrative staff.

Figure 2

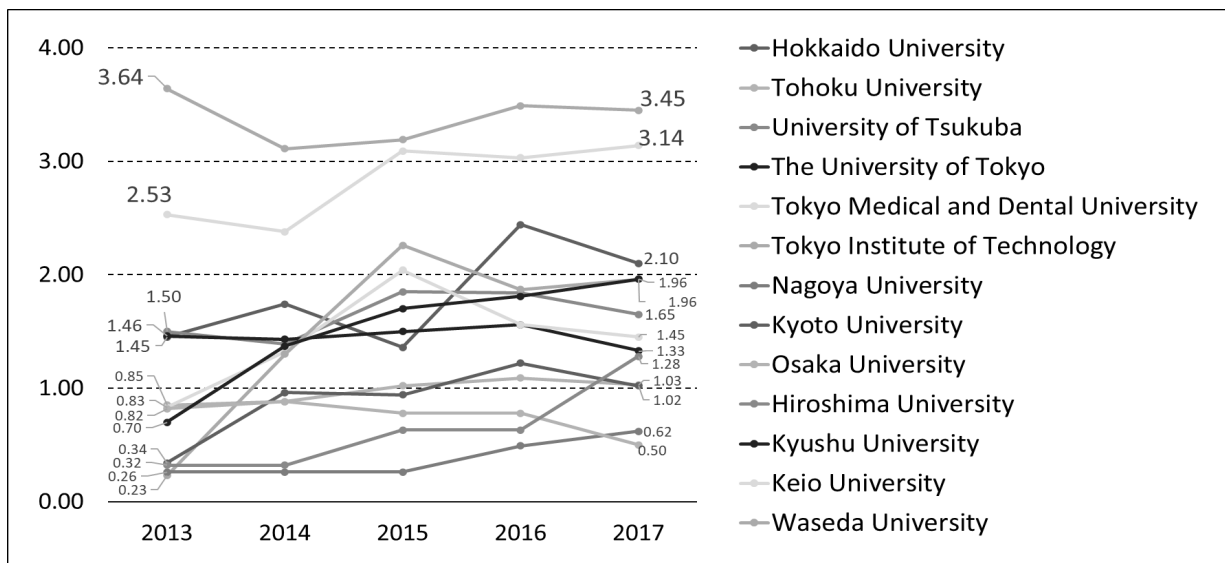
Ratio of Training or Working, Including Staff Development (SD), Overseas to the Total Number of Full-time Administrative Staff with at least One Year during 2013–2017 (%)



Source: Based on JSPS (2019, pp. 17–18)

Figure 3

Ratio of Japanese Administrative Staff with a Degree from an Oversea University to Total Number of Full-time Administrative Staff during 2013–2017 (%)



Source: Based on JSPS (2019, pp. 17–18)

Administrative Staff in Japanese Universities Who Have Degrees from Overseas

As reviewed, the educational background status of the administrative staff has not been sufficiently surveyed. However, as universities internationalize, the role of Japanese staff with degrees from overseas universities is likely to become more important.

Although the Tokyo Institute of Technology increased by 1.73% over a period of five years (2013–2017), most universities showed no clear changes (Figure 3). In particular, the graph for the University of Tokyo and Waseda University are effectively flat. For a staff member who is still under employment, it is difficult for the university to accommodate if the staff wishes to obtain a degree from an overseas university, unlike short-term professional development and training courses. Even if the university hires new administrative staff with degrees from overseas universities, they cannot be easily incorporated into mid- or long-term positions without significant organizational engagement.

For example, Ritsumeikan University and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University among Japanese private universities explore mid-career applicants for university administrative positions and prioritize hiring “those with degrees from overseas universities or graduate schools” and “those of foreign nationality” as administrative staff (The Ritsumeikan Trust, n.d.), that is, recruiting administrative staff who are prepared to promote university internationalization rather than staff who require additional training to contribute to the internalization process (Yonezawa, 2018, p. 56).

Ritsumeikan University and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University presented the following recruitment information for administrative staff in 2022: (Mid-career recruitment [The Ritsumeikan Trust, n.d.]):

- (1) Recruitment qualifications (partial): “Graduates of Japanese or international four-year universities (including master’s and doctoral programs) who can begin work from the day of hiring.” (The Ritsumeikan Trust, n.d.)

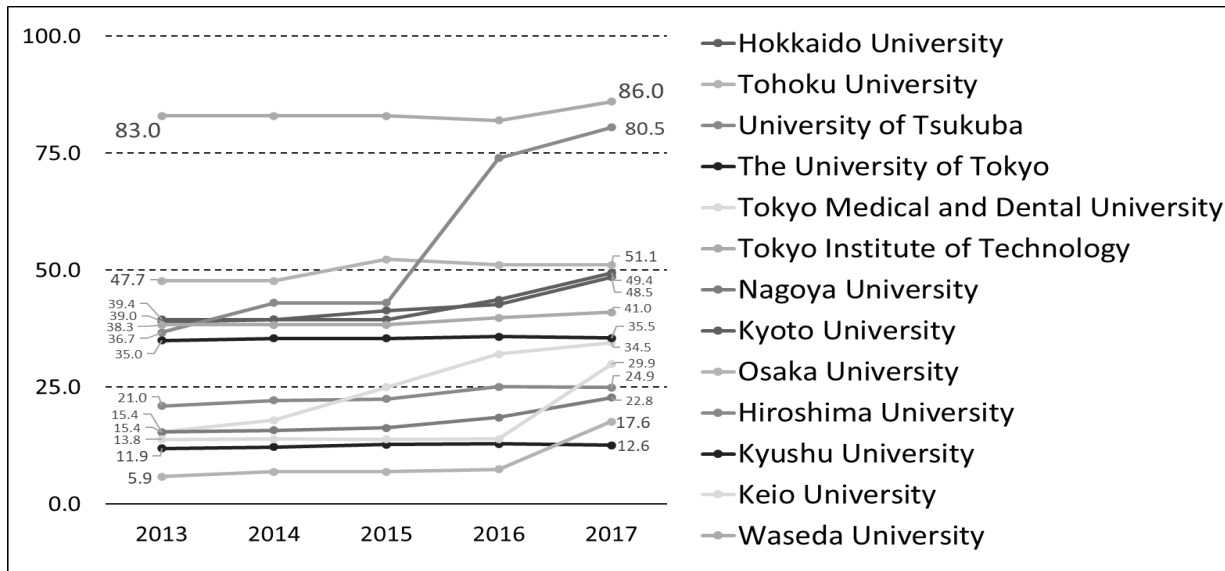
“Those with degrees from overseas universities and/or graduate schools, those with work experience overseas, and those of foreign nationality are welcome to apply.” (The Ritsumeikan Trust, n.d.)

- (2) Duties (partial): “Employees will handle the promotion of education and research and the management of the academic institution through the duties assigned to them in their department. Because approximately half the students and faculty at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University are of foreign nationality, staff will need to make

use of their foreign language abilities such as English. Assigned departments may include academic offices, student offices, career offices, research offices, admissions offices, and the President’s office.” (The Ritsumeikan Trust, n.d.)

Figure 4

Ratio of Degree Courses at Graduate Level Conducted in Foreign Languages Only to All Degree Courses during 2013–2017 (%)



Source: Based on JSPS (2019, pp. 45–47, pp. 49–50)

Universities have to consider internationalizing their administrative staff taking into account the unique circumstances they are in, and it remains a question whether universities are an attractive workplace for new graduates or mid-career applicants who have obtained degrees in overseas universities.

Discussion

Figure 1 that presents the proportion of international administrative staff in Japanese universities has not increased over time, even among universities in the TGU Project that are expected to heavily promote internationalization in the future. However, most of universities are providing English-medium degree courses and their programs, and the proportion of such programs is increasing at graduate levels (Figure 4).

Thus, this study noted the increasing number of international faculty members and researchers, in addition to international exchange students who can converse only in English in Japanese universities, and the context where there is an increase in foreign language degree courses and programs at the graduate level offered by universities (Figure 4). As Ota (2011) states, the staff of foreign nationality can provide high-quality work in a way which Japanese staff members cannot. For example, they can understand the struggles and difficulties unique to international exchange students and provide appropriate support. This is not to meet the goals of having an international administrative staff but also to undertake an active attempt for promoting diversity within the university community in the middle- and long- terms.

Kaneko (2017) suggests a need for “systematical learning experiences” (p. 13); the training content and programs “have not actually been systematically constructed” is an issue in SD (JUAM, 2021, p. 148). As the international staff gradually increases, the purposes, contents, and systems of SD are expected to become more complex. Brinton (2008) argued that the framework in which “individuals master and use the necessary skills and capacities as members of society” (p. 68), are important as “human capital development systems” (pp. 52–53). In addition, as mentioned in the “conceptual framework” section of this article, Brinton (2008) divided individuals into “self-led types” and “other-led types” and

observed that most Japanese workplaces are “other-led types” guided by other stakeholders (schools, corporations, etc.) (p. 53).

As per the mandatory university establishment standards of 2016, SD concerned with workplace experience and capacity development are being promoted in policy and organizational terms. Naturally, study options such as master’s courses and individual study and learning are encouraged; however, from the perspective of related systems, workplace environments, support measures, and “investment” in administrative staff at Japanese universities (Kaneko, 2017, p. 12), we think that they remain insufficient based on the analysis and discussion of this study.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examined the basic situation behind the internationalization of university administrative staff members, who received much less academic attention than other university members (e.g., faculty members, researchers, and graduate students). This study also reveals the necessity of examining administrative staff internationalization more closely. Furthermore, the insights can be employed for the development of university policies on recruitment guidelines and methods as well as the organization of staff training and talent development. However, only a few attempts have been made to analyze the basic situation of internationalizing administrative staff at Japanese universities compared to other countries

Specifically, this study reaffirmed that the proportion of international staff in Japanese universities is very small when compared to Japanese staff (Figure 1), and a few staff members have training, work experience, (Figure 2) or hold degrees from overseas universities (Figure 3). Grounded in the current policies related to internationalization of Japanese higher education (Shimmi & Yonezawa, 2015), this study recommends expanding administrative staff diversity and improving international SD training and opportunities for internationalizing Japanese universities in the near future.

Further research should investigate how and where the opportunities we clarified here for administrative staff’s international training, learning, capacity development, and “human resource development” (Hunter et al., 2018, “Internationalisation and administrative staff”, para. 3) are to be constructed, provided, and invested. Additionally, we need to examine important issues such as recruitment and hiring of administrative staff in Japanese universities. It is time to continue our focus on the “internationalization of constituent members” (Ota, 2011, p. S8) in a way that includes the administrative staff.

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Pre-Service Teaching and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in A Diverse and Democratic South African School Setting: A Social Theoretical Perspective.

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Abstract

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) is a form of experiential learning that connects students with workplaces in their chosen field of study. WIL is a vital component of South Africa's teacher education, requiring pre-service teachers to complete a school practicum as part of their qualification. This research explores the question: What are effective WIL models for pre-service teachers in diverse South African contexts? The study reviews the practical and philosophical models of WIL and the concurrent model, examining their implementation in various universities as case studies. The study also identifies challenges, opportunities, and the need for support in South African WIL. The study adopts a social learning theory framework. The study informs how WIL effectively supports pre-service teachers and schools in diverse South African classroom. The study also discusses how WIL can promote education for sustainable development (ESD) and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords: Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), South African schools, higher-education institutions, pre-service teachers, social learning, diversity and inclusion, education for sustainable development (ESD), SDGs.

Okucashuniwe

Inqubo yokubeka umfundi endaweni yokusebenza (WIL) iwuhlobo lokufunda okuhlangenwe nakho oluxhumanisa Abafundi nezindawo zokusebenza emkhakheni abawukhethile wokufunda. I-WIL iyingxenye ebalulekile yemfundo yobuthishela yaseNingizimu Afrika, edinga ukuthi othisha abaqeqeshwa ngaphambi kokuqala ukufundisa baqedele abakufundile ekilasini endaweni yangempela njengengxenye yokuphothula kwabo. Lolu cwaningo luhlola lo mbuzo: Yiziphi izifanekiso ze-WIL ezisebenzayo kothisha abaqeqeshwa ngaphambi kokuqala ukufundisa ezimeni ezahlukahlukene zaseNingizimu Afrika? Ucwaino lubuyekeza izifanekiso ezisebenzayo zesimo sengqondo nokuziphatha ze-WIL kanye nesifanekiso sezigaba eziningi zenqubo yokuthuthukiswa kwesofthiwe ezenziwa ngesikhathi esisodwa, luhlola ukuqaliswa kwazo ezimfundweni

eziphakeme ezihlukahlukene njengezifundo zocwaningo. Ucwaningo luphinde luhlonze izinselele, amathuba kanye nesidingo sokwesekwa kwe-WIL yaseNingizimu Afrika. Ucwaningo lamella unlace lombono wokufunda kwezenhlalo. Lolu cwanningo lwazisa ukuthi i-WIL ibasekela kanjani ngempumelelo othisha abaqeqeshwa ngaphambi kokuqala ukufundisa kanye nezikole ezisemakilasini ahlukahlukene aseNingizimu Afrika. Luphinde luxoxe ngokuthi i-WIL ingayithuthukisa kanjani imfundo yentuthuko esimeme (ESD) kanye nokufezwa Kwemigomo Yokuthuthukiswa Okusimeme (ama-SDG).

Amagama asemqoka: Inqubo yokubeka umfundi endaweni yokusebenza; Izikole zaseNingizimu Afrika; Imikhakha yemfundo epezulu; ukuqeqeshwa kothisha ngaphambi kokuqala ukufundisa; ukufunda ngokuziphatha kwabantu ezimeni zokuxhumana; ukwehlukahluka nokwamukela umehluko; imfundo yentuthuko esimeme; Imigomo Yokuthuthukiswa Okusimeme.

Introduction

Teacher training in undergraduate education needs to be understood in a post-democratic landscape, which ought to consider issues of equality, diversity and inclusion (Sant, 2019; Perry-Hazan & Somech, 2021; Savolainen et al., 2022). As Kalil and Grant assert (2021): “Higher education in a post-apartheid South Africa has been in a state of flux, as institutions have grappled with the challenges of transforming themselves to meet the changing needs of a developing democracy in a globalized economy.” Work-integrated learning (WIL), an essential component of teacher education in South Africa, provides pre-service teachers not only with practical experience and teaching skills, but also the context that is necessary for diverse, democratic and inclusive classrooms (Maseko & Nxumalo, 2016; Mncube & Mphahlele, 2019). WIL is a form of experiential learning that integrates theory and practice by providing students with opportunities to engage in meaningful work experience that is relevant to their field of study (Boud & Solomon, 2001; Almaiah et al., 2020). WIL programs can take many forms, including internships, cooperative education, service learning and practicums (Billet, 2009; Wild & Heuling, 2020). Work-based learning (WBL), on the other hand, is a subset of WIL that refers to learning that occurs in the workplace or is directly related to the work tasks and responsibilities of the students (Billet, 2009). WBL can be seen as a more specific and applied form of WIL that focuses on the development of work-related competencies and skills:

For many, with only their personal observations and experiences as school students to draw on, their entry into the profession as pre-service teachers also involves developing new understandings of their role, professional practices and the school environment as a professional educator. The use of authentic, industry-driven WIL learning activities creates numerous opportunities for universities to support students to develop a range of professional capabilities prior to placement (Winslade et al., 2020)

Research has shown that WIL can lead to better learning outcomes, increased employability and improved skill development (Billet, 2009; Zegwaard & Coll, 2012). WIL can also help bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world work experience, providing students with a more holistic understanding of their field of study (Boud & Solomon, 2001).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations provide a framework for sustainable development and include a specific goal on education (Goal 4), which emphasizes the need for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). WIL can contribute to achieving this goal by preparing pre-service teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide quality education in South African schools (Langeveldt et al., 2023). Furthermore, different WIL models can also contribute to achieving other SDGs, such as reducing inequality (Goal 10) and promoting decent work and economic growth (Goal 8) by addressing social and economic challenges in the classroom (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The educational landscape and SDGs should have a strong emphasis when considering the development of student teachers through WIL (Crawford & Cifuentes-Faura, 2022). This, in turn, has significant implications for the socioeconomic development of learners. Indeed, as Vladimirova and Le Blanc (2015) posit: “Education plays a well-recognized role of an enabler for many areas under the SDGs, e.g., growth, gender equality and many others ... progress in other areas may affect education in many ways.”

To achieve this study’s objectives, the following research question is posed: What are the best models of WIL for pre-service teachers in diverse South African social contexts?

To address this research question, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on WIL was carried out in South African schools, including case studies of higher-education institutions that have implemented best-practice models. The key characteristics of effective WIL models were identified and evaluated for their effectiveness in South African schools based on the review findings.

Literature Review

In South Africa, Work-Integrated Learning has gained prominence in the education system as a critical component of teachers' formation before they begin working. It is recognized as an effective way to prepare pre-service teachers for classroom demands by providing them with the practical experience and skills necessary for effective teaching (Billett, 2011; Singh et al., 2018; Department of Higher Education & Training, 2018; Mafumo et al., 2018).

Theoretical and practical learning to facilitate WIL models in South African schools

In South African schools, several WIL models have been used to improve teacher training. Some of the models include the mentorship model, the school placement model and the co-teaching model (Johannes et al., 2020). The mentorship model involves pairing pre-service teachers with experienced teachers who act as mentors, guiding and supporting them in their teaching practice. The school placement model involves placing pre-service teachers in schools to gain practical experience under the supervision of experienced teachers. The co-teaching model involves pre-service teachers working alongside experienced teachers to develop their skills through collaborative teaching. This work is so important because if one were to contextualize this wide enough that it touches upon the global aspects in terms of "the long-term relationship resulted in the devotion of the mentors to their mentees" (Nguyen, 2021). If one were to situate WIL discussions in this article to be applicable in various situations and nations as Nguyen's work suggest, then cultural and contextual factors should be taken into account when putting such initiatives into reality, and the effects of globalization on work-integrated learning practices need to better be understood.

Studies have shown that the effectiveness of these WIL models in South African schools depends on the balance between theoretical and practical learning. Pre-service teachers must have a balance of theoretical and practical learning to acquire the skills and competencies necessary for effective teaching (Nieuwenhuis & Ngidi, 2019). Adequate support and mentorship from experienced teachers are also critical in ensuring the success of WIL models (Johannes et al., 2020). This is difficult for both student teachers and their mentors, according to Manderstedt et al. (2022), exclaim that "this [puts] considerable pressure on students, who must deal with at least two different discursive practices during their work placement, which are different in terms of hierarchy. The conditions also put a lot of pressure on the mentors, who are supposed to assess the students in relation to university requirements." Despite the benefits of WIL in South African schools, there are several challenges associated with its implementation. Limited resources, insufficient infrastructure and a lack of coordination between higher-education institutions and schools have been identified as the main challenges facing the effective implementation of WIL in South African schools (Ngidi & Nieuwenhuis, 2020). These challenges have resulted in inadequate support for pre-service teachers during their practical training, which undermines the effectiveness of WIL models.

To address these challenges, it might be useful to compare the WIL model in South Africa with other countries that have similar or different contexts and approaches. For example, a study by Kalil and Grant (2014) compared the WIL model in South Africa with that of Australia and found that both countries face similar issues such as funding constraints, quality assurance and stakeholder collaboration. However, the study also found that Australia has a more established and coordinated national framework for WIL that provides clear guidelines, standards and incentives for all parties involved. The study suggested that South Africa could learn from Australia's experience and adopt some of its best practices to improve its own WIL model.

Another aspect that might help to improve the WIL model in South Africa is to consider the diverse context of the country itself. South Africa is a multicultural and multilingual country that has 11 official languages and various ethnic groups (Savolainen et al., 2012). This diversity poses both opportunities and challenges for pre-service teachers who need to adapt to different cultural and linguistic settings in their practicum placements. A study by Mncube and Mphahlele (2015) explored how pre-service teachers cope with cultural diversity in their WIL experiences and found that they face various difficulties such as communication barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and stereotypes. The study recommended that pre-service teachers should receive more training and support on intercultural competence and awareness before and during their WIL placements. The study also suggested that higher-education institutions and schools should collaborate more closely to ensure that pre-service teachers are matched with suitable mentors and schools that can cater for their diverse needs and expectations.

Effectiveness of WIL and technology in South African schools

To address these challenges, several strategies have been proposed. These strategies include improving the funding mechanisms for WIL programs, improving infrastructure, promoting research and innovation, and strengthening partnerships between stakeholders (Ngidi & Nieuwenhuis, 2020). The use of technology has also been identified as an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of WIL models in South African schools. Using technology in WIL programs can provide pre-service teachers with access to online resources, virtual classrooms and other digital tools to enhance their learning experience (Johannes et al., 2020). For example, the use of e-portfolios can help pre-service teachers document and reflect on their WIL activities, as well as showcase their competencies and achievements to potential employers (Moodley & Singh, 2019). Most students, according to Costley (2014), agree that incorporating technology into the curriculum improves the WIL learning experience. Another example is the use of mobile devices and applications, which can enable pre-service teachers to access learning materials, communicate with mentors and peers, and collect data in various contexts (Makgato & Mudau, 2018). Costley (2014) posits:

Technology has a positive impact on student learning. Technology encourages students to be more engaged; thus, students often retain more information. Due to the arrival of new technologies that are rapidly occurring around the world, technology is relevant for students. Technology provides meaningful learning experiences. Technology also provides hands-on learning opportunities that can be integrated into all school curricular areas [including WIL]. Different models of WIL have been used in South African schools, including the cooperative education model, the service-learning model and the apprenticeship model (Department of Higher Education & Training, 2018; Singh et al., 2018). Each model has its strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of model can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of WIL in preparing pre-service teachers for the classroom.

Several studies have evaluated the effectiveness of different WIL models in South African schools. For example, a study by Mafumo et al. (2018) found that the apprenticeship model was more effective in preparing pre-service teachers for the classroom than the service-learning model. However, other studies have found that the cooperative education model is the most impactful (Singh et al., 2018). The effectiveness of WIL models is influenced by several factors, including the balance of theoretical and practical learning, the quality of support and mentoring provided, and the level of collaboration between tertiary institutions and schools (Billett, 2011; Department of Higher Education & Training, 2018). Additionally, the employability of graduates is a key goal for the government and a performance metric for higher-education institutions. As Ng, Chan et al., (2021) state, “WIL students become increasingly employable when they equip themselves with the required skill standards that allow them to show their capabilities in the workplace. WIL improves the understanding of values and culture in the workplace.” However, most WIL studies focus on undergraduate students' experiences, making it challenging to translate WIL models to postgraduate programs (Karim et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 2018). The compressed nature of postgraduate degrees makes industry involvement difficult, but benefits outweigh constraints.

Implementing WIL in South African schools faces significant challenges, such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure and a lack of coordination between higher-education institutions and schools (Department of Higher Education & Training, 2018; Singh et al., 2018). However, there are also opportunities to improve WIL, such as using technology, promoting innovation, and fostering collaboration between stakeholders (Billett, 2011; Department of Higher Education & Training, 2018). Addressing challenges and taking advantage of opportunities requires the participation of educators, policymakers and education stakeholders.

WIL and South African higher-education institutions: a tool for teaching in schools

In South Africa, the Department of Higher Education & Training has developed the National Work-Integrated Learning Strategy (2017), which aims to promote the integration of WIL in all academic programs in the country. Several universities have implemented WIL in their teacher-education programs. For example, according to Koen and Du Plessis (2019), the University of Johannesburg has developed a WIL model that integrates theoretical and practical learning through school-based experiences. In this model, pre-service teachers are placed in schools for a year and are required to complete various tasks and assignments that align with the curriculum. The model also incorporates the mentorship and support of student teachers by more experienced teachers to ensure that receive adequate guidance and feedback is given.

Similarly, the University of Cape Town has implemented a WIL model that integrates service learning and community participation in its teacher-education program. In this model, pre-service teachers are required to participate in community-service activities that are aligned with the curriculum and provide opportunities for practical learning. This model also incorporates reflection and self-assessment to allow pre-service teachers to critically reflect on their learning and develop their professional skills (Okeke-Uzodike et al., 2020). Put differently by Jita and Munje (2022), “Therefore, it

is important for pre-service teachers to have the opportunity to develop adequate skills, mainly from teaching-practice mentoring experience, as required by South African national curricula". The University of Stellenbosch has a WIL model that incorporates school-based experiences and mentorship in its teacher-education program (Mncube & Mphahlele, 2019). Pre-service teachers are placed in schools for a year and complete various tasks and assignments aligned with the curriculum, while receiving mentorship and support from experienced teachers. The model includes the mentorship and support of experienced teachers to ensure that pre-service teachers receive adequate guidance and feedback.

At the University of South Africa (UNISA), a blended WIL model has been implemented that combines online learning and school-based experiences in the teacher-education program. In this model, pre-service teachers complete theoretical learning online and are then placed in schools for practical learning. The model incorporates support and mentorship from experienced teachers and uses technology to improve learning and communication (Chabeli & Muller, 2014).

In general, best-practice models for WIL in South African schools have been found to incorporate a balance of theoretical and practical learning, support and mentorship, and collaboration between higher-education institutions and schools (Maseko & Nxumalo, 2016; Mncube & Mphahlele, 2019). These models have been evaluated as effective in preparing pre-service teachers for the classroom and improving their employability. To support these strategies, researchers suggest that improving coordination and collaboration between higher-education institutions and schools can improve the implementation of WIL in South Africa (Maseko & Nxumalo, 2016). Additionally, technology can be used to support learning and communication between pre-service teachers and mentors (UNISA, 2023). Other suggestions include establishing effective feedback mechanisms to address challenges and improve the quality of WIL programs (Mncube & Mphahlele, 2019) and incorporating community engagement and social justice principles into WIL programs (Chabeli & Muller, 2014).

Opportunities to improve WIL in South African schools

The use of technology, innovation and the promotion of collaboration between stakeholders are key opportunities to improve WIL in South African schools. These opportunities can help address some of the challenges faced in the implementation of WIL and contribute to the effectiveness of WIL programs.

The present study explored best practices, challenges and opportunities related to work-integrated learning (WIL) in South African schools. Best-practice models were identified from international and African countries, including cooperative education, apprenticeships, problem-based learning, community-based learning and service-learning models. In addition, four South African universities were discussed for their effective WIL models: the University of Johannesburg (service-learning model), the University of Cape Town (work-integrated learning model), Stellenbosch University (experiential learning model) and the University of South Africa (internship model). Despite the benefits of WIL, challenges in its implementation were also identified. These challenges include inadequate funding, lack of infrastructure, and difficulties in the placement and transportation of students. Strategies to address these challenges include collaboration among stakeholders, government support, leveraging technology and innovation, and greater collaboration between stakeholders.

In terms of technology, it can help provide alternative learning experiences, promote interaction and facilitate evaluation. Innovation can help create new WIL models and improve existing ones. Collaboration among stakeholders can improve student learning outcomes and help create sustainable WIL programs. As Kalil and Grant (2021) explain, "while we recognize that the school-practitioner implementations are responsive to social characteristics of the learning environment, we have not directly investigated how social features of the pedagogy might create the conditions conducive to teaching and learning of integrated multimodal communication practice" (p. 47).

To improve WIL in South African schools, policymakers and educators must prioritize funding, infrastructure development and effective student placement strategies. They should also foster collaboration among stakeholders, promote innovation and use technology to provide a more engaging and effective learning experience for students. There are numerous advantages to incorporating technology in the training of student teachers, as expounded by Barrett et al., (2019), posits that:

Educational IT can allow [students] to learn at their own pace in purposely designed break-out spaces, outside learning areas or even corridors, staircases or cafeterias. Flexibility and adaptability in the design of formal and informal learning spaces may not only provide students with more diverse learning opportunities, stimuli and experiences, but also the chance to develop non-cognitive skills.

WIL models and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Work-integrated learning (WIL) models have the potential to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations by providing students with the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that are relevant in addressing global challenges. For example, WIL can help prepare pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to address social and economic challenges in the classroom, which is relevant for SDGs 4, 8 and 10. As Nousheen, et al. (2020) explain:

[Pre-service] teachers play a key role in the transformation of schools and overall society. To facilitate the societal transformation and attainment of SDGs requires a well-planned and well-established learning process that may contribute to the real change in the minds of people. Education for sustainable development (ESD) provides a well-planned and well-established platform to raise consciousness among individuals and to empower their decision-making capabilities to act sustainably. It is a well-recognized fact that ESD provides the required learning process to inspire the societal transformation and various educational institutions' adopted initiatives.

According to a study by Billett et al. (2018), WIL models that integrate academic learning with workplace experience can improve the quality of pre-service teacher education by providing opportunities for students to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. This approach can help students develop a deeper understanding of the context in which they will be working and also improve the formation of their professional identity (Billett et al., 2018).

Furthermore, WIL models that provide students with opportunities to engage in work-based learning can help develop the skills and competencies necessary for the workplace, such as problem-solving, communication and teamwork (Gribble et al., 2019). These models can help bridge the gap between the knowledge and skills that students acquire through their education and those needed in the workplace (Gribble et al., 2019).

In terms of diversity and inclusion, WIL models that incorporate community-based learning can help address social and economic inequality by providing students with opportunities to work with different people groups and gain a deeper understanding of their needs and perspectives. Diversity and inclusion are important aspects of teacher education that aim to promote respect, equity and social justice in the classroom and beyond (Sleeter, 2017). Diversity refers to the recognition and appreciation of the differences among students in terms of their social identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, language, culture and religion (Banks et al., 2005). Inclusion refers to the creation of a learning environment that values and supports the participation and contribution of all students, regardless of their backgrounds and abilities (Gay, 2018). Diversity and inclusion are essential for effective classroom instruction because they can enhance the quality of teaching and learning in several ways. A benefit of diversity and inclusion are diversity and inclusion can foster critical thinking and creativity by exposing students to different perspectives, experiences and worldviews. This can help students develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others, as well as challenge their assumptions and biases (Nousheen & Kalsoom, 2022). This approach can also help prepare students to become socially responsible citizens and contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable communities. This speaks to helping pre-service teachers develop empathy when engaging with students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, which is so important not only in South Africa, but also globally. A diversity of backgrounds in an educational context is summarized by Nousheen and Kalsoom (2022) as:

...socio-cultural perspectives (human rights, peace and human security, gender equality, cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, health, HIV/AIDS and governance); environmental perspectives (natural resources, such as water, energy, agriculture, biodiversity, climate change, rural development, sustainable urbanization, disaster prevention and mitigation); and economic perspectives (poverty reduction, corporate responsibility and accountability, and market economy).

WIL models can make important contributions to achieving SDGs by providing students with the skills and knowledge needed to address global challenges, such as ending world hunger, universal access to education and taking action against climate change. By integrating academic learning with work experience and community-based learning, WIL models can help develop students' professional identities, work skills and a sense of social responsibility, which are essential components of sustainable development.

In particular, WIL can help advance Goal 4 (quality education) by improving the quality and relevance of education (Langeveldt & Pietersen, 2024), as well as Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) by preparing pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to address social and economic challenges in the classroom. Furthermore, different WIL models can contribute to the achievement of other SDGs, such as reducing inequality (Goal 10) and promoting sustainable communities and cities (Goal 11).

Theoretical Framework

In analyzing how WIL models assist future educators in a uniquely South African context, the conceptual framework I have employed in this study is that of social learning theory (Kalil & Grant, 2021). We have chosen this framework because it emphasizes the role of observation, modelling and imitation in learning, which are key aspects of WIL. Moreover, this framework can help to answer the research question of what the best models of WIL for pre-service teachers in diverse South African social contexts are, as it can explain how different models of WIL influence the social learning processes and outcomes of pre-service teachers. Social learning theory, first advanced by psychologist Albert Bandura, proposes that people learn best through observation, modelling and imitation (Bandura, 1977). This theory helps to connect models that higher-education institutions use, along with examples of pedagogy in action and student feedback (Moosa & Rembach, 2020). As pre-service teachers are trained for a diverse South African school context, these procedures are linked (Van Steen & Wilson, 2020). Furthermore, seeing and doing is essential to student formation in terms of how the WIL process develops. Or, to put it another way, according to Bandura (1977), the WIL process is underpinned by learning that takes place alongside or in combination with other individuals as a form of social learning, which puts this type of interaction into context. Although resources, skills and technology are crucial for the WIL process, in essence, students learn best through observation (Schoeman, 2021).

Methodology

The research's general research methodology is the qualitative method. Cohen et al. (2000) provide a concise summary of the rationale behind the selection of this method: "the data [in literature reviews] at a specific point describe the nature of the conditions already in place or identify benchmarks to which the conditions already in place can be compared". This method allowed us as the researchers to locate the conceptualization around the constructs of the success of WIL models employed in South African schools varies, underscoring the need to identify the best practical and philosophical models needed for a diverse context. Several practical and theoretical models, including the block practicum model, the distributed model and the concurrent model, have been identified through a thorough assessment of the literature and a consideration of various universities as case studies through the lens of literature reviews has been employed, in order to understand the best practice of WIL models in a diverse South African educational environment.

In light of the aforementioned, the social learning theory allowed for analysis in this study in order to understand the research question of this study to investigate *what are the best models of WIL for pre-service teachers in a diverse South African social context?* In answering this question higher education institutions and all related parties will foreground teaching and learning within a defensible version of democracy in which WIL can be appreciated.

Results

The study, based on a thorough literature review and analysis of Wo models, offers crucial insights for future research in South African schools.

The key is to create a comprehensive WIL model that integrates classroom-based learning, supervised teaching practicums, and community-based service learning. The integration of these elements provides pre-service teachers with a comprehensive comprehension of their future responsibilities. They provide hands-on experiences in diverse settings, working with students from diverse backgrounds. This approach promotes adaptability and prepares students for the dynamic classroom environment through a multifaceted approach.

The success of WIL is not only theoretically based but also heavily relies on practical guidance and mentorship. Experienced teachers play a crucial role in providing support to pre-service teachers during their WIL journey. Mentorship helps bridge the gap between theory and practical application by providing insights, encouragement, and constructive feedback that foster growth and confidence.

The use of technology in schools is crucial for enhancing the learning experience and enhancing the overall learning experience. Digital platforms enable seamless communication and collaboration among various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and community partners. Technology, through virtual classrooms, online resources, and collaborative tools, significantly improves knowledge exchange and innovative practices.

The collaboration ecosystem is crucial for effective WIL. Schools, universities, and community organizations work together to create a symbiotic ecosystem. They foster the growth of pre-service teachers by combining resources, expertise,

and networks. The implementation of collaborative efforts enhances the effectiveness of WIL, enhancing student learning and fostering community engagement.

The impact of WIL extends beyond individual classrooms, contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. WIL models significantly contribute to achieving SDGs by providing pre-service teachers with adaptable skills and a deep understanding of social and economic challenges. These educators serve as change agents, influencing the development of a more equitable and sustainable future. The South African education system can benefit greatly from a collaborative, technology-enhanced WIL model, which empowers pre-service teachers to contribute meaningfully and drive positive societal change.

Limitations

This study focuses primarily on what are the best models of WIL for pre-service teachers in a diverse South African social context. If one were to have studied all the faculties of education in all the Universities in South Africa, and perhaps even the entire higher educational space in South Africa, deeper issues relating to WIL may rise, this may also be true if this study were to be applied to other countries internationally. These may include:

- Unbiased and efficient assessment techniques for WIL experiences. Traditional assessment techniques might not fully reflect the range of abilities and skills acquired in practical teaching situations.
- South Africa is a multilingual nation, and in some situations, language difficulties can make it difficult to communicate and impart knowledge. When pre-service teachers interact with students, colleagues, and community members, language barriers may present difficulties.
- The educational system in South Africa is going through reforms and adjustments. WIL models may be less relevant and successful in this dynamic context because they must adjust to changing objectives and policies.

Therefore, many readers of this study may find it difficult to objectively wrestle with some of the ideas presented here. Nevertheless, the research question discussed in this study is quite exciting and could become instrumental to policymaking. It is still uniquely South African based while it still offers an example in its implementation and contributions in South Africa, or the presentation of South African context could comparatively help other countries navigate and learn from it.

Implications and Conclusion

The research question, namely *what are the best models of WIL for pre-service teachers in a diverse South African social context?* has been investigated in this article. This was foregrounded by the premise that WIL models need to be created by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to assist pre-service teachers, schools and higher-education institutions in addressing the specific needs and difficulties of the various classroom environments in South Africa, rather than addressing only the mechanical and practical elements of teacher formation. As Slabbert and Naudé (2022), aptly put it, “owing to political transformation in South Africa, the term diversity has become synonymous with the political reform taking place in the country. Approaches to diversity are important elements in improving understanding of social integration in a racially integrated school environment, as schools are considered a reflection of society.” Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an important pedagogical approach to prepare pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge they need to become effective and caring school practitioners (Pietersen, 2022). WIL models have been successfully implemented in various countries around the world. However, despite the benefits of WIL, there are still several challenges to its effective implementation in South African schools, including limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, coordination issues between higher education institutions and schools, insufficient funding, and placement and transportation difficulties.

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Localization of the Bologna Process in Post-Soviet Context: The Case of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

As the Bologna process emerged in the framework of European integration, its objectives are closely linked to the process of voluntary convergence of public policies of members of the European Union. In this context, it can be challenging to understand possible convergence or divergence trends in Bologna member countries that are outside the European Union. In this paper, I develop a theoretical framework based on Acharya's (2004) norm localization theory to analyze the historical and present factors of borrowing and adoption of the Bologna standards in Kazakhstan. While the findings suggest that convergence to the Bologna model will be limited, the identified short-term outcomes of the Bologna process include adopting the Bologna-driven competence-based approach. In the long term, the competence-based approach could replace knowledge-based education in Kazakhstan. The analysis reveals the importance of domestic factors for educational policy borrowing.

Keywords: Amitav Acharya, Bologna process, Kazakhstan, norm localization, policy travel, post-Soviet

Introduction: Convergence, Divergence, or Localization

In recent decades, many governments have pursued neoliberal policies out of pragmatic considerations (Tight, 2019). Neoliberalism proposes the application of the following principles in the public sector: the reduced role of the state in the management of goods and services, including educational ones; the use of the market as an instrument for the distribution of resources; and finally, “a view of individuals as economically self-interested subjects” (Tight, 2019, p. 2). These processes were facilitated by globalization and the rapid development of technologies (Marginson & van der Wende, 2009a). In this context, many researchers advocated a theory of convergence that predicted the alike development of “social

structures, political processes, and public policies” (Bennett, 1991). The theory led to studies on economic and policy convergence. However, the idea of convergence was criticized for failing to take into account the unique national contexts of individual countries (Bennett, 1991). The emergence of distinct positions on the issue of convergence among social scientists has been referred to as the convergence-divergence debate (Georgiadis, 2008).

In higher education, globalization increased interconnectedness and competition between universities all over the world, as well as the orientation of education systems towards the market (Marginson, 2006). These trends led to the proliferation of international quality assurance standards and benchmarking tools, including global university rankings, and created pressure toward convergence on education systems and universities (Steiner et al., 2013). In addition to the convergence pressures of neoliberal policies, many countries in Central and Eastern Europe became involved in the European integration processes (Georgiadis, 2008), which were directly oriented toward voluntary policy convergence (Bennett, 1991). Initially, the members of the European Economic Community had to harmonize their national tax regulations to eliminate tariffs on goods transported between national borders within the European Economic Area (Charlemagne, 2010, as cited in Woldegiorgis, 2013, p. 16). In the context of creating a common European market supported by the free movement of labor and capital, priority was given to the tasks of “quality education, employability of graduates across borders, and standardization of qualifications” to support the free movement of labor and capital in the Common European Market (Woldegiorgis, 2013, p. 13). In this case, voluntary convergence or harmonization of educational policies became a priority task for European countries (Woldegiorgis, 2013, p. 16).

In 1999, the intergovernmental Bologna Process (hereinafter – BP) was launched aimed at the convergence of higher education systems in Europe and the creation of the European Area of Higher Education (The Bologna Declaration, 1999). The Bologna Process aimed to promote the coherence of European higher education systems and cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe based on policy measures and instruments, including the two-cycle degree system and the European Credit Transfer System (BFUG, n.d.).

At first, the Bologna process was created without the direct involvement of the European Commission, based on a more voluntary and flexible approach towards the convergence of higher education (Wagenaar, 2019). In connection with its inter-governmental approach, which did not involve the European Commission directly, the Bologna process has attained great attention and influence in almost every country beyond Europe, with many non-EU countries either joining the Bologna process in harmonization efforts or adopting its instruments (BFUG, n.d.; Zgaga, 2006). Thus, the voluntary involvement of European countries in the convergence of educational policies echoed in the convergence of educational policies by non-EU countries, interested in the Bologna process.

Consequently, the theoretical problem of convergence in higher education, driven by globalization and the Bologna process, became an important research agenda (Heinze & Knill, 2008; Veiga, 2005). In higher education research, some scholars proposed the convergence thesis based on the increase of non-state forces as important actors in public policies, while others suggested the divergence thesis, which stated that harmonization of educational policies is used for national interests by states (Woldegiorgis, 2013). In connection with this, studies of the Europeanization of higher education and the external dimension of the Bologna process have grown (Zgaga, 2006). Focusing on the voluntary convergence of European and non-European countries to Bologna standards, some scholars discussed the idea of exporting the Bologna model to non-European countries (Ravinet, 2008; Zgaga, 2006).

On the one hand, the Bologna process had achieved considerable progress in the convergence of degree structures among participating countries and had introduced common frameworks in the fields of quality assurance and qualifications (Marginson & van der Wende, 2009b). The systematic literature review of the articles and policy documents on the Bologna process published between 2004 and 2013 found that convergence, at least at the macro-level, was the most important outcome of the Bologna process (Wihlborg & Teelken, 2014). Furthermore, the Bologna process has also evolved: although initially, its implementation was flexible, the use of benchmarking, and peer pressure have become successful instruments to achieve the convergence goals of the Bologna process in intergovernmental conditions (Ravinet, 2008).

On the other hand, in-depth studies have revealed significant country differences in the implementation of the Bologna process among the countries involved (Marginson & van der Wende, 2009b). For example, while the Netherlands replaced its old system of degrees with the two-tier Bologna system, Germany introduced the two-tier system in parallel with its old system (Lub et al., 2003). Furthermore, it is hard to focus on convergence to European educational standards when researching the Bologna process in member countries outside the European Union. The analysis of the EHEA Bologna

Process Country Reports by Soltys (2014) has shown that the convergence to the Bologna model in many post-Soviet countries did not happen. In a similar vein, Zmas (2014) noted that “it is possible that the BP will reinforce relevant regionalisms or nationalisms in other parts of the world rather than leading to a convergence of national higher education policies” (p. 720).

While the convergence of the macro-structures in frames of the Bologna process cannot be ignored by researchers (Ravinet, 2008; Wihlborg & Teelken, 2014), the studies also reveal evidence in support of the divergence thesis (Lub et al., 2003; Marginson & van der Wende, 2009b; Zmas, 2014). Thus, the studies of Europeanization and the external dimension of the Bologna process did not avoid the convergence-divergence debate in higher education.

Kazakhstan is a Central Asian country that joined the Bologna process in 2010 (The Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010). By contrast to the Europeanization studies, which focus on convergence towards European educational standards, existing studies suggest that Kazakhstan has used international discourse to symbolically support the establishment of a new geopolitical space (Silova, 2005). Furthermore, existing studies have reported many implementation challenges of the Bologna process in Kazakhstan (Tampayeva, 2015, 2016; Yelibay et al., 2022; Yergebekov & Temirbekova, 2012). While the Bologna process is important for Kazakhstani higher education policy, the implementation challenges in the Kazakhstani context show the necessity to study the influence of regional and local factors on the process of borrowing international policies and norms.

In connection with this, the present article suggests that a more balanced theoretical approach is needed in the study of the Bologna process, which admits the local context and its actors in the process of adopting the Bologna standards. The paper proposes to use the localization concept by the International Relations scholar Amitav Acharya (2004) to examine the Bologna Process in non-EU countries. Acharya studied the policy borrowing and travel of international norms. In the discipline of International Relations, the norm is “a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 891). Although not legally binding, participation in the Bologna process involves the voluntary convergence of educational policies to a set of European policy regulations and standards (Garben, 2010), creating international norms in higher education.

Acharya (2004) argued against the approach in which international standards would be treated as some “good global or universal” replacing “bad regional or local norms” (p. 242). Following Acharya (2004), the present paper suggests that the focus on convergence vs. divergence views the Bologna process as “teaching by transnational agents, thereby downplaying the agency role of local actors” (Acharya, 2004, p. 242). The paper suggests that the focus on convergence or divergence implies the dichotomic view on the Bologna process in non-European countries, which ignores the interplay between the Bologna influence and domestic factors, especially in regions and countries outside the European Union.

Pointing out that “local beliefs are themselves part of a legitimate normative order, which conditions the acceptance of foreign norms,” Acharya (2004) argued that local agents reconstruct international norms so that they “fit with the agents’ cognitive priors and identities” (Acharya, 2004, p. 239). Referring to this process as “congruence building,” Acharya (2004) suggested that localization is a “key to acceptance” of international policies and norms (p. 239).

The findings of research on educational policy borrowing in post-Soviet countries echo Acharya’s (2004) observations. Iveta Silova (2005), an international researcher in education, has developed a theory about educational policy borrowing in Central Asian countries. Silova (2005) suggested that:

Local education stakeholders may ‘appropriate the language of the new allies’, while not necessarily agreeing with it or being willing to implement it. In other words, local education stakeholders may effectively internalize international discourses, while using them for their own needs such as legitimizing contested educational reforms domestically, objectifying value-based decisions, or ‘signaling’ certain reform movements internationally (p. 52).

In a similar vein, Tampayeva (2015) suggested that “It is inevitable then that borrowed patterns become a subject of “recontextualization” in a local context” (p. 83).

Some higher education scholars positively evaluated Acharya’s (2004) concept. For example, Chou and Ravinet (2017) criticized the view on the Bologna process as the model for adoption in other world regions, pointing out that local context plays an important role in shaping transnational policies (p. 154). Chou and Ravinet (2017) also positively evaluated

the concept of localization in the study of the external dimension of the Bologna process, noting that “Acharya's concept of 'norm localization' captures much more accurately the processes we observed” (p. 156). However, the researcher could find only one higher education study that applied this concept: Que Anh Dang (2015) applied the concept of localization as part of a broader theoretical framework to examine regionalism in ASEAN higher education and concluded that ASEAN is actively building its own regional higher education space, while the role of the Bologna process served as an inspiration but not a template.

The present paper adapts Acharya's (2004) arguments into an analytical framework for a literature review of the Bologna process in the post-Soviet and Kazakhstani context. The paper aims to reconceptualize the Bologna process in contexts outside the European Union, by analyzing the reasons for many post-Soviet countries' joining or showing interest in the Bologna Process, as well as the factors that influence the localization of the Bologna process in Kazakhstan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, post-Soviet countries faced similar problems (Smolentseva et al., 2018). Therefore, after presenting the conceptual framework and the research method, the factors that led to the adoption of the Bologna model or its elements in post-Soviet countries are examined. Next, the factors of localization of the Bologna model in Kazakhstani higher education are analyzed. The analysis suggests that the convergence to the Bologna model will be limited in the Kazakhstani context, but short-term and long-term outcomes of localization can be observed. It is expected that the paper will contribute to the understanding of convergence to the European higher education model in the non-European context, joining the discussion on geopolitics and governance in higher education by Shaw (2012), Oldac (2021), and Otto (2021).

Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Localization

The present section presents the concept of localization by Acharya (2004), which serves as the analytical lens of the current literature review. Acharya (2004) has criticized the perspective which presumed that “‘good’ global norms prevail over the ‘bad’ local beliefs and practices” (p. 239). He pointed out that “local beliefs are themselves part of a legitimate normative order, which conditions the acceptance of foreign norms” (p. 239). He further argued that local agents reconstruct international norms so that they “fit with the agents’ cognitive priors and identities” (p. 239). Referring to this process as “congruence building,” Acharya suggested that it is a “key to acceptance” (p. 239). To illustrate the effectiveness of certain international norms at the regional level, Acharya studied a case from the field of ASEAN security policy. Inspired by the European experience, Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans proposed the idea of “common security” for the ASEAN organization. The idea of “common security” suggested the complete abandoning of established ASEAN norms, including non-interference in the domestic issues of ASEAN members and preference for a non-formal style of cooperation (Acharya, 2004, pp. 256, 265). However, members of ASEAN countries rejected this idea. Specifically, Ali Alatas, the former Indonesian Foreign Minister, criticized this proposal: “You cannot just take European institutions and plant them in Asia because the two situations are totally different” (as cited in Acharya, 2004, p. 257).

In connection with this, Evans modified the initial idea into the idea of “cooperative security” (Acharya, 2004, p. 257). This approach was more flexible, respecting the non-interference principle of ASEAN members (Acharya, 2004). Due to this respect towards one of the major principles of ASEAN, the idea was accepted by the ASEAN members (Acharya, 2004).

Acharya (2004) suggested that borrowed policies and norms face several factors in the local context (Table 1). First, he introduced a concept of “norm hierarchy” suggesting that a norm that threatens the established norms will be rejected by the receiving side (Acharya, 2004, p. 251). He further suggested that if the foreign norm does not threaten any of the established main norms on the receiving side, it may occupy the spot of a less significant norm in the hierarchy. Thus, while the idea of cooperative security was compatible with the ASEAN principle of non-interference, it replaces the less significant prior norm – the Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality framework (ZOPFAN) (Acharya, 2004, p. 256). Furthermore, other factors of successful localization of an international norm include the existence of influential insider proponents and prior similar norms, as well as an international prestige of a norm (Acharya, 2004, p. 265).

Table 1

Reasons and outcomes behind norm and policy borrowing and localization.

Reasons	
Why borrow	Economic crisis, war, or depression Change of global powers Change of domestic powers
Why localize	International regional demonstration effect Borrowed norm enhances the legitimacy and authority of existing institutions and practices Strong local norms prevent wholesale borrowing (norm hierarchy) Credible local actors Strong local identity Similarity with a prior norm
Outcomes	
Short-term outcome: institutional change	Task expansion Development of a new policy instrument
Long-term outcome (may or may not occur)	Fundamental change or norm displacement

Note. Source: Adapted from Acharya (2004)

It is suggested that Acharya's (2004) concept of localization can contribute to the convergence-divergence debate in social science. Furthermore, this theoretical perspective can help explain the success and failure of borrowed policies in different local contexts (Table 1). Therefore, this perspective is proposed for analyzing the Bologna process outside the European Union.

Research Method

The Bologna Process is a mature and established topic, which makes it difficult for junior scholars to bring new perspectives to the process. This paper applies the analysis of literature to reconceptualize the Bologna process in post-Soviet countries as a localization of Bologna policies and standards. Among different types of literature review, Torracco (2016) identifies a distinct type of literature review: the reconceptualization literature review. According to Torracco (2016),

Reconceptualization offers a new way of thinking about the topic addressed in the literature. Reconceptualization is undertaken when the current conception of the topic is found to be outdated or otherwise problematic and a critique and reconceptualization of the topic is needed (p. 64).

Following Torracco (2016), the relevance of the literature in the present review was assessed considering the research objective, which is to identify domestic factors behind joining the Bologna Process. While there is a plethora of studies on the implementation of the Bologna Process in post-Soviet countries, the present literature review focused on the studies describing the initial phase of the adoption of the Bologna process in the post-Soviet context.

Data Collection and Analysis

At the beginning of the work, the researcher identified the existing literature on the Bologna Process. The researcher was able to identify seven systematic and two analytical literature reviews dealing with specific aspects of the Bologna Process (Table 2).

In addition, the researcher read the meta-review of studies on internationalization by Kehm and Teichler (2007). Overall, none of the identified reviews of the literature were dedicated to the Bologna process in the post-Soviet context

(Table 2). The initial literature search was performed in the ERIC database using the “Bologna process” and “post-Soviet” keywords. This search identified 44 articles, published since 2003. However, by reading the titles and the abstracts of the articles, the researcher identified only three relevant articles (Silova & Niyozov, 2020; Soltys, 2014; Tampayeva, 2015). A further search of the literature was performed based on the careful reading of the identified articles, in which the abovementioned authors cited other researchers in the field of post-Soviet education and the Bologna process in Kazakhstan. Some authors cited their previous works (Silova & Niyozov, 2020). Furthermore, an in-depth compendium titled *25 Years of Transformations of Higher Education Systems in post-Soviet Countries: Reform and Continuity* was published by Huisman et al. (2018). The compendium provided an in-depth analysis of the reform history of post-Soviet higher education systems. The researcher used several articles from the abovementioned compendium (Clement & Kataeva, 2018; Shadymanova & Amsler, 2018; Smolentseva et al., 2018). Finally, the researcher flexibly used search engines to identify additional reports, relevant to the aim of the study (BFUG, 2004; Zgaga, 2006, 2019).

Table 2

Existing literature reviews, dedicated to the Bologna process.

Authors (in alphabetical order)	Type of review	Topic of review
Collins & Hewer, I. 2014	Systematic	The Bologna process and nursing higher education
Diogo et al., 2019	Systematic	The implementation of the Bologna process
Heinz & Maasen, 2020	Systematic	Bologna process and the social sciences
Kroher et al., 2021	Systematic	Bologna process and student enrollment
Mngo, 2019	Analytical	The Bologna process and the external dimension
Palese et al., 2014	Systematic	The Bologna process and nursing education
Pereira et al., 2016	Systematic	Assessment studies in the Bologna process
Vucaj, 2015	Analytical	Bologna process and vocational education and training (VET)
Wihlborg & Teelken, 2014	Systematic	Critical studies on the Bologna process

The present literature review has a conceptual structure, organized around the main elements, identified by Acharya (2004) (Table 1). Analytical tables are included to visualize the conceptual framework of Acharya (2004) and the main findings of the literature review. The literature review provides a novel perspective that highlights the role of domestic factors in the Bologna process.

Findings

Reasons for Joining the Bologna Process in the Post-Soviet Context

As it was mentioned above, Acharya (2004) criticized the dichotomic view of “good global” standards versus “bad regional or local” standards (p. 242). In his paper, Acharya (2004) suggested several factors that would lead the countries to borrow international policies or standards (Table 1). The purpose of the present section is to show several historical changes that influenced the interest of the post-Soviet countries in the Bologna process. Overall, in the Soviet Union, all the countries were subject to one uniform system of higher education, which was centrally controlled from Moscow (Froumin & Kouzminov, 2018). Thus, the post-Soviet education systems in European and Asian parts of the ex-Soviet Union faced similar problems after its collapse. Overall, the analysis below suggests that post-Soviet universities were pushed towards the Bologna process by exogenous factors. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic crisis caused a drastic lack of financing in the higher education sectors of ex-Soviet countries. While the discussion of the quality of Soviet education or comparison of Western and Soviet education models is beyond the scope of the article, the main point about the challenges with which post-Soviet universities met is the following: the lack of funding and the new, marketized environment, in which post-Soviet universities could not operate, were the major reasons for the deterioration in education quality. Furthermore, international organizations have been active in promoting neoliberal policies in post-Soviet higher education systems. Finally, the interest of some post-Soviet countries in the Bologna process influenced the interest of their neighbors in it, including Central Asian countries.

Economic Crisis after the Collapse of the Soviet Union

The first years of the post-Soviet era were characterized by an elevated level of turbulence. First, the social context was incredibly challenging for the development of education systems: unemployment, low wages, poverty, and armed conflicts in certain regions (Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). Many economic ties between ex-members of the Soviet Union were broken and centralized funding from Moscow was cut (Silova, 2009). During this period, the adoption of neo-liberal policies in higher education in post-Soviet countries was not driven by a strategic choice, but by a lack of government funds, and the weak ability of the government to ensure proper management (Smolentseva et al., 2018).

The international competitiveness of HEIs fell dramatically after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Specifically, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Soviet higher education ensured certain achievements: the government provided free higher education for all citizens based on entrance examination results, and higher education focused on the needs of a society guided by government policy (Kuraev, 2015).

In the Soviet Union, the government system defined and dictated certain beliefs to citizens through the system of communist ideology. Studies of Marxism and Leninism, dialectical materialism, and the history of the Communist Party were instead of the social sciences (Heyneman, 2010). To put it simply, all the views on history, literature, law, and society were taught through a single framework of communist ideology. As it was strictly defined what was proper to believe in and what was not, there was no need for the development of social sciences, the process which was taking place in the West during the same period. Consequently, higher education developed a strong vocational orientation. In the last decades of the Soviet Union's existence, education policy prioritized the professional training of youth at school and college levels (Kuraev, 2015). Academic freedoms or individual rights were ignored in Soviet HEIs, while communal values were placed as a priority (Kuraev, 2015). As noted by Kuraev (2015),

Soviet higher education opposed the western university model on a fundamental level: The pragmatism of practical training contradicted the ideology of academic liberal knowledge and institutional self-governance. Decision-making in higher education was transformed from a personal matter to a communal one in the USSR.” (p. 181).

Institutions were not able to define their budgets (Heyneman, 2010). Kuraev (2015) compared the role of Soviet higher education with a conveyor belt, that provided a professional workforce under the state order.

Consequently, the quality of education fell below the level that was achieved during Soviet times (Silova, 2009), so it was a big step back for universities. Curriculum got outdated, university and school infrastructure got old, education funding was at an extremely low level, lack of qualified teachers, and corruption became widespread issues across post-Soviet countries (Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). According to Froumin and Leshukov (2016),

The collapse of the Soviet system and the shift to a new, more market-oriented economic model forced a significant transformation of the Russian higher education system, including the mission, organization, and behaviors of institutions themselves (p. 174).

It was noted that the level of professionalization in education was low in the 1990s, which could be a barrier to the reform process (Johnson, 1996). Employability became a significant challenge for universities in their new role (Heyneman & Skinner, 2014).

Consequently, not all HEIs managed to survive in new conditions: “At one time, they had been leaders in specific areas of training determined by the state; now they had lost their sense of identity and purpose” (Froumin & Leshukov, 2016, p. 183). The quality of higher education went down, resulting in cheap educational programs, oriented on mass demand (Froumin & Leshukov, 2016). Enrollment rates decreased; many high-quality specialized programs were closed, and even the mass-produced new education programs did not satisfy student demands in terms of poor and narrowly focused curricula (Froumin & Leshukov, 2016). All these problems created an internal demand for education reform.

Change of Global and Domestic Powers

The collapse of the USSR created a necessity to develop independent education systems, which corresponded to the needs of post-Soviet states. Furthermore, international organizations emerged as new players in the region, which was

previously closed to international influences. International organizations supported the process of policy borrowing in post-Soviet countries, which was needed to build independent educational systems (Silova, 2005). Many post-Soviet countries relied on assistance aid from international organizations, including World Bank, Asian Development Bank, US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Open Society Foundation, Aga Khan Foundation, and others (Silova, 2005). The European Union became one of the influential players in the post-Soviet region. Furthermore, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) proposed to act as a broker in bringing the Bologna process to non-Bologna countries (Zgaga, 2006)

Under the influence of international organizations, post-Soviet and Central Asian countries were introduced to outcome-based education (hereinafter - OBE) (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2006). By the time it arrived in Central Asia, OBE was already an internationally widespread reform, whose footprint could be found in many national education systems (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2006). In addition, Central Asian countries were accustomed to the practices of benchmarking and planning since the Soviet times, which made the use of competences and learning outcomes attractive for Central Asian policymakers (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2006). Finally, Central Asian countries dealt with domestic issues in education, which made policymakers interested in outcome-based education. According to Steiner-Khamsi et al. (2006), in Kyrgyzstan, policymakers used outcome-based education to reduce corruption in the education sector. Kazakhstan used the same approach to pursue its wish to develop an economy like that of Western countries (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2006).

International Regional Demonstration Effect

Many post-Soviet countries submitted their application for Bologna membership at the same time: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (BFUG, 2004). Now, the Bologna process includes all the countries from the European sub-group of post-Soviet countries (Smolentseva et al., 2018). Similarly, to the Eastern European countries, Kazakhstan joined the Bologna process in 2010 (The Budapest-Vienna Declaration, 2010). Coming from a similar post-Soviet context, these countries could have influenced each other in their interest in the Bologna Process. This can be described as the "regional demonstration effect" by Acharya (2004, p. 247).

While Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian member country of the Bologna process (at the moment of writing this paper), all other Central Asian countries have shown great interest in the Bologna model of higher education reform. Kyrgyzstan applied for membership in the Bologna process. However, the application was rejected in 2007 due to Kyrgyzstan not being a signatory of the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe, which is a precondition of the Bologna membership (Shadymanova & Amsler, 2018). Specifically, Bologna's two-tier degree system has been introduced in all Central Asian countries, although in many cases it coexists with the Soviet 5-year specialist degree and Soviet doctorate system (Smolentseva et al., 2018). In 2014, Turkmenistan established the International University of Humanities and Development (IUHD), with the teaching process being experimentally based on the Bologna model (Clement & Kataeva, 2018). The university mostly recruited local faculty with foreign degrees and two international faculty members (as of spring 2016) (Clement & Kataeva, 2018). Some leading universities in Turkmenistan host guest lecturers in cooperation with the Erasmus program (Clement & Kataeva, 2018). According to Clement and Kataeva (2018), "The philosophy behind IUHD's founding was to create a Turkmen HEI that would meet international standards and compete with the internationally recognized Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan" (p. 397). The interest of the CA countries in the Bologna model shows the importance of developing a strong higher education system for the elites of these countries. In addition, the case of IUHD in Turkmenistan shows the wish to build universities that are competitive in comparison with neighboring countries.

In the context of the external dimension of the Bologna process (Figueroa, 2008; Petkutė, 2016; Zgaga, 2006; Zmas, 2014), the European Union supported the initiative called Tuning in Central Asian countries to facilitate regional curriculum convergence based on the Bologna standards (Isaacs, 2014; Isaacs et al., 2016). The Tuning initiative applies methodology based on the use of the Competence-Based approach for the creation of educational programs at universities, and for connecting the educational programs with the European credit transfer system (González & Wagenaar, 2005).

To sum up, the Bologna process responded to two important internal demands of post-Soviet education systems: the necessity to build independent education systems and the need for reform in the context of economic crisis, and the deteriorating quality of university services. Furthermore, the post-Soviet region was open to the influence of international organizations, including the European Union. Thus, the description of the post-Soviet context reveals all the factors of borrowing the foreign norm by Acharya (2004). The economic crisis led to the problem of reduced education quality, and

the collapse of the USSR led to the change of global and domestic powers. All the post-Soviet countries faced the necessity to rebuild education systems. Furthermore, the already established Bologna process caused the international regional demonstration effect in the post-Soviet space (Table 3).

In the context of the historical challenges, decentralization and the emergence of the free market attacked the central pillars of Soviet higher education (Froumin & Leshukov, 2016). Johnson (2008) claimed that the adoption of the neoliberal approach had exacerbated the crisis in higher education that happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, this context created good soil for the adoption of the principles of the Bologna Process as a European model of higher education reform, in which state regulation plays a vital role (Johnson, 2008).

Table 3

Bologna Process in the post-Soviet context.

Theoretical framework by Acharya (2004)	Domestic factors
Economic crisis, war, or depression	Underfunding of universities and issues of education quality
Change of global powers	The collapse of the USSR
Change of domestic powers	The necessity to build independent higher education systems
International regional demonstration effect	Neighbouring countries joined the Bologna process

Like many other countries, post-Soviet states have adopted a neoliberal approach to higher education policy, which reinforces the orientation of higher education to the demands of the market and the importance of global and national rankings (Smolentseva et al., 2018). The European Union has actively supported the Bologna model in post-Soviet countries. Thus, neoliberal policies and the Bologna standards became significant sources of the convergence of post-Soviet higher education systems.

To sum up, due to the exogenous factors many post-Soviet countries have shown significant interest in the Bologna Process. However, the interest of these countries was forced by the economic crisis, so the transfer to European standards was involuntary, especially on behalf of universities. Universities were forced to switch from the Soviet to the Bologna model of higher education.

However, neo-liberal higher education governance ideas faced an unprepared context of post-Soviet higher education, which was built on the principles opposite to Western ideas. Furthermore, certain developments in the context created barriers to the Bologna process in the region. Following the early period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, several political trends emerged that reduced the influence of Western educational models, including the Bologna process (Johnson, 2008). By contrast to early scholarly expectations, a trend towards the “state capitalism” model emerged in the recent decade across leading ex-Soviet countries (Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine) (Johnson, 2008, p. 170). The distinctive feature of the “state capitalism” model suggested that oligarchic groups and military people regulated the system of those countries (Johnson, 2008). In this context, countries achieved certain stability while not developing into democratic regimes (Johnson, 2008). While some elements of New Public Management were introduced in post-Soviet higher education systems, increasing higher education orientation to market demands and the importance of global and national rankings (Smolentseva et al., 2018), politics in the higher education sector were more conscious since the mid-2000s (Johnson, 2008). A report on educational transformation in post-Soviet countries by Huisman and colleagues (2018) revealed that most post-Soviet countries have maintained a division between research institutions engaged in scientific work and higher education institutions focused on teaching. This was in opposition to the neo-liberal democratic reforms suggested by international organizations and the European Union in post-Soviet countries.

These findings confirm the observation of the main factors behind policy borrowing by Acharya (2004) (Table 3). Furthermore, these findings explain why the Soviet model of education has not given place to the Bologna model creating a coexistence of post-Soviet heritage and European standards in post-Soviet universities. The next section will focus on the factors of localization of the Bologna model in Kazakhstan. Specifically, it will consider the interplay between factors supporting the Bologna process such as its prestige, and the factors challenging the Bologna process such as Soviet legacy.

Localization of the Bologna Process in Kazakhstan

The purpose of the present section is to show local conditions that influence the implementation of the Bologna process in the Kazakhstani context. The literature reveals that similar to other Bologna members, Kazakhstan joined the Bologna process to strengthen the legitimacy and authority of their government reforms and policies. There were a few credible local actors that supported the Bologna process in the face of education ministries and some university leaders. However, the Soviet model of education retained its powerful reputation among the majority of Kazakhstani academia. As a result, the Bologna model was localized in Kazakhstan, having the biggest influence on quality assurance practices, and promoting the use of a competence-based approach at Kazakhstani universities.

The Prestige of the Bologna Membership

Many countries, ex-members of the Socialist Bloc, and ex-member countries of the Soviet Union were interested in joining the Bologna process. In its application, both Armenia and Georgia proclaimed their commitment to the “Europe of Knowledge” (BFUG, 2004, pp. 1, 5). Azerbaijan stressed the importance of international cooperation; Moldova stressed the necessity of reforming its higher education system and the need for change (BFUG, 2004). Ukraine focused on measures already taken in the field of higher education and did not present its motivation clearly (BFUG, 2004).

In the application letter for becoming a Bologna member, then Minister of Education of Kazakhstan, Zhaksybek Kulekeyev stated that “integration into global educational space is considered to be of primary objective” for the national education system (BFUG, 2004, p. 13). It can be concluded that Bologna membership was considered as being part of Europe for countries from Eastern Europe, and for Kazakhstan, the important motivation was joining the international community. This motivation worked, as the United Nations National Human Development Report assessed positively the efforts of Kazakhstan to join the Bologna process (UNDP in Kazakhstan, 2004, pp. 19, 53).

The Role of Local Actors

International organizations like the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) interacted with Kazakhstani policymakers in promoting the Bologna process, which could open the way for the Bologna reform in Kazakhstan. Pavel Zgaga described a purposeful advertisement of the Bologna process to members of post-Soviet academic communities: “It was at the 12th OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Economic Forum where Per Nyborg, head of the Bologna Secretariat under Norway’s coordination (2003-2005), was invited to present the Bologna opportunities to a broad range of countries, broader than the circle of signatories” (Zgaga, 2006, p. 37). According to Zgaga (2006), conference participants consensually agreed on the cooperative nature of the Bologna process (p. 38). According to Zgaga (2006), Per Nyborg started his speech with the claim that “the principles and objectives of the Bologna Process may be used for reforms in any country, and they may be a very good basis for international cooperation in higher educations also outside the European Region” (Nyborg, 2004).

In his speech, Per Nyborg specifically addressed a representative from Kazakhstan: “I shall be very interested in what the next speaker, Rector Kuznetsova from Kazakhstan, is going to say about university reforms in the light of the Bologna Process” (as cited in Zgaga, 2006, p. 37), which is a sign that Kazakhstan was already being considered as a potential member of the Bologna process. This conference was named “New Challenges for Building up Institutional and Human Capacity for Economic Development and Cooperation” and the Bologna process was introduced as a potential framework for “educational reform [...]in transition countries” (Zgaga, 2006, p. 37).

The initial flexibility of the Bologna process could have increased its attractiveness for Kazakhstani policymakers and university leadership.

Agendas of Quality Assurance and International Cooperation in Higher Education

Influential international organizations have introduced the Bologna reform in connection with the topics of quality assurance and higher education internationalization. The use of these pre-existing norms could have helped to connect the model of Bologna reform with the post-Soviet political context in higher education because Kazakhstani policymakers were strongly interested in improving higher education quality. The importance of comparable degrees was obvious and could inspire the Kazakhstani government to seek membership in the Bologna process. For example, the Minister of Education of Kazakhstan participated in a Ministerial Round Table on the Quality of Education conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in October 2003 in Paris (Zgaga, 2006). During this round table, the Bologna process was presented to the participants with emphasis on its “principle of comparative and transparent

certificates across borders, which can equally apply to other levels of education” (Zgaga, 2006, p. 204). Along with this, the importance of international cooperation and studying the best foreign practices was stressed (Zgaga, 2006).

In subsequent years, a lot of effort was made by the EU Council and EU agencies to introduce the quality assurance agenda in Kazakhstan. Before the country applied for Bologna membership in 2010, the EU supported various dissemination events on the topic of quality assurance in higher education. Specifically, as part of inter-regional cooperation with the European Higher Education Area, the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) organized a Eurasian conference named “Central Asian Symposium on Quality Assurance Seen from three perspectives – Governments, Higher Education Institutions and their students, Enterprises,” in Almaty (Kazakhstan) in October 2007, and organized a Seminar on “QA on an institutional level” in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in May 2008 (Rauhvargers et al., 2009, p. 16). Within inter-regional cooperation, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) signed agreements with regional accreditation networks and accreditation bodies in several countries, including Kazakhstan (Rauhvargers et al., 2009). These joint efforts of the EU and Kazakhstan were welcomed by the international agencies of UNESCO and OECD. The review of Kazakhstani higher education by OECD & World Bank (2007) also noticed the country's efforts to align its education system with Bologna principles. Thus, the topics of international cooperation and quality assurance could have paved the way for the Bologna model in non-EU countries.

So far, most factors have supported the introduction of the Bologna process in Kazakhstan: the prestige of the Bologna membership and the promotion of the Bologna process, and the outcome-based education in the post-Soviet context by international organizations. These processes fit well within the agendas of quality assurance and international cooperation. However, some other factors stood in the way of the Bologna reform. According to Silova (2005), traveling policies were met with resistance in Central Asian countries due to the wish of the latter to keep Soviet traditions in education.

Strong Soviet Traditions in Higher Education

Overall, the adoption of neoliberal practices during the period of this turbulence led to the perception that Soviet education was a good old standard of reference (according to Belkanov, 2000, as cited in Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). This perception is strong among post-Soviet academia until today. Several power struggles were noticed in higher education systems during the process of reform adoption (Silova, 2009). In the case of the Bologna process, joining it turned out to be faster than the process of aligning with Bologna's goals and principles (Silova, 2009). It was observed by Kuraev (2015), that Soviet approaches and practices have remained in Russian academia. In a similar vein, traveling policies were met with resistance in Central Asian countries due to the wish of the last to keep Soviet traditions in education (Silova, 2005). These developments have created a challenging context for the development of research universities based on post-Soviet HEIs.

The study of the Kazakhstani higher education context by Tampayeva (2016) identified that members of the Kazakhstani academic community responded with the discourse of "nostalgia and loss" towards the Bologna reforms in Kazakhstani higher education (p. 2). However, the discourse of nostalgia over Soviet education was simultaneously expressed with the discourse of progress (Tampayeva, 2016). Thus, the Soviet approaches to education were still strong in the post-Soviet period because everyone was accustomed to them. In connection with this, Tampayeva (2016) noted: “The specific post-Soviet context should be considered in studies of education in the 'Second World'. These 'context models' are influential on how Western standards are implemented in the reality of post-Soviet education” (p. 2).

Consequently, Kazakhstani higher education policies have been characterized by opposing trends: on the one hand, the elites of the countries have been interested in building their research universities, competitive in the international higher education space (Hartley et al., 2016). On the other hand, implementation challenges were revealed by Tampayeva (2015), who applied the Critical Discourse Analysis of the interviews with Kazakhstani university teachers about the implementation of European educational standards. Tampayeva (2015) revealed that the implementation of new standards was conducted without consideration of the disciplinary peculiarities of the subjects and relevant support to teachers. This evidence suggests that the adoption of the neo-liberal approach in Kazakhstani higher education went hand in hand with the strict top-down relationship between the government and universities, in which universities have been marginalized or dominated (Tampayeva, 2016). This contradiction created chaos in the policy implementation process, and diminished the influence of Western standards and models, leading to the co-existence of Western-oriented practices with Soviet legacies (Tampayeva, 2016).

While acknowledging the major changes in Kazakhstani higher education in the recent period, Ibatov and Pak (2020) note the major problems in the implementation of the Bologna-driven standards in the Kazakhstani context, including the insufficient motivation of universities to reform their practices and the underdeveloped labor market. Furthermore, the strong nostalgia of Kazakhstani academics, which was like the feelings expressed in academic circles of Russian and other post-Soviet countries, suggested that the Soviet identity remained strong after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

However, the ideas of outcome-based education and competence-based adoption of the neo-liberal approach fitted well with the Soviet-inherited planning practices and were not rejected in the post-Soviet context.

The Short-Term and Long-Term Outcomes

Several quality assurance agencies were established in Kazakhstan since the country joined the Bologna process. The most prominent quality assurance agencies in Kazakhstan are the Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA) and the Independent Agency for Accreditation and Rating (IAAR). Both IQAA and IAAR are members of the big European associations of quality assurance agencies: the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2021) and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR, 2022). To be members of ENQA and EQAR, any quality assurance agency must be compliant in their activities with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA, 2021; EQAR, 2021). Through these mechanisms, it is ensured that the Bologna standards are being followed by universities in member countries of the Bologna process. At the national level, these agencies provide both institutional and program accreditation for Kazakhstani universities. Per the report of IQAA (2020), many universities in Kazakhstan that went through the accreditation process by IQAA, practice the system of credit allocation and transfer, based on the ESG standards and the competence-based approach. The emergence of quality assurance agencies is the task expansion caused by the country’s membership in the Bologna process, and the direct short-term outcome of the localization of the Bologna process in Kazakhstan. In the process of obtaining institutional and program accreditation from IQAA and IAAR, Kazakhstani universities adopt the Bologna-driven ESG standards, which leads to the development of a new policy instrument in Kazakhstani higher education, based on the Bologna standards and the use of the competence-based approach.

To sum up, the crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union drove Kazakhstan, along with other post-Soviet countries, towards the Bologna membership. Along with other Central Asian countries, Kazakhstani policymakers were accustomed to the practices of benchmarking and planning since the Soviet times, which made the use of competences and learning outcomes attractive to them (Steiner-Khamsi et al., 2006). However, the post-Soviet model of higher education remained strong, so elements of the Bologna process had to be connected with the norms of quality assurance and international cooperation to find their place within the already existing norm hierarchy of Kazakhstani higher education system (Table 4). These findings reveal the interplay between external influences and local conditions in the process of localization of the Bologna process in the Kazakhstani context.

Table 4
Bologna Process in the Kazakhstani Context

Element from Acharya theoretical framework	Why localize the Bologna process in Kazakhstan
Borrowed norm enhances the legitimacy and authority of existing institutions and practices	The prestige of the Bologna membership
Strong local norms prevent wholesale borrowing	Soviet approaches
Credible local actors	Ministries of education
Strong local identity	Nostalgia over Soviet education
Similarity with a prior norm	Focus on quality assurance
Short-term outcome	
Task expansion	Quality assurance agencies (IQAA, IAAR)
Development of a new policy instrument	Adoption of the Bologna standards (ESG) and the competence-based approach
Possible long-term outcome	
Fundamental change or norm displacement	Displacement of the knowledge-based approach

Note. Source: The theoretical framework based on Acharya (2004)

Discussion

The present study aimed to reconceptualize the Bologna process from the perspective of localization by Acharya (2004). The study fulfilled its aim by providing a fruitful description of the regional factors that drove post-Soviet states' interest in the Bologna process and by identifying the factors of localization of the Bologna process in Kazakhstan.

Overall, the findings of the paper confirm the importance of local factors in the process of borrowing and adopting international policies as observed by Acharya (2004). All the factors of policy borrowing, suggested by Acharya (2004) (Table 1), could be revealed in the literature on the Bologna process in the post-Soviet context (Table 3). These were exogenous factors: following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic crisis caused a drastic lack of financing in the higher education sectors of ex-Soviet countries (Table 3). This was followed by the involvement of international organizations in the promotion of neoliberal policies in higher education. Finally, the interest of some post-Soviet countries caused their neighbors to apply to the Bologna process, including Central Asian countries. However, the case study revealed the contradictions among the domestic factors, for example, between the wish of the elites of the countries to build competitive research universities and the strict top-down relationship between government and universities, such contradictions can decrease the efficiency of the policy localization. Consequently, this led to the co-existence of Bologna elements with Soviet-inherited practices in higher education.

The case study suggests that the concept of localization by Acharya (2004) provides a better account of the interplay of domestic factors that influence the implementation of the Bologna process in Kazakhstan (Table 4). Joining the Bologna process for reasons of prestige would not necessarily mean the adoption of the Bologna model in practice. In the Kazakhstani context, the Bologna process was associated with the narrow task of higher education quality assurance. The analysis of the domestic factors helps to identify the emergence of quality assurance agencies and the application of the competence-based approaches in the Kazakhstani context as the short-term outcome of the localization of the Bologna process. Kazakhstan joined the quality assurance initiatives within the framework of the Bologna process and under the umbrella of Kazakhstani quality assurance agencies, universities apply the Bologna-driven ESG standards. In the long term, the competence-based approach might displace the knowledge-based approach in Kazakhstani higher education.

The concept of localization suggests that the context of higher education systems can constrain or support the influence of international models and standards. The case of Kazakhstan demonstrates that international education discourses can be used for justifying certain policies and advertising their political activities internationally, as suggested by Silova (2005) and Tampayeva (2015). Furthermore, the use of the localization framework suggests that at least in the non-EU context, convergence towards the Bologna model of higher education will be limited despite its immense popularity outside Europe.

If the revealed contradictions will be overcome, the likely long-term outcome of localization of the Bologna process in Kazakhstan will be the replacement of the knowledge-based education with the Bologna-inspired competence-based approach in Kazakhstani universities.

Conclusion

The present literature review aimed to reconceptualize the Bologna process from the perspective of localization by Acharya (2004). The literature review suggests that domestic factors can play a role in the convergence to or divergence from international trends. The support of key local actors can influence the long-term outcome of policy borrowing. The selection of articles for the analytical review was not carried out in a systematic way, which is a significant limitation of the study.

The findings imply that local factors are important for the adaptation of international norms in the national education systems. These findings echo the concept of translation by Chen (2010; see also Zhang et al., 2015). Thus, understanding domestic factors is crucial for research on international policy borrowing. In connection with this, further studies are recommended based on the concept of localization by Acharya (2004), which could encompass a wider range of articles. For example, the localization framework could be applied to the study of the Bologna reform in other post-Soviet countries.

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Sequencing Internationalization Policy in the 21st Century: A Comparative Analysis between Japan and the United States of America

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Abstract

This paper offers a comparative analysis of internationalization policy between two distinct nations entrenched in unique sociopolitical and economic cultures, namely Japan and the United States of America (U.S.A.). How do different policy-making processes impact internationalization policy in practice? While Japan's internationalization policy is clearly articulated at the national level, the U.S. does not have a national higher education internationalization policy that emanates from the federal government. Therefore, in this study we analyzed macro-level data from three distinct policy-making sectors to identify U.S. national policy. Our analysis identifies the policy-making process in each nation and elucidates how internationalization policy unfolded in both cases. Second, we compare the development of higher education internationalization policy efforts in the two countries, sequencing events, factors, and rationales that impacted national policy. This approach allowed us to compare the implications of having a centralized versus a pluralistic internationalization policy-making process in the 2000s. Our research shows that, in practical terms, there is more variation in higher education internationalization policy in the U.S. than in Japan. In both countries, policy dynamics were influenced by social and economic factors, and political factors influenced policy in the U.S. An academic and humanitarian rationale for internationalization policy was not central to the essence of the policy in either country.

Keywords: comparative analysis, higher education institutions, internationalization policy, Japan

Introduction

The 21st century is largely characterized by the effects of globalization, a process that has escalated through systematic regrouping and alignment of nation states since the Second World War (de Wit, 2002; Giddens, 2002). Globalization is a multi-pronged process that touches on economics, culture, and political processes as well as on transnational migration (Ritzer & Robinson, 2008). In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the multi-pronged effects

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of globalization revealing the extent of interconnectedness and interdependence between nation states (Ranney et al., 2020). In higher education, Altbach (2007) has defined globalization as “the broad, largely inevitable economic, technological, political, cultural, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education” (p. 64). In reaction, the higher education sector has utilized internationalization policy to address these globalization trends that generate interconnection and interdependence among nation states.

For Knight (2012), internationalization policy is an institutional reaction to globalization forces and resulting demands for human and social capital at an international level (Stanley, 2012). It has also been deemed an agent of globalization in itself (Knight, 2012; Paige, 2005), particularly as higher education institutions worldwide compete to attract over five million international students annually (UNESCO, 2019). Overall, scholars agree that internationalization policy has been a decisive factor in the transformation of tertiary education (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2012). Nevertheless, and in spite of clearly articulated higher education internationalization measures around the globe, approaches, efforts, and initiatives have varied widely among nation states (Veerasingam, 2021).

The ways in which internationalization policy is outlined and implemented in individual countries vary greatly depending on approaches, governmental systems, and the specific mechanics of policy-making processes, all of which combine to yield different results. Consequently, a comparative investigation of nation states’ internationalization policy processes for the higher education sector may be of particular value in an era of growing interconnectedness between countries, educational institutions, and widespread student mobility. Moreover, comparative analysis enables evaluation of the practical impact of differing policy-making processes on campus internationalization to advance research in this field. In this paper, we outline and compare macro-level higher education internationalization policy-making processes in Japan and the U.S., and offer a brief discussion on the nature and extent of 21st century internationalization policy efforts in these two nations to answer this question: How do different policy-making processes impact internationalization policy in practice?

Literature Review

Scholars attest that investment in internationalization differs greatly among policy-making actors, institutions, and other stakeholders, and may be linked to a variety of sociocultural, political, economic and academic rationales (Brewer & Leask, 2012; Knight, 2004). Key among these rationales is internationalization as a source of revenue, especially through profits generated by international student recruitment (Rumbley et al., 2012). The goal of attracting students from abroad, in turn, kindles a quest to elevate an institution’s reputation at the international level and achieve a top spot in competitive world rankings (Knight, 2012; Rumbley et al., 2012; Yamamoto, 2018). Another significant rationale emerging from the literature is the desire to produce interculturally competent graduates capable of addressing global challenges from different cultural perspectives and advancing economic development at a national level (Coelen, 2015; Deardorff & Jones, 2012; Yamamoto, 2018).

Internationalization rationales are accompanied by a range of international, regional, and national strategies involving stakeholders from government agencies to interest groups and educational providers in a variety of roles (Knight, 2012). Yet both rationales and strategies for internationalization have come under heavy criticism in the past decade. In 2011, Knight identified five myths relating to internationalization: first, that foreign students are internationalizing agents; second, that international reputation serves as a proxy for quality; third, that the quantity of international institutional agreements is a sign of institutional prestige; fourth that international accreditation is representative of the scope and quality of an institution’s international activities; and fifth, that global branding, i.e., international institutional visibility, denotes internationalization. Knight’s “Five Myths about Internationalization” are largely agreed on by international education scholars.

Furthermore, a corpus of research in the field has been critical of the disproportional emphasis placed by governments and institutions on quantitative output measures as symbols of internationalization, rather than on improved educational quality (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2012). These scholars are also critical of the emphasis placed on global higher education rankings, highlighting issues with the ranking mechanisms (Rumbley et al., 2012; Yonezawa, 2010). Scholars have further added that internationalization rationales which fail to be accompanied by consistent policies, objectives, and monitoring systems lead to a disconnected and ultimately unsuccessful internationalization process

(Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; Rumbley et al., 2012). In the following sections, we examine the cases of Japan and the U.S. to garner some understanding of the relationship between institutional policy-making models and national internationalization policy.

Internationalization in Japan

Japan's historical and cultural ties with other countries have been largely guided by political and economic motives (Inuzuka, 2017). In the 20th century, as part of reconstruction efforts after WWII, the Japanese government encouraged students to study abroad to connect with the outside world and gain knowledge that could help rebuild the war-torn country (Juwitasari, 2020; Sanders, 2019). As globalization intensified during the 1970s and Japan began to experience a period of large economic growth in the 1980s, there was a renewed push to internationalize the education system as a means to compete with the West; as such, building Japan's economic and political power remained at the forefront of internationalization policies in the 21st century (Inuzuka, 2017).

Based on a perceived need to foster global *jinzai*, or global human resources (GHR), capable of increasing the international competitiveness of Japan in the 1980s, debates on internationalization, or *kokusaika*, developed further (Yonezawa, 2014). From the onset, the Japanese government positioned itself at the center of the internationalization process by developing, promoting, and implementing policies in a top-down manner (Horie, 2002; Yamamoto, 2018). This approach required very little input from institutions, faculty, or students, leading to strong institutional dependence on government initiatives and funding over time (Yonezawa, 2009).

To achieve its economic development and global competitiveness goals, the government has concentrated efforts on two main internationalization strategies. The first strategy has focused on international student recruitment through the launch of two successive plans seeking to increase the number of enrolled international students at Japanese educational institutions. The first plan, appropriately titled "The International Student 100,000 Plan," aimed to increase the annual number of enrolled international students from 10,428 in 1983 to 100,000 by the year 2000 (Ota, 2003). Launched by Prime Minister Nakasone, this plan effectively marked the beginning of the current phase of internationalization in Japan by openly addressing reforms to Japanese higher education institutions (Horie, 2002; Ota, 2003). This initial plan was followed in 2008 by the "300,000 International Students Plan," which proposed intensifying recruitment efforts to annually attract 300,000 international students to Japan. This plan also placed a larger emphasis on attracting top talent and increasing the overall international student share of the market (Kuwamura, 2009).

The second strategy adopted by Japan has focused on the provision of governmental funding for institutions implementing internationalization policies. Since 2009, the Japanese government has designed three heavily funded internationalization projects, namely the Global 30 (2009-2014), Go Global Japan (2012-2017), and the Top Global University (TGU) Project (2014-2023), with a common goal of reforming and internationalizing higher education institutions from within. These three plans were designed and implemented in rapid succession, emphasizing goals of recruiting larger numbers of international students and faculty; developing courses and degrees in English; increasing the number of short-term study abroad programs; and establishing overseas offices (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology: MEXT, 2011, 2014, 2017a).

The most recent internationalization initiative, the TGU Project, was announced in 2014 with an original budget of 7.7 billion yen and scheduled to run until the end of the 2023 fiscal year (MEXT, 2014, 2017b). The project largely emerged out of a general sense that Japan is falling behind other nations in its internationalization of education and research, and it must act strategically to secure higher spots in the education world rankings (Sandhu, 2015). As such, the TGU Project aimed to promote internationalization initiatives in line with previous projects through the recruitment of international students and the development of English-medium courses, multicultural campuses, and internationalized curricula and co-curricula (Sandhu, 2015; Shimmi & Yonezawa, 2015). Overall, the project originally aimed to fund and further internationalize a total of 37 higher education institutions: 13 Type A universities, aiming to become one of the top 100 highest ranked HEIs in the world, and 24 Type B universities, responsible for leading internationalization efforts in Japan.

Recent strategies adopted by the Japanese government aiming to internationalize educational institutions echo Japan's historical approaches to relations with other countries and cultures. In fact, Japan's goals have remained mainly economic and political since the 20th century. In the 21st century, educational policies to produce globally competent graduates show that internationalization continues to be perceived as a means to reinforce and expand Japan's economic and political power both domestically and internationally.

Internationalization in the U.S.A.

In the U.S., internationalization policy grew after the Second World War, largely in an effort to build rapprochement between nation states and avoid future wars as stated in the Truman Report on higher education for democracy (U.S. DOS, 1947). In a pluralistic policy-making process, a multiplicity of actors from the public (government departments), the voluntary (higher education organizations) and the private sector (philanthropic foundations), initiates and implements the policy, and the actors can be aligned horizontally to understand their contributions (Harclerod & Eaton, 2005; Thelin, 2011; Veerasamy & Durst, 2021). As an age-old policy with roots in the 19th century, multiple terms have been used over the years to connote “internationalization policy” including “international dimension, international education, [and] internationalization of education” (de Wit, 2002, p. xvii; Thelin, 2011).

Unlike Japan, the U.S. does not have a centralized Ministry of Education that dictates education policy for the nation. Consequently, at the federal level several government agencies and departments contribute to higher education internationalization policy based on their departmental purview (Department of Commerce, Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of State, and Department of Homeland Security). In 2004, Knight noted that “the national/sector level has an important influence on the international dimension [in higher education] through policy, funding, programs, and regulatory frameworks” (p. 6); simply stated: various national-level policymakers determine which HEIs receive funding for their internationalization policies and initiatives. Additionally, at the national level, voluntary or citizen-run organizations also influence and contribute to internationalization policy through advocacy efforts and by providing training opportunities for their members (Cook, 1998; Harclerod & Eaton, 2005; Veerasamy, 2021). Through diverse efforts and initiatives, major national voluntary organizations have helped shape the policy at the federal level (Cook, 1998; Veerasamy, 2021).

Similarly, private, philanthropic foundations have a history of funding international education efforts on American campuses and these efforts continued during the 2000s. These initiatives have typically helped with enhancement of international education in curriculum (Harclerod & Eaton, 2005), international student scholarships (Ford Foundation, 2013), need-based aid for international students (Lumina Foundation, 2008), and research funding (Hayward, 2000).

Finally, on the world stage, the U.S. has long enjoyed the status of destination of choice for higher education (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). In 2017, one million international students were enrolled on U.S. campuses; in 2022, this number remained over the one million mark even in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (IIE, 2018, 2021, 2022). In the 21st century, with the exception of the Trump administration from 2016 to 2020, federal government immigration policies favored “brain gain” from the Global South (Sá & Sabzallieva, 2018). Deliberate immigration policies allowed F-1 and J-1 nonimmigrant student and scholar visa status to international students to extend their length of stay in the U.S. after graduation. The extension allowed them to pursue post-completion Optional Practical Training (1 year for F-1 alumni). The STEM OPT Extension allowed an additional 2 years after OPT for F-1 alumni with qualifying majors, and post-completion Academic Training (18-36 months for J-1 alumni) with a possibility to transition to employer-sponsored H-1B visa status (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2019a). As international student enrollment in U.S. HEIs has steadily increased in American campuses, scholars have stated that in the 21st century, international students have helped keep HEIs economically viable, rendering internationalization policy synonymous with international student recruitment to some scholars (Wadhwa, 2016).

Although generally campus internationalization has not always been viewed as a priority worthy of scarce financial resources (Stax Brown & Singer, 2015), different policy-making sectors have contributed to the expansion of the policy based on varied rationales. Emerging from different sources, U.S. internationalization policy is articulated in a fragmented or plural manner. Multiple actors provide support and initiatives for campus internationalization policy; a unified policy emanating from one government department has long been absent in the U.S. (Mestenhauser, 1998; Veerasamy & Durst, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This study examined internationalization policy historically, considering factors, events, and policy rationales that punctuated its evolution in the 21st century. We coded internationalization policy efforts in central and pluralistic policy-making settings in Japan and the U.S. to understand its development within a temporal context. Japan and the United States were selected for their seemingly different approaches to internationalization and the authors’ research into internationalization strategies in these countries.

In our comparative analysis of policy processes, we relied on process sequencing as a lens to analyze our data set. Process sequencing derives from the punctuated equilibrium policy change model established by Baumgartner and Jones in 1993 (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). According to Daugbjerg (2009), an underlying assumption in process sequencing is that an event in a policy sequence is both a reaction to an antecedent event and a cause of a subsequent one. Scholars have recommended looking at policies over a period of time rather than simply at the policy-making mechanism to better understand the factors that impact the particular policy (Howlett, 2009). Process sequencing has been utilized to analyze the evolution of policy over time and historically (Haydu, 1998; Howlett, 2009; Howlett & Rayner, 2006). For Howlett (2009), “policy outcomes are neither purely deterministic nor random but rather are 'contingent' upon a variety of factors, not least being the order in which a sequence of events occurs” that may be deemed “inevitable” (p. 242).

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research methods, in particular document analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Krippendorff, 2013). We analyzed archival documents written in English from government and non-governmental sources to ascertain the key policy-making actors and situate the state of national higher education internationalization policy in Japan and the U.S. We analyzed and coded the documents using lean coding (Creswell, 2013). In addition, by relying on process sequencing to analyze the data, we were able to identify themes in higher education internationalization policy efforts over a twenty-year span from 2000 to 2020 and the accompanying chain of reactions in both countries during this period. We organized and coded our data under each country and then compared the codes and themes between each nation to establish commonalities and differences. Through dialogue and reflection between the authors, we established that, for example, both nations engaged in internationalization at home and international student recruitment, thus allowing for this common theme to emerge from the codes for both countries. This process allowed for cross-verification and triangulation of our categorizations. In sum, it allowed us to validate the credibility of our analytical framework (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Data Collection

As part of government efforts to foster GHR in Japan, 37 universities were selected for the TGU Project. These institutions were required to propose and design a variety of internationalization strategies and initiatives, which in turn would shed light on how Japanese higher education institutions implement government policies. In this study, we analyzed a total of 29 websites containing 41 policy and implementation documents published in English by the Japanese government and Top Global universities. The documents analyzed consisted of policy reports and promotional materials directly published by MEXT (MEXT, 2011, 2014, 2017a) and by the Council on Promotion of Human Resources for Globalization Development (CPHRGD, 2011), as well as information on the official TGU Project website (MEXT, 2017b). Only documents related to the TGU Project and GHR were analyzed as they pertain to the Japanese government's most recent internationalization strategies and thus remain widely available for analysis.

Data from the U.S. was collected from the Department of State and the Department of Education from the public sector and from The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), The American Council on Education (ACE), The Association of Public Land-grant Universities (APLU), The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), The American Association of Universities (AAU), and The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU)—the “Big Six” most influential, federal-level organizations from the voluntary sector (Cook, 1998). Data was also collected from the Lumina Foundation and the Ford Foundation from the private sector. In all three sectors, data was collected from publicly available documents such as (a) general information on the websites, (b) international education reports, (c) annual reports, (d) fact sheets, and (e) policy briefs. Specifically, from the public sector, data was collected from (a) executive directives, (b) executive orders, (c) memoranda, and (d) legislation. In total, 112 documents were analyzed, accounting for 55 from the public sector, 38 from the voluntary sector, and 19 from the private sector.

Results

In Japan, many initiatives were proposed by the government, and TGUs employed combined strategies for their implementation. For instance, initiatives with a main focus on mobility were occasionally linked to one or more of the other four types of strategies; initiatives with a language goal occasionally associated with intercultural exchange or system reform; and collaborative initiatives were sometimes paired with reform, intercultural exchange, or language strategies. In the U.S., however, national policy efforts emerged from a multiplicity of actors from the public, the voluntary and the

private sector; each sector had its own area of policy focus and, in contrast to Japan, the different aspects of the policy were not deliberately combined. However, trends in policy efforts in the two nations were similar, emerging under the following themes: internationalization at home and international student recruitment, global student mobility, international institutional partnership efforts, and institutional reform; this final theme was only observed in Japan.

Internationalization at Home and International Student Recruitment

In Japan, internationalization has been largely associated with international student recruitment, namely, increasing numbers of international students on domestic campuses. Starting in 1983 with the “The International Student 100,000 Plan,” the government has consistently aimed to attract international students to Japanese education institutions. The goals of this strategy are twofold: to internationalize education through international student enrollment and to have them promote Japanese culture abroad once they return to their home countries (MOFA, 2022). Our analysis of university documents revealed that intercultural exchange initiatives were at the forefront of planned internationalization strategies (41 initiatives). Twelve universities explicitly mentioned the need for diversity among the faculty and student bodies. Others emphasized international or global academic campuses and classrooms (10), interaction programs between domestic and international students on campus (10), intercultural exchange in general (4), and multicultural exchange with the local community (2). Additionally, programs that catered to international students, such as English-medium instruction courses and Japanese language education for international students, were also mentioned by 19 and 3 universities, respectively. Overall, international student recruitment policies have been highly successful. While Japan only welcomed approximately 10,000 international students annually in the early 1980s, this number increased to over 300,000 by 2019, pre-pandemic (JASSO, 2020).

The need for foreign language proficiency, associated with talented GHR, was also reflected in programs aimed at improving domestic students’ foreign language skills (5 universities). With regard to the strong GHR-derived focus on English language skills for domestic students (Hofmeyr, 2021) and governmental efforts to promote English language education (MEXT, 2003), documents revealed a comparatively low emphasis on English education strategies at the institutional level. In fact, English education has been at the forefront of internationalization policy due to its role as the de facto international language of communication (Inuzuka, 2017), and English language education is now firmly institutionalized at the secondary and higher education levels, having been officially added to primary grade (5 & 6) curricula since 2020. In fact, most universities in Japan had already implemented mandatory English courses for first- and second-year students prior to the TGU Project via the Global 30 program, which might explain why such initiatives are given less focus in the most recent documents.

Overall, the implementation of the above-mentioned initiatives mirrors governmental rhetoric emphasizing international student recruitment as a key strategy for internationalization in Japan. The strategies identified in our document analysis reveal perceptions of international students a dual solution to labor shortage and the demand for competitive talent. They are also perceived as internationalization agents, providing Japanese domestic students with opportunities for intercultural contact and exchange.

The U.S. has long served as a desirable place of study for international students. The 2000s saw international student numbers increase to reach the one-million mark in 2017 (IIE, 2018). The three sectors under analysis did not ignore this growing body of students. Between 2000 and 2020, three administrations – with the exception of the Trump administration (2017-2020) – took measures to attract and retain international students in the U.S. (although certain restrictions were adopted following the September 11 attacks in 2001). Measures to attract international students became necessary based on: (a) a shortage of skilled workers in the field of science and technology, and (b) an aging U.S. population (v. growing population in BRIC nations), and (c) the threat of China's economic rise with its accession to the World Trade Organization (Banks, 2014; Brookings Institute, 2012). In 2008, under the Bush administration, international students graduating in certain STEM fields included on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) STEM-designated degree program list became eligible for an extended period of post-completion Optional Practical Training (NAFSA, 2019). OPT, which is authorized by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), allows international students to extend their F-1 visa status and (a) remain in the U.S. to gain work experience in their field of study for a period of up to three years after graduation, and (b) potentially transition to a more long-term H-1B work visa if sponsored by an employer and approved by USCIS. This pathway often leads to permanent residence and even U.S. citizenship. The DHS STEM-designated degree program list was extended in 2012 under the Obama administration (NAFSA, 2019). The Obama administration also made

it less onerous for highly skilled non-citizens to work in the U.S. on an H-1B visa. Later, the Trump administration took strides to reverse many of these measures to attract international students and retain them as U.S. workers post-graduation.

At the federal level, language instruction as part of internationalization policy was linked to defense and economics. During the Cold War, language studies focused on the USSR and its satellite countries; the trend of funding strategic language studies related to foreign conflicts persisted in the 2000s and extended to countries with economic ties. According to Merckx (2010), “Since September 11, 2001, the increase in the annual budget of the DLI [Defense Language Institute] alone has been greater than the total annual appropriation for all Title VI programs combined” (as cited in Wiley et al., 2010, p. 28). In 2002, a new program came under the National Security Education Program and legislation encouraged universities to apply for grants to teach Arabic, Hindi, Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese, Korean, Persian/Farsi, Russian, and Turkish (Tessler, 2010, as cited in Wiley et al., 2010, p. 59). By 2007, Foreign Language and Area Studies enrollment in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean received attention from national funding agencies for economic reasons (Wiley, 2010). In 2009, Less Commonly Taught Languages under Title VI expanded to include 195 languages (Wiley, 2010, p. 89).

Within the voluntary sector, the American Council on Education’s Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement (CIGE) published *A Comprehensive National Policy on Internationalization Education* in 2002. In this report, the ACE outlined its model for comprehensive campus internationalization. By 2003, the organization established an internationalization laboratory to help personnel of higher education institutions achieve the steps outlined in its comprehensive internationalization model (ACE, 2019b). Internationalization efforts by other voluntary associations also targeted specific types of institutions, such as community colleges, helping them develop programming on global awareness (AACC, 2019). In 2009, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ Global Learning Value Rubric was developed to measure student global learning outcomes in higher education curriculum (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2019a). All three sectors were involved in internationalization at home efforts through collaborative research funding between the voluntary and the private sector (Hayward, 2000); the development of toolkits on global learning (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2010); and the use of technology in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), a type of virtual exchange which thrived during the global pandemic (American Council on Education, 2019, 2022).

Student Mobility

In our analysis of Japan, the second most frequent type of internationalization strategy referenced in policy and implementation activities was mobility. Student mobility in Japan has been emphasized as a means to develop students’ foreign language skills and a broad understanding of other cultures while promoting Japanese culture abroad (MEXT, 2011, 2017a). Nevertheless, outbound mobility in Japan has faced challenges with the number of Japanese students studying abroad declining by nearly a third between 2004 (82,945) and 2011 (57,501) (Kobayashi, 2018). The decline in the number of outbound students has been attributed to many causes, including the declining birthrate, the high cost of study abroad programs, the strict job-hunting system during university years, and students’ lack of confidence in their foreign language ability, among many other factors (Bradford, 2017).

Several of the Top Global universities referred to the goal of increasing both inbound and outbound mobility in general terms (17 universities), while others stressed the importance of supporting the development of study abroad programs (9), satellite campuses (8), and international internships (6). Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the number of Japanese university students internationally mobile was consistently on the rise (JAOS, 2017), clearly favoring English-speaking countries such as the U.S., Australia, Canada, and the U.K. This trend reinforces the perceived role of student mobility as the means to develop English language skills, an important component of GHR. In fact, results of the same 2017 survey conducted by the Japan Association of Overseas Studies (JAOS) revealed that short-term language exchanges lasting three months or less were students’ preferred program type to go abroad. In our analysis of policy and strategic documents, mobility and intercultural exchange were described as the core, potential sources of intercultural competence development in students.

Efforts to promote student mobility in the U.S. came from the voluntary sector with HEIs moving away from the term *study abroad* to adopt the term *education abroad* as opportunities expanded to include internships, service-focused programs, and research abroad (Helms, 2017). The voluntary sector supported outbound opportunities for American students, but federal support, namely legislation in support of study abroad, failed to pass (Paul Simon Study Abroad Program Act (S. 1198/H.R. 4555)). Conversely, efforts from the public sector supported inbound opportunities for non-American students. Following the 9/11 attacks, the Department of State launched a proliferation of exchange programs,

such as DOS Kennedy, Lugar, FLEX, and DOS, to bring students from predominantly Muslim nations to the U.S. with a view to (a) strengthen bicultural understanding, (b) showcase American culture and political values, and (c) share Muslim culture with American host families and their communities (Aguirre, 2002). Under the Obama administration, these programs were extended to Muslim African nations via initiatives like the DOS YALI program. However, the Trump administration afforded little attention to building on these programs, eventually freezing these efforts.

International Institutional Partnerships (IIPs)

Many Japanese Top Global universities referred to various types of collaboration as the strategy most relevant to internationalization. In fact, partnerships with international institutions were the most popular strategy noted (27 universities), followed by the creation of either joint or dual-degree programs (12). Other collaborative strategies included developing relationships with the international community, with various industries, and with the Japanese government. Consistent with the publicized image of GHR (Hofmeyr, 2021), collaboration strategies were generally promoted as a means to develop global-ready graduates with specialized knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and leadership skills.

In the U.S., IIPs with institutions located abroad grew in all three sectors in the 2000s. The public and voluntary sectors developed strategic and long-lasting IIPs through agreements with foreign institutions to collaborate on research, deliver courses, develop exchange programs, establish branch campuses, offer dual degrees with institutions located abroad, and enhance international accreditation efforts (Department of Education, 2009; Institute for International Education, 2019). The voluntary sector provided personnel training for members administering IIPs (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2019), while the private sector funded research on African higher education institutions (Ford Foundation, 2019) and on global institutional collaborations (Lumina Foundation, 2017). The public sector maintained funding support for establishing IIPs, and existing institutional partnerships with different countries continued to grow from initial efforts in the 1990s (Department of Education, 2019). First-time partnerships with nations such as China emerged, and American HEIs relied on advances in technology to deliver education overseas from their home base in the U.S. (Helms, 2017).

Institutional Reform

Calls for system reform in Japan date to the Meiji Restoration of 1868 when Japan implemented various strategies to “catch up” with Western countries. In the 1980s, globalization and international competition led to the 1984 establishment of the Ad Hoc Council on Education in support of education reforms (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). By the 21st century, challenges stemming from international relations and information technology advances led various government committees to call for curriculum reform and the upgrading of teaching and administrative practices (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020).

In the Japanese policy and implementation documents analyzed, system reform was noted as an important internationalization strategy, though to a much lesser extent than the other four types of strategies discussed in previous sections. Strategies discussed under this umbrella emphasized the need for educational reform to meet international standards (11 universities), enable new interdisciplinary research (5), galvanize governance system reform (3), and re- envision the research support system (1). Overall, system reform was generally encouraged not so much as the means to facilitate the implementation of internationalization strategies, but as a panacea for competing with highly ranked Western institutions and attracting top international students to Japanese universities. This approach echoes Japan’s early motivations for implementing system reform that began in the mid-19th century.

In the U.S., HEIs are autonomous, self-regulating and do not answer to the different tiers of government. They are also diverse, varying by type (public, private, religious), academic degree offerings (associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral-granting), and mission (e.g., R1 institutions, liberal arts colleges, HBCUs, etc.). Within this diverse landscape, the decision to include an international dimension in course offerings has historically depended on the actions of national higher education policy actors (Knight, 2004), college presidents (Stax Brown & Singer, 2015) and faculty members (Dewey & Duff, 2009). Moreover, the level of internationalization has differed based on institution type. For example, according to Woodin (2016), 2-year institutions are less internationalized than 4-year institutions. A blanket federal policy requiring campuses to internationalize is non-existent in the U.S.

Discussion

Japan and the U.S. adopted internationalization policies to serve different rationales. During the 2000s in Japan, internationalization policy was driven largely by socioeconomic rationales and emerged in reaction to changing economic forces and globalization. In the U.S., internationalization policy was historically adopted at the national level for academic

reasons and evolved to serve political rationales; in the 2000s, it emerged in reaction to economic and social rationales. In efforts to internationalize HEIs following its economic downturn in 2009, Japan adopted a national policy led by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which set specific goals and targets for selected universities to receive government funding with the goal of increasing the nation's competitiveness in the global market. Conversely, the U.S. did not adopt a clearly articulated national strategy for internationalization policy in the 21st century despite President Clinton's explicit support for international education in his 2000 Memorandum and globally competent graduates being linked to economic success (Spellings, 2006). Instead, internationalization policy efforts and initiatives evolved in a pluralistic, ad hoc manner from actors within the public, voluntary, and private sectors.

Spurred by Japan's economic crisis in 2009 and subsequent events, the Japanese government and Top Global universities under study proposed specific strategies and initiatives in response to increasing demand by domestic industries for talented GHR to contribute to the nation's economic development and competitiveness. With a competitive focus, many of the Japanese government's strategies were designed with the goal of placing Japanese HEIs at the top of international ranking scales. In the U.S., political, economic, and social events in the 2000s, such as China joining the WTO in 2002, slowed economic growth in 2008, and changing demographic trends domestically and internationally in emerging countries (BRIC nations), influenced the trajectory of internationalization policy.

In Japan, internationalization policy evolved as a means of creating GHRs capable of working in international and intercultural environments, and efforts to achieve this goal were supported and funded by the government. Through international student recruitment, Japan aimed to produce international graduates who would return to their home countries with a positive connection to and understanding of Japan. In addition, Japan aimed to provide its domestic students with opportunities for intercultural exchange and foreign language practice, especially in English. The creation of English-medium instruction programs that were, in principle, open to both international and domestic students, served similar purposes. Parallel policies by the government aiming to implement English language education beginning in elementary school further reinforced strategies devised by HEIs to yield globally competent graduates.

In the U.S., efforts to develop globally competent students through higher education curricula emerged, however, language studies unfolded both accidentally yet inevitably. The events of September 11, 2001 deeply impacted the course of policymaking and academic prioritization within higher education for the remainder of the decade. For example, campuses pivoted to offer Arabic and languages spoken in the Muslim regions of Central Asia in reaction to the terrorist attacks on American soil. In addition, when China joined the WTO in 2002, Mandarin became a popular foreign language on American campuses, as did Korean, due to the rising economic might of these two nations and the associated career opportunities for learners in the U.S. The voluntary and private sectors took several measures to internationalize HEIs by training faculty and staff and offering curricula development support to produce graduates with global skills.

In vying for a place in the global world order, international student recruitment in Japan was partially driven by international ranking considerations, while in the U.S. it was spurred by socioeconomic factors. Ultimately, both nations were impacted by their own demographic changes and needed to appeal to youth from outside their respective countries to sustain their HEIs and, in the case of the U.S., society. In both countries, international student recruitment changed course, expanded, and reached an equilibrium in the context of global interconnectedness and local demographic realities.

Similar to international student recruitment goals, student mobility in Japan was developed mainly as a gateway for intercultural exchange and foreign language proficiency development. As a result, most mobility partnerships were focused on countries where English was spoken as a first language and there were many short-term ESL immersion study abroad programs. In practice, however, student mobility, much like other internationalization initiatives in Japan, was assessed through "box-ticking" practices. In the U.S., student mobility took various forms and adapted to include outbound study, internships, and research abroad as well as hosting inbound students from Muslim countries to improve national ties in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001. Federal support to expand access to outbound student mobility failed, revealing no shift in this aspect of internationalization policy.

Finally, in both nations, their 21st century policy dynamics were indisputably punctuated by a trend toward implementing IIPs, largely as a result of globalization. IIPs for Japan were driven mainly by two factors related to the cultivation of GHR: first, the need for partnerships that could facilitate student mobility and the development of specialized knowledge, problem-solving, and leadership skills in Japanese students, and second, the prestige associated with having a large number of partnerships which aimed to serve the double purpose of attracting top international students and scoring higher in global education rankings. Conversely, IIPs in the U.S., were also reactive and driven by alliances with economic

powerhouses, establishing branch campuses abroad, and incremental expansion of socio-political relationships overseas. In the process, technology was leveraged to reach learners located outside of the U.S.

In practice, internationalization policy in these two nations with distinct sociopolitical cultures was impacted by events from within and external to their countries. In both countries, internationalization policy efforts were reactive with policies developed in response to select events such as demographic changes, international terrorism, economics, and globalization. With its centralized, top-down approach, Japan adopted HEI reforms to enable internationalization policy efforts on campuses. In the U.S., however, policy efforts emerged from a multiplicity of sectors and were varied and wide-ranging, but not pervasive among the country's diverse higher education system. In the globalized, international environment of the 21st century, Japan became fixated on world ranking metrics for its universities, while in the U.S. the events of September 11, 2001 skewed policy focus to specific geographic regions and religions. The U.S. adapted its policy to react to China's accession to the global market and both the U.S. and Japan sought to attract international students. Overall, the implications of the two nations' different policymaking processes with respect to the essence of internationalization policy appeared to be minimal in this study. Both the centralized system in Japan and the pluralistic system in the U.S. failed to anchor their efforts in one of the core purposes of internationalization policy: education for fostering understanding across cultures.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it offered a brief analysis of national internationalization policy-making processes in only two nations based on documents available in the public domain. Second, policy analysis in the Japanese context focused mainly on documents available in English and belonging to institutions receiving funding to internationalize. Third, analysis of policy-making sectors in the U.S. was limited to only three sectors. Finally, the focus of the comparative analysis was limited to a twenty-year span from 2000 to 2020. Despite these limitations, this study offers a lens that can be extended for the two countries and a frame of analysis that can be utilized to examine internationalization policy among other nations. Future research in Japan should focus on analyzing documents in Japanese and examining projects funded before and after the TGU Project. In the U.S., internationalization policy analysis should be extended to examine market and legal sectors with a comprehensive focus beyond 2020.

Conclusion

National policy or otherwise, in both Japan and the U.S. there was a failure to advance the academic rationale for adopting internationalization policy. An academic rationale for internationalization policy favors the advancement of knowledge and the development of intercultural competence using clearly identifiable and assessable outcomes. Instead, both countries were driven by socioeconomic motivations, and the U.S. was also influenced by geopolitical developments. In addition, both countries lacked a humanitarian rationale for internationalization policy, namely discourse on 21st-century competencies in empathy, mindfulness, and compassion in a world where major events and crises are increasing along with higher numbers of refugees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs) and where food insecurity is tangible and the effects of climate change devastating on developing nations. Moving forward, ethical advancement of the field of internationalization policy requires sustained attention by scholars, practitioners, and organizational leaders as well as committed financial resources so that academic and humanitarian rationales receive meaningful investment to ensure learners develop compassionate and mindful ways of thinking and existing in our interconnected and interdependent world.

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“It Was Difficult to Understand the System”: Developing A Coordinator role to support international nursing students- A qualitative study

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Abstract

International students are an important component of the host country and universities bringing economic, social, and community contributions. International students are the most vulnerable students with challenges related to academic expectations, language proficiency, and socio-cultural integration. This study explores the challenges of international students in a Western Australian School of Nursing and Midwifery. An exploratory questionnaire (n=10), three focus groups (n=15) and a quality improvement survey (n=80) informed this study. Four themes emerged: stress in the first weeks, incorrect and/or late enrolments, lack of guidance and support, and system navigation nightmares. Other issues included: accommodation, culture shock, financial concerns, information needs, and peer support. These findings led to the instigation of an international academic coordinator role as a single point of contact and increasing resources within the university faculty provided additional support to the international students.

Keywords: coordinator, international students, student challenges, student support

Introduction

According to the OECD, international students (IS) are defined as those who have moved to another country for the purpose of study (OECD, 2021). In Australia, international students provide significant social and economic benefits to the higher education sector. Pre-Covid 2019, over 756,000 IS were enrolled in Australia with over 55% in higher education, bringing billions into the Australian economy (DESE, 2022) and contributing further to the economy through casual employment (DIBP, 2017).

International students enrolled in a nursing degree are the most vulnerable students at many institutions of higher education (Karram, 2013; Sherry et al., 2010; Tran & Soejatminah, 2018). They are at high risk of failure due to differences with teaching and learning styles of their host countries, the use of online learning technologies, meeting academic standards, and communicating with educators, peers, patients, and the healthcare team (Forbes-Mewett, 2019). They are also at risk of exploitation and vulnerability as part of the host country workforce (Tran & Soejatminah, 2018). To support their learning in a foreign country, it is vital that IS are adequately prepared to understand academic requirements in a culturally unfamiliar environment.

Setting

This study was conducted in an Australian School of Nursing and Midwifery, which has the largest undergraduate nursing program in the state. For the past four years, international student enrolment has remained steady with approximately 15-23% of enrolments being international students. This equates to approximately 140-500 international students per year across eight nursing and midwifery courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level in the university. The number of IS enrolments dropped in 2020 and 2021 because of the travel restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some courses lead to professional registration in nursing or midwifery within Australia, and some courses contain mandatory work-integrated learning.

The research questions this project sought to answer were:

1. What challenges were encountered by international nursing students?
2. What interventions and resources could the university provide that may assist current and future international students in adjusting to the context of nursing and midwifery studies in Australia?

In this paper, we report on a research project which used the experiences of international nursing students who had just completed their first semester of study. Their insights and feedback informed the development of an International Academic Coordinator (IAC) role to support the students' transition to Australia.

Literature Review

The literature describes terms such as 'culture shock' and 'acculturative stress' to refer to emotional turmoil that may be created by transition to new cultures (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017). Change and adaptation to the higher education sector is challenging due to significant differences in teaching and learning systems and added pressures of academic success (Quan et al., 2016). Evidence highlights three key challenges faced by IS, namely academic expectations, language proficiency, and socio-cultural integration (Ballo et al., 2019; Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017).

The literature is mostly concerned with academic expectations (Bai, 2016). Pedagogical and systemic differences exist across higher education institutions and adjusting to these differences is challenging (Agostinelli, 2021; Quan et al., 2016). Further, as teaching practices and classroom dynamics may vary greatly and in Australia, there is a high emphasis on independent and self-directed learning (Foster, 2011). Assignment and assessment methods may also be unfamiliar, with essays and academic writing offering many challenges to IS (Wu & Hammond, 2011), often resulting in poor grades (Quan et al., 2016).

Language proficiency, as the conduit to academic success, is perhaps the greatest challenge for many IS (Burdett & Crossman, 2012). Many international students find their language skills are inadequate to cope with the pace of spoken English (Ramachandran, 2011). It is widely reported that standardized language proficiency tests and grammar teaching methods are inadequate preparation for international students to transition to academic skills and English language (Bai, 2016; Wu & Hammond, 2011).

Evidence suggests that most IS have never written an assessment piece in English and have not practiced English adequately before studying abroad (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017). Educational institutions do take measures to address this, but the primary focus is mainly on the development of language competency for entry requirements and completion of studies (Arkoudis et al., 2013).

Prior to leaving their home countries, there are often complex and frustrating processes to obtain visas and enrolments abroad, as well as tensions involved with leaving their communities (Caldwell & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016). This stress may lead to homesickness (Szabo et al., 2016) and a loss of established social networks (Chavoshi et al., 2017). Upon arrival, IS need to quickly find accommodation and employment, master a public transport system, and adapt to new eating habits, weather, and social conventions. Many IS underestimate their requirements for adequate cash flow, leading to a major source of anxiety (Ramachandran, 2011). Students with higher levels of social support experience lower levels of acculturative stress and depression (Kenyon et al., 2012). Furthermore, many IS do not feel a cohesiveness with Australian society, highlighted by a lack of local friends by the end of their course of study (Gomes, 2015). Their social networks may consist of other IS (Kashima & Pillai, 2011), and they may live in a parallel society to that of their host country (Gomes, 2015).

These domains do not exist separately, but instead overlap to influence each other in both positive and negative ways. Language proficiency affects academic learning and success (Akanwa, 2015) but also communication with other staff and students, making it harder to seek help and to create friendships and social connectedness (Bai, 2016). The degree of culture shock experienced by IS is related to both scope and pace of change expected (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017), triggering anxiety, depression, and anger and may harm self-worth (Pickford, 2016).

Therefore, it is crucial to provide adequate support for IS to reduce acculturative stress and culture shock. Efforts have focused on recruitment and transitioning to living and learning in a new culture (Bohman, 2014), but social and institutional support needs to be flexible enough to address ongoing and emerging challenges at all stages of the experience (Arthur, 2017; Roberts et al., 2015).

For nursing students, professional clinical practice poses additional stress and cultural shock (Edgecombe et al., 2013; Koch et al., 2015). There is limited evidence available that explore IS support needs (Lin et al., 2021) or challenges in the clinical setting (Edgecombe et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2021). In this study, we explored the challenges and needs of the international nursing and midwifery students resulting in the development of the International Academic Coordinator (IAC) role, responsible for supporting their academic and psychosocial needs.

Conceptual Framework

Our study resonated with the conceptual framework described by Graham et al. (2006), knowledge-to-action (KTA) two-step process. The first step, knowledge creation, is represented by a funnel in which knowledge from research or experiences moves through it and becomes more useful and refined as it develops (Graham et al, 2006). Our research sought knowledge in stage one through open-ended surveys that informed our focus groups in stage two. At each phase of knowledge creation, the researchers adjusted activities and approaches to address the international students' needs and to gain as much information as possible to inform next steps. The second step, the action cycle, was influenced by the knowledge creation in stage one and two. This step calls for the knowledge to be actioned and problems identified to be addressed (Graham et al, 2006). Stage three in our research represents our knowledge product through the development of an International Academic Coordinator (IAC) role within the school with resources that were evaluated using the Plan-Do-Study-Act process in stage four.

Methodology

Qualitative methodologies underpinned the development of the International Academic Coordinator (IAC) role and resources. The study approach involved an inductive sequential process, where data from each stage informed the subsequent stages (Polit & Beck, 2014).

Stage 1: Initial survey with open ended questions

Stage 2: Focus group discussions

Stage 3: Development and implementation of IAC role and resources

Stage 4: Quality improvement project to evaluate IAC role.

Two separate open thematic analyses were conducted for the survey and focus group data, each undertaken by different members of the research team to enhance reliability. Key words and phrases were highlighted and coded inductively, and these codes were compared and clustered into subcategories according to their meaning (Saldana, 2009). Core themes identified were checked and confirmed by another researcher to establish credibility ((Guest et al., 2012) Polit & Beck, 2014).

Stage 1: Questionnaire

All international nursing students who completed their first semester were invited to complete a questionnaire on the challenges they faced and how they navigated the educational system in their first semester. We asked them to describe the assistance and resources that were useful and suggest additional supports.

Stage 2 Focus group

Three focus groups consisting of five international nursing students each were conducted on the university campus. Questions underpinned by themes from the initial questionnaire in Stage 1 were developed to guide the discussion. All discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analysed by members of the research team (NF, AG, NG, KM).

Stage 3 Development of the International Academic Coordinator (IAC) role

After questionnaire and focus group data analyses, a new role, IAC, within the school was proposed. The IAC's role, scope, resourcing, and expectations were underpinned by the student data. The IAC commenced in 2019 as the first point of call for IS for information and support.

Stage 4 Quality improvement evaluation of the IAC role and resources

A quality improvement process following the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) (Sokovic et al., 2010) cycle was undertaken to ensure the support rendered to international nursing students met their needs. Anonymised online survey was sent to all IS within the school, out of the 782 IS who received the link to complete the online survey, 86 students completed them but 80 submitted their surveys. Therefore, we analysed only the submitted surveys. The survey was mainly open-ended questions, so the free texts were thematically analysed for recurring themes on IS's top three support needs.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained by the university's Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval No: 16490). Participant information and consent forms were given to all IS present at a welcome morning tea. The surveys were anonymous, and participation was voluntary. Focus group participants consented to keeping all discussions confidential and private. All personal identification materials were removed or anonymised during the transcription and data analysis. The quality improvement activities were not subject to human ethics review (Stiegler & Tung, 2017).

Participants

A total of 25 IS participated in the research. Ten students who had just finished their first semester of undergraduate nursing completed the questionnaire. Eighty percent of these students had been in Australia less than six weeks before commencing studies. A further 15 students participated in the focus group discussion.

Data analysis

As the data was of qualitative nature, thematic analysis was used to analyse them. The six steps of Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed in an iterative process. First, the authors (NF, AG, NG, KM and EA) explored the qualitative data for familiarity by reading through several times for codes and themes arising. The main codes, that is, recurring words and phrases, were merged to develop themes, which were constantly re-visited by the team members until all agreed that the generated themes were reflective of the data.

Results

Thematic analysis of the survey data identified four themes: *stress in the first weeks, incorrect and/or late enrolments, lack of direction for prior preparedness, and system navigation nightmares.*

Stress in the First Weeks

In describing their first few weeks in the host university and the problems they encountered, students used terms such as “*nervous*”, “*anxious*”, “*confused*”, “*overwhelmed*”, “*really tough*”, “*a shock*”, “*very frustrated*” and “*it was hard*.” Students talked about the difference in local culture, the diverse cultural makeup of the university and of Australia. Many initially felt a sense of disorientation and mixed emotions toward the first week of studies:

“It was hard and exciting. Hard to get to know new systems and how the school worked. But I do like studying here. It’s a good nursing school.”

“I was a bit nervous on my first week, but when I met some students and I cleared my doubts, then I was okay.”

There were issues that marred the first week experiences of the students, including enrolment problems, preparedness for study and problems with accommodation. Some students commented on the distance they needed to travel to get to the university.

Incorrect and/or Late Enrolments

The main concerns in the survey were enrolment into the wrong units, unclear enrolment instructions, attending wrong classes, and missing the first week(s) of lectures, tutorials and practical sessions. Related to this for some students was a lack of understanding of the full financial commitment of the course.

“Enrolled in the wrong unit, wasn’t clear how to go about the enrolments. For one week, I was attending the wrong classes until I discovered this in week 2.”

However, it wasn’t just enrolment issues; it was also finding the person with all the answers:

“It was difficult to understand the system. Get all the paperwork in order before prac [work integrated learning]. Really missed having one person to deal with, since we had a lot of questions.”

Several students commented Student Central did not know about their enrolment, nor could advise them accordingly, and so they needed to embark on a circuitous enquiry route which could take up to two weeks to resolve.

Lack of guidance and support

A further theme identified was the issue of prior preparedness and the hindrances this caused throughout semester. For some students, a suitable resolution was reached after asking friends.

“No contact to correct person. We ask our friends.”

“We got to talk to an international counsellor. Knew about it from recent students who had been through the same situation.”

There were also some positive indicators the campus structures in place were able to address students’ issues.

“School of Nursing staff were very helpful to get them ready before prac and I tried my best to go through them as a priority.”

System Navigation Nightmares

This final theme ran through the majority of the students' comments and was largely based on problems with understanding and navigating academic processes, assessments, information technology, learning management systems and work integrated learning preparation.

"Not sure about seeking help especially with assignments."

"I face the problem mainly with the assignments. It is totally different from what I studied. In India we just study from the book and write the exam. We have some assignments but not same as we do here."

The comments reflected an overall sense of unfamiliarity with university systems in general and assessment requirements in particular. Comments such as "everything is new", "new systems nightmare", "unaware online lectures prior to tutes", "Blackboard {learning management software} is a nightmare", "hard to get to know how things work" all reflect the students' difficulty in understanding the system, at least in the initial stages. Of interest, only one student commented on difficulty with English, despite this being a well-known barrier to transition (Burdett & Crossman, 2012).

Responses to what activities or resources may have made the transition from home to studying at university easier included knowing how to navigate IT resources and the quality of teaching:

"[Good] teaching style and good interpersonal relationship with teacher and students."

"Availability of the computer labs. Being shown the equipment and how procedures are done before we can go for our practicums."

Stage 2 Focus Group Results

Students identified three additional themes: *accommodation issues*, *culture shock*, and *financial concerns*.

Accommodation Issues

Students raised issues around finding suitable accommodation, partly due to not having a rental history or references and partly a lack of awareness of what was required for rental, such as evidence of income.

"About the rent, actually they wanted a salary slip and many things and references so finally we had to show our bank accounts with the fixed deposit slips from back home. Then it was easy ... maybe more than two or three got rejected then we finally ended up with one."

Culture Shock

International students identified a distinct 'differentness' of coming to Perth. Many felt, at least initially, a sense of disorientation. While travelling to university the students noticed cultural differences, realising they had to re-think a few things:

"For me it was cultural shock in so many ways.... the way people relate to each other different[ly] ... it was a real cultural shock for me. People ignore each other... they just want their phones."

"... before I got used to the Google maps ... I asked someone how do I get to this place? ... people they don't know each other, they don't even know the places you are asking them about, and I thought those people were ignorant or something ... I realised that if you are here, you can't rely much on people to tell you how you can get to places."

Financial Concerns

Another key concern related to finding employment, both generally and in their discipline areas where there were various requirements for working certificates and other pre-requisites.

"Getting a job is not easy ... it seems when I came, I heard people saying it's takes six weeks to do an aged care certificate, but since [then] they have changed it to six months for international students. So, jobs are not as easy as we thought because we assume that since we were nurses in our country that they were going to consider that, but it seems they're not considering it anymore."

A major concern for several IS were issues with their enrolment, where after arrival needed to enrol in an extra unit, extending the duration of their course and incurring further financial impost. For some IS, there was a lack of understanding of the full financial commitment of the course.

Student Suggestions from the Focus Group

Early Information Needs

The key suggestion was early information to help prepare for the challenges they would likely face, including accommodation options, immunisations, documents needed for employment, and accommodation as well as public transport information.

“On my first day someone came with me showing me how it goes on the trains and everything since the systems are different from ours.”

The learning management system (LMS) was acknowledged as containing a lot of information relevant to their course and enrolment, but initial awareness on how to access and use it were raised as problems. It was suggested IS be informed of its existence and use as early as possible, given that LMS was the primary source of course information.

“It was a lot of cultural shock because back in my country we didn’t use much of space technology computers, we used more pens and textbooks ... it was as if they’d expect us to just know ... we were actually new in the industry of using computers and now we’re learning how to use the computer and also learning how to grasp that information at the same time.”

“You really don’t understand ... but when I attended the orientation you have a bit of light because for me Blackboard [LMS] was the first time I was using it ... they would say ‘go find this paper’ ... [and] instead of twenty-five minutes you end up losing one hour and that was a difficult time because I’d budget my time.”

Some IS felt the general orientation for all new students a little difficult to follow and suggested additional help.

“[orientation]... it has to be [for] international students and not because they will be slow in learning ... but it was so fast it was ... she was just clicking and clicking, and I couldn’t even see [what] was up there.”

Preferred Modes of Accessing Information

The IS felt social media would have been a better platform than LMS to communicate and gain an understanding of all the requirements before the start of semester.

“.... one of the nursing students there had agreed to a Facebook group and I followed the details like you have to get your manual thing, your pin boards and everything, also clearance test ... so before I even started here at ... the Uni itself, I’d been running around all the areas for preparation.”

Other suggestions included an online link to a web page with enrolment confirmation, information on preparing for travel to Australia, courses and units, LMS, timing of practicums, finding work, accommodation, and public transport apps. This would be delivered by personal email as early as possible.

“Yeah, knowing the pathway is important because once we know it you know okay this is what I’m going to put in and you can enroll easily.”

Also, an orientation checklist of things IS may need to do was suggested such as: *when to arrive, where to go, who to see, and what items needed for classes.*

“But it would be better to get an orientation check list like that, where to collect your uniform, you need to go to co-op to do your medical ... you need to go to the staff centre because we had to ask each other.”

“It could be a link such that because we get a message from [university] when you see the welcome you’ve been given, your enrolment been confirmed ... to see things to prepare you.”

Peer Support

The final key suggestion that received widespread agreement involved peer support, such as testimonials or stories from previous international students on their experiences, how they prepared, what worked, how they overcame problems and so on. These may be in the form of videos accessible online. Some IS had already made contact with former students.

“Okay for me, I think I’ve been talking to the former students here ... they just finish[ed] and this program has been helpful ... and it’s good for the international students, for their improvement in class ... so for us it has helped us, we’ve learnt some things here which maybe are a bit different in our country and it’s been easy to learn ... we will go for our placement, so it will be easy to integrate, so it’s a good thing for us.”

Stage 3 Development of International academic coordinator (IAC) role

Following review of the challenges and barriers faced by IS, the School of Nursing and Midwifery created the IAC role to support international students socially and academically. The IAC is responsible for supporting IS to enhance the learning experience and integration into a new educational system and culture by ensuring access to the necessary information identified in the previous stages of the study.

Additionally, the IAC role includes organising an International Meet and Greet (intensive orientation and networking event for international students) and educating clinical facilitators on strategies to support IS. The IAC also shares evidence-based resources with academics within the school and university on how to effectively support IS, participates in employability workshops and shares alternative employment pathways for international students who, until February 2022 were not eligible for the graduate nurse program in Australia.

Resources Developed from the IAC Role

To support students in their transition to a new country and new ways of teaching and learning, the university has instituted compulsory academic integrity training modules for all commencing students. Despite not being raised as an issue by IS in either the survey or focus group, the school considered it a priority. Two videos were developed to support both students’ work integrated learning placements and academic experiences. The first video is set in the clinical setting and features a debriefing session between an IS and a clinical facilitator after a day shift. The debrief showed elements of cultural differences between the student’s home country and Australia. The second academic integrity video features a conversation between an IS and her lecturer on plagiarism. The lecturer provided more information on the meaning of plagiarism and how to avoid it. These resources are considered adjunct to the existing resources on clinical placement and academic integrity and are placed in the LMS for access.

Stage 4 Quality Improvement Survey and International Meet and Greet

An important role of the IAC is continuous quality improvement and assessment of the needs of international students. To this end, a simple survey was undertaken among all international nursing students asking to list their three top needs. Eighty (80) students completed the anonymous survey and results showed three overarching areas of concern: academic, work integrated learning, and social needs. For academic support, assistance with assignments, learning management systems, English language support and orientation to programs of study were identified. Work integrated learning placement needs included support with clinical learning, more intensive clinical orientation, adjustment in the new environment and familiarisation with clinical equipment. Social needs included employment during and after graduation, financial support/scholarships, and friendly staff throughout university.

These needs were incorporated into regular International Meet and Greet sessions (IMG). At all IMGs, experts such as career advisers, learning advisers, librarians, counsellors, student support, and clinical simulation facilitators (responsible for work integrated learning) were invited to share expectations and answer questions. Additionally, past IS were invited to share their experiences to motivate and assist students to navigate the system. The meetings also supported networking among IS and staff.

Discussion

The pressures IS experience transitioning to a new country and higher education facility are well described. Abrupt changes in social support (Bhochhibhoya et al., 2017), uprooting stress, coping and anxiety (Szabo et al., 2016) and culture shock (Belford, 2017) are common challenges when transitioning across countries and cultures. The stressors evident in the first few weeks of study seem borne out of fear of the unknown and unfamiliarity with new academic, social, and environmental factors. The scope and pace of activities needed to achieve enrolment, accommodation, employment and transport understandably contribute to acculturative stress, along with issues of seeking help and facing cultural problems (Gomes, 2015). It behooves the institution to provide suitable support right from the beginning of the student's academic journey (Akanwa, 2015).

With the development of the IAC role, IS gain earlier insight into the nursing programs offered and an overview of the expectations of studying at the university. Informed by the survey and focus group results, the role addressed what to expect on arrival, practical areas concerned with transition to Australia and support services available within the university. Also issues of clinical practice, equipment used during clinical placements and current practices used in the Australian health care setting were covered. Although there are various support services reported in the literature for international students (Martirosyan et al., 2019), to the best of our knowledge, the IAC role is the first of its kind developed to support international students' social, mental wellbeing, academic, clinical and employability needs.

Incorrect or late enrolments were originally an area of significant concern to many of the students, both in the survey and the focus group, as was prior preparedness. Even though the process of admission for IS starts prior to their arrival in Australia, the process of unit enrolment and pathway planning happens just prior to the beginning of semester. Some students experience delays in visa acceptance resulting in delay in arrival in-country. Therefore, IS sometimes missed the vital first week(s) of classes, despite a number of existing structures and support services in place to address this. All IS were encouraged to attend orientations sessions designed specifically to address student preparedness and give them a "roadmap" for enrolment and logistical information concerned with academic life. Despite this, it seems IS felt there was little direction to ensure preparedness for semester and were unsure who to approach for help when needed. Pre-departure information measures implemented by the IAC appear to have mostly addressed these concerns, as survey results show the main issues now faced are focused on academic, clinical placement and social needs.

Orientation to a new paradigm of learning is essential for academic and mental wellbeing (Ammigan & Jones, 2018). It appears the most positive outcomes of the orientations resources and support included being more familiar with enrolment, and pre-practicum equipment and procedures, accessibility and familiarity with library resources, and the computer labs, and networking with other nursing students. The IAC role continues to mature and evolve in response to the needs of new cohorts of IS. The cycle of Plan-Do-Study-Act continues, and students will be surveyed annually to assess the impact of changes to the IAC role. Future research studies may evaluate the implementation of similar roles within other university faculties and in response to changes in student migration patterns globally.

There are several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the sample sizes for stage one and two were small, convenience samples and may have only represented those IS seeking help or those struggling in the first weeks of being in country. Future studies should address a broader cohort of IS and consider different points in time along academic journey for generalisability of the results. Lastly, the questions used in stage one had not been previously validated among an IS cohort. Future research with large cohorts should use validated tools for IS.

Implications and Conclusion

International students have become an important component of the Australian higher education system bringing economic, social and community benefits. Three key challenges faced by international students transitioning to study in

host countries were academic expectations, language proficiency and socio-cultural integration. Structured support which differentiates between cultural groups, linguistic support and professional development of academic staff are suggested strategies to improve the educational experience of IS (Agostinelli, 2021).

This paper has described the results from a study of international students, which aimed to identify what resources could be provided to assist future international students adjust to nursing studies at an Australian university. From the qualitative data, four key themes emerged, being: *stress in the first weeks*, *incorrect and/or late enrolments*, *lack of guidance and support* and *system navigation nightmares*. These themes were elaborated on in the subsequent focus group where the themes *accommodation issues*, *culture shock*, *financial concerns*, *information needs*, and *peer support* led to the instigation of an IAC role within the university faculty. This article described some of the varied activities and resources relating to that role including video resources, social activities, academic support and ongoing quality improvement activities. We believe that the IAC role enhances the international student experience and is likely to improve the recruitment, retention, and student satisfaction within the international student cohort. More research is now required to better evaluate the impact of the coordinator role in different contexts.

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Visible but Invisible: Chinese International Students' Experience of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Academic Institutions' Support

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Abstract

This study applies the hermeneutical phenomenological approach, guided by Critical Race Theory, to explicate a nuanced understanding of the way Chinese international students' racial identity shapes the challenges that they faced during the pandemic and their experience of academic institutions' support during this time. The current study highlights the pervasive anti-Asian racism that directly and indirectly contributed to the negative experiences of Chinese international students studying in Canada during the pandemic. The findings also highlight the lack of support from academic institutions, despite the rising anti-Asian racism faced by this group of students. Furthermore, this study calls attention to the consideration of race in developing support programs for racialized international students. Recommendations for universities to better support international students in general are developed.

Keywords: anti-Asian racism, Canadian universities, Chinese international students, covid-19 pandemic, critical race theory

Introduction

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there has been a sharp increase in anti-Asian racism in Canada that is often accompanied by the scapegoating of Chinese people for the spread of the coronavirus (Jeung et al., 2020; Kong et al., 2021). This has placed Chinese international students (CISs) in a precarious situation, as they face the double threats of the coronavirus and intensified anti-Asian violence (Ge, 2021; Litam, 2020; Lou et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2020). While existing research has primarily focused on the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on CISs (Litam, 2020; Ma & Miller, 2021; Nam et al., 2021; Zhai & Du, 2020), there has been limited attention paid to the role of

CISs' racial identity in shaping their experience of the pandemic and academic institutions' support in the Canadian context. The current study aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the lived experiences of CISs during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. Specifically, the study seeks to understand the ways CISs' racial identity influences the challenges they faced during the pandemic and their experience of academic institutions' support. Through this inquiry, the study aims to provide insights into ways that academic institutions can create a more inclusive environment for international students in general. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways that racial identity and racism shape CISs' experience during the pandemic. By providing recommendations for academic institutions to better support racialized international students, the study aims to help create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all international students.

Literature Review

Anti-Asian Racism during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 outbreak has not only created a global health crisis but has also given rise to a racial justice crisis. As China is believed to be the first place where the coronavirus was detected, derogatory and hateful anti-Chinese rhetoric such as “bat-eaters” and “chingchong” that discriminates against Chinese people have proliferated since the outbreak (Borja et al., 2020; Jeung et al., 2020; Tahmasbi et al., 2021). Additionally, the use of “Chinese virus” and “Kung-Flu” by former U.S. President Donald Trump further fueled the racist attacks on Chinese people, and made them scapegoats for the spread of the coronavirus (Borja et al., 2020; Gao, 2022; Litam, 2020; Yao & Mwangi, 2022). Due to the conflation of nationality with race, discrimination towards Chinese people has turned into racism towards Asian people more broadly (Gao, 2022; Li & Nicholson Jr., 2020). Hate crimes against Asians and anti-Asian racism rose significantly in the West during the pandemic. In Canada, anti-Asian hate crimes increased by 532% in 2020 (CSHE, 2021), and it continued increasing in 2021 (Balintec, 2022; Passafiume, 2022). A similar pattern is also found in the United States (CSHE, 2021), the U.K. (Schumann & Moore, 2022), and France (Wang et al., 2021). Asians, especially Chinese people, in the West experience a ‘double pandemic’ where they face the threats of the coronavirus and increasing racist attacks (Lou et al., 2022; Starks, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). The dual crises highlight the significant roles that race and racism play in European-dominant societies. Furthermore, the rising anti-Asian racism in North America creates complex challenges for Chinese international students (CISs).

Chinese International Students' Experience of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Research on Chinese international students' (CISs) experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in North America highlights the prevailing mental health issues they experience as a result of the complex difficulties they face. As Chinese people are seen as primary carriers of the coronavirus, CISs experienced intersectional marginalization during the pandemic due to their race and citizenship status, and they are socially excluded, discriminated against, and verbally and physically assaulted in their host communities (Ge, 2021; Litam, 2020; Nam et al., 2021; Tang & Flint, 2022; Zhai & Du, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Researchers in both Canada and the United States have found that racism and xenophobia experienced by CISs during the pandemic have led to a high prevalence of psychological distress among this student group (Ge, 2021; Litam, 2020; Nam et al., 2021; Zhai & Du, 2020). In addition to the experiences of discrimination, studies on other stressors faced by CISs during the pandemic have emphasized their negative impact on CISs' mental health. For example, CISs were worried about their family's health during the early stage of the outbreak, and later for their own health and safety (Ma & Miller, 2021; Zhai & Du, 2020). In addition, CISs experienced COVID-related financial issues (Firang & Mensah, 2022; Ma & Miller, 2021; Zhai & Du, 2020), travel restrictions (Ma & Miller, 2021; Zhai & Du, 2020), and academic pressure that create added layers of stress in their life abroad (Ge, 2021; Nam et al., 2021; Tang & Flint, 2022). While racial discrimination has been identified in a considerable amount of literature examining the experiences of CISs during the pandemic, the focus on race as a central theme is limited, especially in the Canadian context. As racial discrimination towards people of Asian descent has been prevalent in Canada during the pandemic (Balintec, 2022; CSHE, 2021; Passafiume, 2022), understanding CISs' experiences through a critical race

perspective is important and necessary as it recognizes the significance of race in shaping individuals' experiences. Furthermore, the intersectional challenges that CISs experienced during the pandemic highlight the urgency for academic institutions to provide care and support for this student group in Canada and beyond.

Academic Institutions' Response to Anti-Asian Racism during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Research on academic institutions' internationalization strategy has critiqued the unequal relationship between academic institutions and international students. In Canada, international students are seen as a means of boosting revenue, global ranking, and campus diversity by academic institutions (Buckner et al., 2020; Guo & Guo, 2017; Yao & Mwangi, 2022), and a component of Canadian economic development and skilled labor force by the federal government (Guo & Guo, 2017; McCartney, 2021; Scott et al., 2015). However, despite the cultural, racial, linguistic, and institutional barriers that international students face, they are not recognized as an "equity-seeking" group by academic institutions and are left out of institutions' support policies (Chen & Zhou, 2019; Guo & Guo, 2017; Tamtik & Guenter, 2020; Tavares, 2021). Moreover, research has pointed out the lack of consideration for international students' race and experiences of racial discrimination in institutions' equity and inclusion policy (Buckner et al., 2021; Jiang, 2021). This unequal relationship demonstrates the ways that academic institutions benefit from the inclusion of international students on campus while overlooking the barriers and challenges that they face, thereby highlighting a critical gap in universities' support for international students. In their research on institutions' response to anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic, Tang and Flint (2022) emphasized this gap by revealing institutions' lack of consideration of Chinese international doctoral students' race and the racial discrimination they face. Other than Tang and Flint's (2022) study, research on institutions' response to anti-Asian racism during the pandemic is limited. Given CISs' susceptibility to racism during the pandemic, research on CISs' experience of racism and institutions' response to anti-Asian is needed to better understand international students' experience of race and racism and institutions' role in sustaining the unjust racial status quo (Buckner et al., 2021). By shedding light on these issues, the current study provides important considerations for academic institutions to critically evaluate and improve their support strategies for international students.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed during the 1970s in the U.S. in response to the erosion of civil rights era advances and the emergence of covert racism that continue the oppression of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT highlights the centrality of race and racism in people of color's lives in a racialized society, and investigates the way that racial power differentials are produced and maintained within various socio-economic and political structures to perpetuate the subordination of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Although originally developed in the U.S., CRT has been expanded across disciplines and national borders (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Moreover, a number of researchers (Buckner et al., 2021; Guo & Guo, 2017; Nam et al., 2021; Tang & Flint, 2022; Yao et al., 2019) have effectively applied CRT in studying international students' experiences in predominantly white institutions and societies, which demonstrates the malleability of CRT and supports its application in the current study. As the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated anti-Asian and anti-Chinese racism in Canada (Kong et al., 2021), it further justifies the application of CRT in researching CISs' experience of the pandemic and academic institutions' support during the same period. Specifically, the data collection and analysis process in the current study draws on the foundational CRT tenets that underline the pervasiveness of racism in a racialized society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and the issue of interest convergence in which advances for racial justice often coincide with the interest of the dominant racial group (Bell, 1980).

Methodology

The current study is guided by the hermeneutical phenomenological approach that is interested in a nuanced interpretive understanding of certain aspects of the human experience through "borrow[ing] other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences" (van Manen, 2016, p. 62). As a qualitative research method, hermeneutical

phenomenology intends to make visible the previously invisible significance of a lived experience, and it aims to move beyond the conceptual understanding of a phenomenon and bring up a fuller interpretive understanding of “some aspect of the lifeworld” (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2016). In applying this approach, the researcher aims to explicate a nuanced understanding of CISs’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic through their individual interpretations. Notably, hermeneutical phenomenology does not assume that the meaning of human experiences can be generalized, and it maintains the awareness that the meaning of a lived experience is always more complex than what is interpreted by the individual and the researcher (van Manen, 2016). As such, by applying the hermeneutical phenomenological approach in this study, the researcher does not intend to produce a final or full description of CISs’ experience; rather, the researcher aims to gain a deeper understanding of (1) the way that CISs’ racial identity impacts their experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and (2) their perception of academic institutions’ support in the Canadian context.

Participants

Approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB), 14 Chinese international students from mainland China were recruited via social media posts and snowball sampling. The inclusion criteria for participants included (a) being a Chinese international student in Canada with a study permit; (b) enrolled in a university in Ontario, Canada between the year 2020 to 2022; and (c) stayed in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic for at least one semester. Potential participants were provided with detailed information regarding the research, and screening questions were used to assess their eligibility for the study. To protect participants’ confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the recruitment and data collection process, and the names of academic institutions were not collected. Participants’ ages ranged from 19 to 24, and they are currently working towards bachelor’s and master’s degrees. Not by design, among the 14 participants, 1 self-identified as male, and the rest self-identified as female.

Data Collection

Data was collected in two stages. First, one-hour-long, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom. One month after the individual interviews, 11 participants returned for the follow-up focus group interviews for member checking to improve the trustworthiness of the findings. Every participant provided informed consent prior to each data collection stage. Both English and Mandarin Chinese were used in the interviews depending on participants’ own level of comfort to ensure a rich description of their lived experiences (Vagle, 2018). The semi-structured interview questions explored the ways that participants’ racial identity impacted their experience studying in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic and their thoughts on universities’ support for the challenges they faced during this time. Participants received a \$25 e-transfer for each interview they participated in.

Data Analysis

Guided by van Manen’s (2016) hermeneutical phenomenological approach, data in this study is analyzed with the “holistic – selective – detailed” framework to identify relevant themes of the phenomenon. First, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the researcher attended to each transcript with a holistic perspective to look for the essential meanings of the entire text (van Manen, 2016). Second, the transcripts were read several times in a selective manner to look for statements or phrases that seemed revealing about CISs’ experience during the COVID-19 pandemic (van Manen, 2016). At this stage, a short list of initial categories was developed to describe the data. Third, the researcher conducted a series of line-by-line readings to examine what each sentence might reveal about CISs’ experiences (van Manen, 2016). The initial categories were revisited, modified, and expanded into a list of non-overlapping meaning units during this process for a deeper understanding of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, the meaning units were grouped into broader themes that are essential to CISs’ lived experiences. Mandarin transcripts were translated into English for analysis and coding.

Results

The findings illuminated five major themes that address race-related challenges that CIS faced during the pandemic and their experience of universities' support during this time. In terms of challenges related to CISs' racial identity, (1) encounters with racial discrimination, (2) anxiety with mask-wearing, and (3) emotional distress due to rising anti-Asian racism are commonly experienced among participants. As for participants' experience with academic institutions' support for race-related challenges, they often (4) felt ignored and (5) not understood by the institutions.

Encountering Racial Discrimination

As the scapegoating of Chinese people for the spread of the coronavirus triggered a new wave of anti-Asian racism (Kong et al., 2021; Tahmasbi et al., 2021), most of the participants were aware of the rising hostility towards Asian and Chinese people in the West. Half of the participants had personally experienced overt and covert racial discrimination such as verbal assaults, microaggression, and Othering, which essentialized their identities and served to rationalize the discrimination against them (Said, 1979). Lily, Coco, and Kelly experienced overt racism during the pandemic where strangers verbally assaulted them due to their Chinese identity. Lily was told to "go back to [her] country" by a stranger on the street, and Coco was verbally abused by a stranger in the supermarket. Kelly also had a racist encounter in early 2020 when she was shopping at a local supermarket wearing a mask, and she shared:

"So a guy just came up to me and said, 'you guys brought this virus into our country, why are you wearing this? Are you trying to kill all of us?' That was so mean. I was so upset that day."

The experience of covert racial discrimination was more prevalent among the seven participants. Some participants stated that they had experiences where no racist language was used, but the situation made them feel uncomfortable. For example, Yang shared one of the uncomfortable incidents that he experienced in early 2020:

Like in the supermarket people sometimes fight for stuff, like sanitizer or something, and then, one time there weren't many left, and then when it was my turn, he didn't give it to me, but gave it to a local Canadian instead... it makes me feel really... like I feel really nervous at that time.

The covert discrimination toward Chinese people during the pandemic is also observed by one of the participants, Emily, as she recounted one of the negative experiences she had during the pandemic:

I think last year oh, no, in January, there was a time when I am driving out alone, wearing a mask, and there was a person just shouted at me saying 'why are you wearing a mask? You are in your car.' Yeah, I think that person shouted at me, probably like, I'm Asian or I'm Chinese.

Moreover, Lily and Missy experienced microaggression from peers in early 2020. Some of Lily's classmates called the coronavirus the 'Wuhan virus,' and it made her feel "uncomfortable." She elaborated on this experience when one of her classmates showed her videos about the meaning of the 'Wuhan virus' on YouTube:

Like a YouTube video people make fun of it, like in that video, it shows how COVID started, and they make a lot of jokes about Wuhan from that time. But what I see on the internet, like I see in China, how Chinese people get together to defy COVID and a lot of people support the fight themselves, and I do feel bad about that.

Another participant, Missy, also had a similar experience with one of her classmates, where discrimination was passed on in a "humorous way" when the classmate shared a piece of COVID-related news article with her:

She just like saying a lot of... I don't know, you know they have those news articles, that might be rumors. I don't... I can't tell the validity. But they're just using the news to say things against us, in kind of like a

humorous way, to say something about China and to your face. And I don't know what their ... like what their means of that. I don't know if they did it on purpose, it just feels like they're using it against you.

Notably, two participants, Alex and Jenna, expressed that they have not experienced any form of racial discrimination during the pandemic; however, they both consider themselves to be “lucky” to have no such experience, which implies that they are aware of the racist environment in Canada.

Worried about Mask-Wearing

Due to the association of the coronavirus with masks and Chinese identity, mask-wearing adds another potential source of discrimination for participants. Although many participants expressed their fear of the coronavirus, the association of the coronavirus with masks and Chinese identity made some of them feel “weird” when being the few Chinese people who wear masks, especially in the early stage of the COVID-19 outbreak. For example, Vivian shared:

Like, people are not going to comment, like all my classmates are nice, they're not going to comment on you wearing masks. But... as a minority you just.... You're just afraid. Sometimes they have a look at you, and it may not be anything negative, but you just think oh, are they thinking that I'm weird or whatever?

Participants were paying close attention to anti-Chinese discourse online. For example, Vivian and Kelly noticed that Chinese people are blamed for the coronavirus online and it contributed to the increasing hostility towards Chinese people and mask-wearing. Moreover, the proliferating anti-Chinese discourse online made Elaine worried about potential racist attacks when wearing a mask:

I think it would make me feel uncomfortable seeing so many comments online ... that saying like, why people are still wearing masks or why Chinese people are still wearing masks or why Canada become China, you know, I've seen comments like that. So, it, yeah, it will affect my mood sometimes to think like ... if I would get attacked because I'm wearing a mask, so, that happens.

Sharing a similar concern towards racist attacks when wearing a mask, Jenna shared:

I feel like people on like, buses or subways, they're still like I would say like most people are still wearing masks. So... I'm not kind of like ... I'm not going to be like an obvious target when I was wearing a mask on the bus or on the subway. So... but, it's because like, speaking on the street, yes, there's a risk that somebody's just gonna laugh at you or saying like, like, you know, pointing out your mask and say something really offensive. So, I'm worried about this a lot.

Although a few of the participants attributed their uncomfortableness with mask-wearing to cultural differences, many participants felt that mask amplified their outsider identity during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it becomes a potential source of racial discrimination and emotional distress. Additionally, participants also experienced emotional unrest when seeing frequent news about violence and racism towards Asian and Chinese people during the pandemic.

Emotionally Distressed due to Anti-Asian Racism

Vicarious racial distress related to the rising anti-Asian racism was commonly experienced among participants. Some of them felt “afraid” and “terrified” when they saw the news about violence against Asian and Chinese people. For example, Yang expressed that the rising violent incidents towards Chinese people in Toronto in early 2020 made him “feel quite terrified”, and as a Chinese international student, he felt that “it can be really stressful during that time.” Similarly, Alex expressed it is “always terrifying to see the things about China on Twitter,” because “there are always like, hate comments,” and these comments can sometimes make her feel “really anxious.” The “fear” of racism is also experienced by Elaine when she saw anti-Chinese remarks online, as she elaborated:

On those social media platforms, you can easily see that people just saying something about mask or something about COVID. The comments are all like Chinese virus, blah, blah, blah, something like that [...] And also, I think, it's, it's kind of like you have always heard about it, but you probably never faced it. But you have the fear for that. So, I think that's kind of the experience for me.

Other than emotional distress, some participants also shared that they tried to go out less during the pandemic due to the rising number of violent and racist incidents targeting Asians and especially Chinese people. For example, Lily shared:

[...] at that time, I was really scared and there was a time that I was afraid of going out, because I saw on the news that some Chinese Americans were stabbed on the street. And my parents were also worried about me when they saw news like this.

Similarly, Kelly shared the vicarious trauma that she experienced during the pandemic and her subsequent behavioral change for self-protection:

I think once there was a guy, was a... I think a Chinese guy got killed because of racism, there was the news, and I actually got trauma because of that news. There's um one kind of trauma you get when you see somebody else facing a very difficult or a terrible event, you will feel very scary thoughts, and I got trauma, and I locked myself in my condo for 3 days (laughs).

Feeling Ignored by the Institution

Although anti-Asian discrimination was exacerbated during the pandemic, most of the participants stated that their university did not respond to or issue any statement regarding the rising anti-Asian racism, nor did they offer any support for Chinese international students who were vulnerable to racism during the pandemic. For example, Missy noted the university's lack of recognition of anti-Asian racism:

When they [the school] talk about something like racial discrimination or something, they never really focused on Asian or especially Chinese people. Like, this is a big topic, but they just somehow missed out, like, were ignored and just going through, you know...for this huge group is going through a hard time, especially during the pandemic. They're not given enough resources or not enough... they're not given any resources or any special considerations towards us. For example, I never have an email saying let's stop the Asian hate, well, let's stop the Chinese hate, or let's just stop saying the word like 'Wuhan virus' or something like that. So they never discriminate against us, but they don't offer any support. So, I think that's basically bias.

Notably, a few participants expressed that racism towards Asian people does not get as much attention compared to other racial minorities in the university. For example, when talking about school's lack of support towards CISs who might experience discrimination during the pandemic, Elaine expressed that "because we're Asians, so we just did not get a lot of ... we just don't get as much attention as we want." Moreover, Vivian shared:

I think university... I don't think they, they showed like, they specifically say that, um, stop Asian hate. I don't think they say that. That's also um... yes, this is, this is like, maybe this is a thing because they will, they will say that um... compared to other races, like they will say this is a Black community, Black pride month. I'm not sure about the name, but they will speak it out. But I'm pretty sure I don't see any type of support specifically about Asians, yeah, so this should be a problem also.

Not Understood by the Institution

As illustrated earlier, participants experienced mental and emotional distress during the pandemic; however, many of them chose not to seek mental health support from their institutions because of the perceived institutional barriers such

as the lack of consideration of their identity and the challenges they face in support programs. For example, Vivian has experienced “mental stress” due to academic stress and the lack of social interaction during the lockdown. When talking about her preference of not seeking help from school due to perceived cultural differences, she elaborated:

So, there is an option. I just... for me, I just didn't use their help. I know there is an option available... So, one thing is about, I think specifically about our identities. because we are Chinese international students, that's like, actually, there's a lot of stuff that I... I assume that because they won't understand and that this is like, my assumption. I'm not saying they're not professional. Yeah. But just... I think, in my opinion, they won't understand.

Other than cultural difference, language difference was also a perceived barrier in help-seeking, for example, Sophie explained that she did not go to school for help for her emotional distress during the pandemic because English is not her first language, and when she “feel(s) distressed, stressful, [she does not] know how to describe it in a very comfortable way.” Max described her frustration in using school mental health support due to perceived language and cultural differences as well:

My university can provide students with mental health care...like on... applications, they can call or chat with a psychologist, um...but there, there are few Chinese counselors, there are, but just maybe 2 or 3.... So, when I talked to ... when I talk to the counselor in English, I don't know... I just don't know how to express properly, and just like... so, maybe there's some.... and also, the cultural difference, they cannot understand where we lived before.... So.... They don't know all the situation... it's so difficult for us, especially as a first-year student.

Yang, however, expressed that the generalized support offered by the school does not address the difficulties that CISs face, and it discouraged him from seeking wellness support from school:

Support from school... Actually, there are... just, at that time, the school has support, but it did not provide the kind of one-on-one, specific... well, like for Chinese international students, many faculties or staff in the school they might not really have much of an understanding of China and Chinese culture, yeah. So, I feel that the help provided by the school is not very helpful to me, and I'm not the target... the services are not designed for me.

Yang also mentioned the institution's generalized wellness support showed their lack of understanding of what CISs were going through:

So, many of the supports and services from school are, um, the same as what domestic students will receive, so this is... and the locals also don't really understand international students' situation at that time, especially their situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, the school doesn't seem to understand the situation that Chinese people are being discriminated against during the pandemic, and I think this has a big impact on... like, there is no specific guidance and planning, just really... really general stuff.

Sharing a similar sentiment towards the school's support, Missy remarked:

Although I understand that international students are a big proportion of school, so [school] would generalize them, but then still, they have to, you know, I think they didn't do the research very well. So, they don't really understand what the students are going through.

The institutions' lack of consideration for international students' diverse backgrounds and identities in their wellness support programs rendered CISs' marginal identities and their experiences of discrimination invisible. Additionally, it perpetuated the marginalization of international students of color in academic spaces.

Discussion

The current study explored the challenges that CISs encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic and their experience of institutional support with a specific focus on their racial identity. The findings highlighted the pervasive anti-Asian racism through blatant verbal assaults, microaggression, and Othering that both directly and indirectly contributed to CISs' negative experience studying in Canada during the pandemic. Despite the rising anti-Asian racism facing CISs, academic institutions' support for their experience of marginalization was largely absent. Institutions did not consider CISs' race in their experience of the pandemic, and their program support lacked the consideration for cultural, institutional, and linguistic barriers that discourage CISs' from seeking support and perpetuate their marginalization during the pandemic. The findings also expanded CRT in its theoretical value in that they provided evidence for the pervasiveness of racism and the issues of interest convergence and White domination in a global context. In the following, I discuss the findings in relation to the CRT framework. Specifically, I highlight the way that CISs became the highly visible Other during the pandemic troubles Canada's welcoming multicultural image; and the way that institutions render CISs' experiences of racism and racial discrimination invisible by ignoring CISs' race in support programs.

In CRT, racism is seen as pervasive and an ordinary part of the experience for people of color in White-dominant countries (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Moreover, because racism is embedded in different levels of systems and structures to maintain the unjust racial status quo, racism impacts racialized individuals in covert and pervasive ways that are difficult to detect and address (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In the current study, the pervasiveness of racism is exemplified through the multiple implicit and explicit expressions of racism that participants experienced at the individual level through verbal assaults and microaggressions, and at the societal level where they are scapegoated for the spread of the coronavirus. CISs are highly visible to racist attacks and marginalization during the pandemic due to their perceived proximity to the coronavirus (Jeung et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). Notably, research on Chinese international doctoral students' experience of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. by Tang and Flint (2022) found similar results regarding the common experiences of racism among CISs. The similarity of CISs' experience of racial discrimination in the Canadian and the U.S. context highlights the pervasiveness and centrality of race and racism that render racialized international students the visible Other in White-dominant societies (Yao et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the pervasive racist experiences that CISs encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic troubles Canada's image as a welcoming multicultural country. Multiculturalism is an official policy adopted by the Canadian government in 1971 aimed to promote and preserve cultural diversity, and it has earned a positive reputation for Canada as a welcoming Western nation that is "innocent of racism" (Dua et al., 2005, p. 1). For critics, multiculturalism did not change the reality of marginalization for people of color in Canada, and it has been deployed as a mechanism to maintain the unjust racial status quo (Dua et al., 2005; Lee & Johnstone, 2021). Moreover, the myth that Canada is "innocent of racism" also prompted the illusion that racism in Canada is not as bad as its neighbor down south (Houshmand et al., 2014). This myth is confronted by the participants' experiences of racism and the high rates of anti-Asian hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic when anti-Asian hate increased by 530% in four of Canada's largest cities (CSHE, 2021). The intensified anti-Asian racism in Canada during the pandemic illuminates the invisible racial hierarchy that underpins the Canadian social structure, and it troubles the image of a nice, multicultural Canada. Furthermore, the invisible racial hierarchy underlying Canadian multiculturalism reflects the transnational context of White domination, highlighting the broad relevance of the CRT beyond the U.S. Specifically, CRT provides a helpful framework in understanding racialized populations' experiences of racism in Canada, as well as the experiences of racialization and racism encountered by international students, such as CISs, in the higher education context.

Although beyond the scope of this study, the findings also offer insights into the development of a more nuanced CRT that acknowledges the varying experiences of racism among different racial groups. Additionally, the experiences of racialization and racism among CISs in Canada challenge the black-white binary in the racial discourse and supports the transnational contexts of racism outlined in Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit). AsianCrit emphasizes how historical and present global racial, political, and economic relations shape Asian Americans' experiences of racism (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2017; Iftikar & Museus, 2018). The transnational context in AsianCrit is particularly relevant in understanding how historical anti-Asian racism in Canada, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act (1923) and the Japanese internment camps during World War II (Adachi, 1991), as well as present-day political tensions with China, such as the extradition case of Huawei's executive Meng Wanzhou in Vancouver and the detention of two Canadian citizens in China (Bogerd, 2020). These examples shape the experiences of racism faced by CISs during the COVID-19 pandemic. In sum, the intensified anti-Asian racism experienced by CISs during the pandemic highlights the pervasive racial hierarchy in Canada, and CRT provides a valuable perspective in understanding and addressing the experiences of racism among migratory racialized populations in Canada and beyond.

In addition to the pervasiveness of racism, participants' experience of academic institutions' wellness support underlines the issue of interest convergence and the domination of White norms in Canadian academic institutions. The interest convergence feature in CRT proposes that the support that marginalized groups receive is often incentivized by the advancement of the dominant groups' self-interest (Bell, 1980). The perceived lack of understanding and consideration of CISs' identity from academic institutions experienced by participants during the pandemic suggests that international students of color are welcomed and visible to the institutions insofar as they help boost institutions' profit and increase the academy's image of diversity (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020; Tavares, 2021; Yao et al., 2019). However, when it comes to support programs and policies, racialized international students' experiences of marginalization and racism are often invisible to the institutions (Buckner et al., 2021; Jiang, 2021; Yao et al., 2019). This is exemplified in the findings where participants feel discouraged in seeking institutional support for their well-being because the services are not designed with CISs' identity and unique needs in mind. Furthermore, the lack of consideration of racialized international students' marginalized identities in universities' support programs illuminates the invisible domination of White norms in academic institutions (Buckner et al., 2021; Tamtik & Guenter, 2020), and the centrality of race in shaping their experiences in predominantly White spaces (Yao et al., 2019). As a result, CISs face a conflicting experience where their racialized identity makes them visible to marginalization, yet institutions' lack of consideration of their race in support programs renders their experiences of marginalization invisible. This raises questions about institutions' complicity in perpetuating White domination in academic spaces and Canadian society more broadly, and it highlights the need to acknowledge and address the experiences of marginalization and racism among international students of color. Thus, the issues of interest convergence and the domination of White norms in CISs' experiences of institutional support during the COVID-19 pandemic underline the relevance of CRT in the higher education context as a useful lens to better understand and address the experiences of racialization and racism faced by international students in Canada.

Conclusion

By applying CRT framework, the current study illuminates the complex challenges that CISs experienced during the pandemic due to their racial identity and the lack of support from academic institutions. Moreover, by shedding light on CISs' experiences of marginalization in the higher education context, the study highlights the importance of recognizing international students' marginalized identities and experiences of exclusion in supporting their overall well-being. The presence of international students creates the image of an inclusive and diverse campus; however, inclusion does not mean equity (Abrams & Moio, 2009), and the integration of international students on campus does not mean they receive the care and support that they need and deserve. To live up to their commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, universities need to first recognize the centrality of race and racism that shape racialized international students' experience in Canada. In addition, universities must be aware of the ways that they reproduce the unjust racial hierarchy in Canada and perpetuate the marginalization of racialized international students by ignoring their race and experiences of racial discrimination. When international students' race and experiences of racism are ignored by universities, it creates institutional barriers for CISs who are trying to make sense of their race in a transnational space and to process their experiences of racism (Buckner et al., 2021). As such, it is important for universities to not only recognize international students' race and their experiences of racism and marginalization but also include this understanding in their official policy and strategies for student support

(Yao et al., 2019). The results in this study should not be generalized to represent the experiences of all CISs; rather, they are to add nuance to the understanding of this group of students and their needs.

The researcher proposes the following four recommendations for universities to start imagining and creating an inclusive and supportive environment for international students with marginalized identities. First, as race shapes international students' experiences studying overseas, universities should include anti-racism resources in their orientation process to help international students, especially those from a racially homogenous society, to better navigate experiences of racialization and racism. Additionally, providing anti-racism resources to international students can help make visible the invisible mechanisms of racism, and give international students the language to talk about their experiences of racism, which validates their experiences and empower them to confront and resist the perpetrators (Litam, 2020). Secondly, universities should adopt a holistic perspective in providing support for international students that involves the understanding of the different systems that marginalize students and those that can offer support. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, universities could have raised awareness among staff, faculties, and students on the complex challenges facing CISs to show solidarity and support from different levels within the institution. Third, universities should create channels for international students of color to report and seek counseling for their experiences of racism, especially at times when they are vulnerable to racial discrimination and exclusion, to promote a sense of safety and belonging during a time of crisis (Nam et al., 2021). Finally, in terms of support programs, universities should recognize that international students (Chinese or otherwise) come from diverse backgrounds with unique needs (Yao et al., 2019), and they should work with international students in support program development to center the services around their needs and promote a sense of belonging (Chen & Zhou, 2019; Tamtik & Guenter, 2020).

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“It is always hard at the beginning:” Peer-to-peer Advice for International Students Transitioning to University Life in the U.S.

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Abstract

Formal and informal peer-to-peer support through advice plays an important role in enhancing students' experiences and ensuring their success in higher education. For international students who often face social and cultural challenges adapting to their new university environment, direct and authentic guidance from peers can be vital in helping them acclimate and cope with their transition to campus. This paper examines the cross-cultural adjustment experiences of over 400 international students enrolled at a mid-sized, research-intensive university located in the United States (U.S.). Relying on a qualitative research design, we analyzed data from reflection essays written by international students between 2013 and 2021 and used Oberg's culture shock theory (1960) as a lens to interpret data on experiences that impacted their sociocultural adjustment. Based on their lived experiences, these students identified specific areas that current and future international students could focus on to ease their adjustment to a new culture and academic environment. Guided by five main themes, the discussion highlights salient factors that impact international students, calling for new ways for addressing their adjustment to university life in the U.S. Our findings enabled us to offer insights to university officials as they develop and deliver acculturation and transition programs to their international student community.

Keywords: belonging, international students, peer advice, sociocultural adjustment, support services

Introduction

In recent decades, U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) have continuously enrolled larger numbers of international students, averaging about one million students since 2017 (Institute of International Education, 2022). This growing number of international students is increasingly diverse, with a varied profile similar to the changing domestic student composition on U.S. campuses (Chapman, 1999; Veerasamy, 2021). Scholarship reveals that international students arrive from different sociocultural and economic backgrounds accompanied by different levels of academic and language preparedness (Bista & Foster, 2016; Jean-Francois, 2019). These students are often not ready to face the complex sociocultural norms that characterize the U.S., and, within classrooms, this can impact their academic goals (Li & Zizzi, 2018; Smith & Khawaja 2011; Zhou et al., 2008). This unpreparedness is not necessarily based on a lack of agency on their part but is instead based on the “sojourner’s” experience as they enter new cultural spaces.

In general, when international students transition into new norms in their host culture, the acculturation process is often challenging (Ammigan, 2021; Shafaei et al., 2018). The process of acculturation occurs when individuals from different ethnic backgrounds interact, and during these interactions they often negotiate to avoid conflict, allowing for “cultural and psychological change” (Berry, 2005, p. 698) to occur. While sociocultural adjustments align with behavioral adjustments, psychological adjustments correspond with emotional and affective changes during a sojourner’s adaptation phases (Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Unfamiliarity with host cultures requires intercultural adjustment. As they transition into their new environment, students often need to adapt their cultural norms to engage effectively with peers from the host culture, including with members of the broader campus and local communities (Koo et al., 2021). Unfortunately, adequate support for cross-cultural adjustment and developing a sense of belonging tend to be lacking on university campuses (Jean-Francois, 2019). The current study helps fill this gap by pinpointing specific aspects of culture that accompany *culture shock* during international students’ transition to their new environment. To this end, we identified information from the lived experiences and voices of existing international students and turned them into insights and advice to support the sociocultural adjustment of incoming international students.

Our analysis of reflective essays written by 430 students between 2013 and 2021 enabled us to highlight factors and themes across international student experiences that affect their sociocultural adjustment in the U.S. Relating narratives from their initial arrival experiences to navigating the first semester on campus allowed participants to provide informal advice to their peers on navigating and adapting to their new environment. Peer-to-peer advice was gathered informally, namely from international students based on a relationship outside of a formal or campus supported peer-to-peer advice program. Although student experiences are influenced by multiple factors including race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender, economic status, academic preparedness, and more (Kim, 2012; Lynch et al., 2023; Tozini & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022), we do not disaggregate students along these differences. Instead, we offer an initial overview of the common patterns of international student experiences as a group and identify participant quotes by student home country. We discuss areas of challenges to international student sociocultural adjustment and share their advice to better support the adjustment process of future international students. Research has established that peer interactions have a positive impact on learners’ cognitive and social experiences as they develop and transition into higher education environments (McEachie et al., 1986; Magolda & Astin, 1993; Keup, 2012). Over the years, HEIs have harnessed the various forms of peer interactions to use in support of student success (Shook & Keup, 2012). In this study, we valorize informal peer advice offered by international students to facilitate the sociocultural adjustment of future international students to the U.S. and recommend using this advice to enhance campus supported international student services programs.

Literature Review

When internationally mobile students transition between institutions and systems of higher education, they also have to adjust to their host environment - including the city, country, culture, institution, and people (Roberts & Ammigan, 2024). Institutional support mechanisms are vital structures to have in place, but much of the intercultural transition, namely

interactions between cultures, occurs outside of the classroom, and often depends on an individual student's ability to transition (Deardorff, 2006; Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009). Scholars have suggested that international students are expected to adjust or adapt to American norms to benefit from "social capital," namely "the social relationships that provide access to institutional resources and knowledge of cultural norms" (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013, p. 413). Acknowledging two components to "social capital," namely an institutional and a non-institutional aspect, Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood (2013) state that "social capital" has a broader definition which includes "social resources that can be mobilized through the construction and maintenance of institutional and non-institutional social networks" (p. 413).

When international students arrive in the U.S., they are transitioning from the context of their known cultural norms into unfamiliar territory. Cultural norms exist within individual cultures. According to Hofstede (2011), "culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 3). The term culture has been applied to several types of collectives including ethnic groups, nations, organizations, and individuals who exist within these collectives. On the whole, research has shown that cultural differences at any collective level impact international students on university campuses (Le & Gardner, 2010).

Institutional Support

Over the last 50 years, institutional support has been identified as a critical component of international student success in research studies. Relying on *transition* theory, Schlossberg et al. (1995) suggested that HEIs should examine the support they provide as international students begin to transition through *culture shock*, namely the accompanying anxiety of being abroad in a different cultural context (Oberg, 1960) or "the collective impact of... unfamiliar experiences on cultural travelers"(Zhou et al., 2008, p. 63). In his seminal work on cultural adjustment, Oberg (1960) coined the term *culture shock*, theorizing that it is characterized by different stages. Acknowledging the heterogeneous nature of international students as a group, researchers have recommended that institutions be mindful of the varying levels of personal development and of adaptable support services for this diverse student body (Perez-Encinas & Rodriguez-Pomeda, 2018; Roberts et al., 2021). In 2008, Zhou et al. pointed out that some international students are "unaware and falsely assume that the new society operates like their home country" (p. 63). In his Input - Environment - Output (IEO) model, Astin (2012) asserts that the college environment impacts student development. In this vein, scholars have examined how environments shape international students' experiences and success on campus.

In their Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model, Museus and Smith (2016) recommended paying attention to campus environment when addressing student sense of belonging on campuses. To enhance student sense of belonging, the scholars suggest cultivating cross-cultural interactions for international students on campus. The CECE model emerged after Museus (2014) examined the experiences and outcomes of diverse college students and measured the extent to which campus environments are culturally engaging. Briggs and Ammigan's (2017) Collaborative Programming Outreach (CPO) model stresses the importance of partnerships between different units on campus, including with the wider community, to better serve the academic, social, and cultural needs of international students.

In 2017, Heng explored how host institutions could better support the college experiences of international students in the U.S. and discussed implications for faculty, school administrators, support services staff, and local students. Students interviewed in their study wished that professors would be more patient and reassuring in class and would consider their cultural background as newcomers when teaching, assessing, and interacting with them. Students welcomed the opportunity to receive feedback on draft assignments and homework ahead of time due to language barriers and their unfamiliarity with the U.S. system of education. Also, students asked that their host peers be more inclusive, open-minded, curious, and less stereotypical about their culture. The international students in Heng's (2017) study also hoped to receive better support and resources from the university's academic and student services units, including from their international student office. Expectations included improved academic orientation programs, course availability and selection, group work and discussions, student mentorship programs, social activities, opportunities to practice English, immigration and career support, and housing and dining experiences. Gomez et al.'s (2014) study found that students who engaged in campus groups, including those related to recreational activities and social programs, showed greater accumulation gains.

Tozini and Castiello-Gutiérrez's (2022) study examined the importance of institutional support during COVID-19 and found that HEIs need to provide clear and prompt communication to international students, ideally tailored to students by academic level and subsequent needs. Additionally, HEIs need to provide better support and socialization opportunities to reduce occurrences of stress and isolation (Tozini & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022). Similarly, Lynch et al. (2023) examined how institutional support structures related to international students' trauma experiences during COVID-19 as well as challenges posed by shifting immigration policies. They found that students who felt the institution provided adequate outreach and support and had a friend with whom they felt comfortable sharing and communicating with, showed lower levels of trauma (Lynch et al., 2023).

Not only is providing institutional support essential, but university officials and administrators must continuously adapt to changing student needs and identities. Critical international education scholarship has examined how college faculty, staff, and students can unintentionally marginalize international students, particularly students of color. In Lee and Rice's (2007) seminal study that examined neo-racism as a construct in the international student experience, student interviewees indicated that non-white international students experienced racism at an alarmingly high rate (Lee & Rice, 2007). The authors recommended that institutions shift from enrolling international students and expecting acculturation, toward tailored support and a critical analysis of how welcoming the campus is in its policies and interactions. A study of first year international students of color by Yao et al. (2019) found that these students navigated common stressors and transitions while experiencing micro aggressions and challenges with finding social networks (Briscoe et al., 2022). They discussed how the intersectionality of international students is often not considered in typical university programs or support structures. Students may be seen only as an international student, when other identities they hold such as race, religion, or gender are more salient (Yao et al., 2019). As such, HEIs must evolve to better understand and support the intersectional needs of international students.

Non-institutional Support

Scholars of student development, such as Baxter Magolda (2001), state that students in college embark on a journey of "self-authorship," namely "the capacity to internally define [one's] own beliefs, identity and relationships" (p. xvi). This requires students to trust external authorities that impact their lives and understand the wider world including their own selves. During this journey, Baxter Magolda (2001) states that any discord with their external authorities brings students to a crossroads where they are challenged to rely on their internal sense of self. The scholar posits that students feel supported when their thoughts and feelings are respected and when they are encouraged to handle their experiences and solve problems in a collaborative environment (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

In their new cultural context, international students face cultural challenges (Deardorff, 2006), and studies have addressed specific cultural challenges faced by Asian students in particular (Chennamsetti, 2020; Heng, 2018; Li & Gasser, 2005). These include homesickness and loneliness from having to live away from family and friends; self-doubt and low self-confidence due to the lack of English proficiency; and higher levels of anxiety resulting from the fear of being misunderstood and misinterpreted by faculty and peers. In general, when navigating cultural challenges, social support from other people helps with tackling psychological stressors (Dalton et al., 2001), and international students are often in need of extra support compared to domestic students (Jou, 1993; Roberts et al., 2021). International students need interactions with their peers for recreational and social support; and when students interact with their own compatriots, it enhances their self-esteem, reinforces their cultural identity, and reduces acculturative stress (Bochner et al., 1977; Shadowen et al., 2019). Notably, scholarship shows that as they transition into an individualistic society, international students from collectivistic cultural backgrounds prefer to turn to their social networks and trusted communities to seek advice and recommendations when facing challenges in college. This is largely due to the understanding of and perceived familiarity with the issues at hand by students from the same culture (Heng, 2018). According to Louw et al. (1998), support from like-minded groups, such as social peers who have similar shared experiences, help students develop coping skills. If students have peers they can relate to and ask questions, this usually helps create a caring and inclusive campus environment (Arthur, 2017; Tanaka

& Reid, 1997). Hence, peers who have lived experiences when adjusting to life on American campuses can be a good source of “noninstitutional [support by] social networks” (Rose- Redwood et al., 2013, p. 413).

Understanding the host culture and developing skills to transition into it can facilitate students’ integration in their new university life—academically, linguistically, and socioculturally (Ecochard & Fotheringham, 2017; Li & Zizzi, 2018). Targeted advice from international students in Heng’s (2018) study revealed the need for international students to prepare themselves linguistically and culturally prior to arriving on campus. Furthermore, suggestions called for students to improve their reading skills and familiarize themselves with contemporary digital and non-digital media as ways to adjust academically and socially. How international students from different countries adjust or adapt to American culture will impact their educational success, and the challenges that stand in their way can be learned from personal or shared experiences. Connecting with peers not only with similar international roots, but with similarities in ethnic, racial, or cultural background, can help students to find their place and flourish (Gomez et al., 2014; Lee & Rice, 2008; Yao et al, 2019).

Peer-to-Peer Support Programs

Peer-to-peer support for students has been a cornerstone of campus programming at American HEIs. Research has established that students learn best from each other and peer-to-peer academic and social support contributes to both learner and institutional success (Latino & Unite, 2012). Peer-to-peer interactions have led to varying types of support and advice, namely academic, social, mental, and more. While the nature of campus supported peer-to-peer programs have targeted the student population in general, peer-to-peer interactions among international students have received attention from scholars such as Briggs & Ammigan (2017). The scholars have advocated for campus supported programming that brings international students together through initiatives like coffee hours, shopping trips, and other social engagement events. Yet, attempts to gather advice by current international students to incoming international students, formally or informally, are scant.

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses a theoretical interpretive lens to explore the subjective experiences of international students who are enrolled at a mid-sized public research university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. It also aims to share analysis on informal peer-to-peer advice by international students, based on their cross-cultural adjustment experiences, to better support the adjustment and adaptation of incoming or future international students, and to inform campus programming on international student services. The following research question guided our study: Based on student experiences as expressed in their essays, what examples of informal peer-to-peer interactions can help create advice to incoming international students to help them adapt to university life in the United States?

We use Oberg’s (1960) seminal work on *culture shock* theory as the guiding framework for data analysis because of its continued relevance in the field. Culture shock has been more recently defined as ‘the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment’ (Pedersen, 1995, p. 1). In his seminal work on *culture shock*, Oberg (1960) identified four stages of cross-cultural adjustment by sojourners, or short-term visitors, to new cultures. Over the years, the sojourner definition has been adopted to describe temporary residents in a culture such as international students (Arthur, 2004).

In Oberg’s model of *culture shock*, sojourners first undergo the *Honeymoon* stage which lasts for approximately 6 months. During this stage sojourners are fascinated and elated with the new culture. During the second stage (*Irritation*), sojourners become hostile to the new culture, and they display emotionally stereotyped attitudes towards the host culture and identify with fellow sojourners. During the third *Adjustment* stage, sojourners increase their knowledge of language and their ability to get around in the new culture in preparation for the last stage. During stage four, sojourners enjoy a state of *adaptation*. During this stage, sojourner anxiety and social discomfort dissipates and customs from the new culture are accepted and enjoyed.

As a foundational basis in cross-cultural studies, Oberg’s model was extended by Adler’s (1975) *transitional experiences* concept to include more stages of cross-cultural adjustment. Oberg’s model approaches culture shock from the

paradigm of symptoms, cause, and cure, and has been used extensively including when examining cross-cultural adjustment of international students (Zhou et al., 2008) and studying identity formation by international students (Kim, 2012). Relevant extensions of Oberg's *culture shock* phenomena include the 'cultural learning' theoretical approach. *Cultural learning* is a theory embedded within cross-cultural adaptation that describes the process and challenges that sojourners may face in novel cultural environments as they navigate daily life (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). It focuses on the behavioral adaptation and understanding that is needed for an international student (in this study's case) to function well in a new cultural environment (Ward et al, 2001). This may often include both verbal and non-verbal communications, and cultural nuances that are not apparent even to students who may be familiar with the host culture through technology and globalization (Pacheco, 2020). Although these theoretical extensions and modifications provide additional context, we chose to use Oberg's original theory to connect to the large contingent of the field that continues to utilize his original theory.

Methodology

This study is part of a broader research project that examined international student experiences on a U.S. campus. Using a qualitative research design, namely document analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Krippendorff, 2013), we collected data from 430 reflection essays written by international students between 2013 and 2021. Using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, we analyzed content from the essays and coded the raw data using both Nvivo 12 Qualitative Software and non-software coding (Creswell, 2013). The first round of coding using Nvivo 12 Qualitative Software was focused on axial coding while the non-software coding process used lean coding. This dual approach helped add depth to our analysis. We approached our codes inductively, allowing them to reflect the data set, and we reorganized our codes under themes following discussions. This allowed for cross-verification triangulation and validation to ensure trustworthiness of our findings. Our joint codes yielded five themes: (1) American Culture is Often Different than Expected; (2) Practical Challenges of Social Adjustment; (3) Navigating Academic and Classroom Differences; (4) Resiliency is Vital; and (5) Developing a Sense of Belonging.

Data Collection

In 2013, the International Student Services office at the university site launched a reflection essay contest to gather information about international student experiences on campus. During the fall semester since 2013, all registered international students were invited via email to share an essay about their cross-cultural experiences on campus, including any advice they might offer to incoming international students adapting to their new environment. Between 2013 and 2021, 430 reflection essays were submitted, with most essays collected in 2014 ($n=91$) and the least in 2020 ($n=28$). The contest did not run in 2019 due to an adjustment made to the site's programming calendar.

Participants

The average age of the participants in this study was 25 years, with 50.2% between 21 to 26 years old. About 57% were female and 43% were male. The two most common nationalities were Chinese (24.7%) or Indian (17%). In terms of their level of study, 65.8% were graduate students, 24% were undergraduates, and 10.2% were enrolled in an English Language Training program. Top programs of study were represented by Arts & Sciences (41.2%), Engineering (24.7%), and Business & Economics (18.6%). Participants consented to their essays being used for research and publication purposes. Their participation was voluntary and was not part of their academic program. Their identifying information was removed prior to analysis, and this project was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Results

We report our findings under five themes within Oberg's (1960) four stages of *culture shock* theory.

American Culture is Often Different than Expected

During Oberg's first stage of adaptation, the Honeymoon stage, sojourners are often elated with the new culture. International students often arrive in the U.S. with a perceived sense of familiarity. This familiarity with American culture is usually based on knowledge gathered from movies and television shows. Peer advice dismantles this myth as demonstrated by one student: "Although you have watched many Hollywood movies...take out time to appreciate the fact that new places come with new challenges" (Participant-14, Nigeria). Another shared:

Given what I had seen in high school dramas or other TV shows I was anticipating some rude, impatient brats from whom somebody was definitely going to throw something at me within the first ten minutes of the class. Nothing of that sort happened (Participant-383, India).

With diverse expectations in mind, one student's advice summarizes how to navigate the new cultural landscape: "The best path to get beyond living abroad is not to be afraid of learning the language, overcoming prejudices, and finding out the advantages hidden at first sight" (Participant-37, Colombia), while another student warned: "Americans are very expressive and conversational people, you better be ready to talk and hold an engaging discussion when you meet an American" (Participant-104, United Kingdom).

Connecting with Others

Excited about being in a new country, students often forget that connecting with locals requires new communication styles. Learning to connect with Americans can be a new process and international peers advise that Americans interact differently than people from their home countries. For example, a French student noted that small talk had to be interpreted within the American context:

Social interactions in the United States are different from what we are used to. The culture of 'small talk' is a real thing here..., I was amazed at how friendly people were. And they are... Most Americans engage in a conversation with me and ask questions, they most likely do not truly care for an answer. This feeling of "friendly welcomeness" from Americans I used to perceive is mostly meaningless greetings" (Participant-411, France).

A female student from Cameroon felt that American students were welcoming and helpful. Two American students reached out to her when she first arrived.

One day they took me out to eat and to do some shopping. They helped me to figure out the administrative and practical matters... I was so moved by their acts of generosity towards me... having those two friends in my residence was truly a blessing (Participant-427, Cameroon).

Students appreciated the opportunity to engage not only with American students but also with other international students to learn about their cultures and connect through shared transition experiences.

I've not only made American friends, but friends from Malaysia, India, China, South Korea, Tunisia, and Germany and the cross-cultural experiences and knowledge gained have been invaluable. These are friendships I'll treasure for the rest of my life (Participant-365, United Kingdom).

During Oberg's second stage (Irritation), sojourners tend to become hostile to the new culture displaying emotionally stereotyped attitudes towards the host culture and identifying with fellow sojourners. Observations by a Canadian student reveal that nationality and conforming to American expectations matters:

America boasts itself as a melting pot of cultures, and there is understandably an expectation for immigrants to respect and conform to the American way of life. However, I have noticed a discrepancy between how my Canadian friends and I are treated and how my friends from the “more international” countries are treated (Participant-341, Canada).

And another stated: “I am convinced that the strongest borders exist in our mind, which sometimes, unfortunately, prevents us from fully experiencing other cultures and customs” (Participant-037, Colombia).

Practical Challenges of Social Adjustment

During Oberg’s Adjustment stage, sojourners increase their knowledge of language and their ability to get around in the new culture in preparation for the last stage and peer advice from participants went beyond language. A participant from this study expressed:

The difference when being abroad is that small problems suddenly become really big issues. So then comes the list of questions: what do I do? Who do I ask? Where do I belong? What am I doing here? Why has this small thing turned out to be such a big thing? Why can’t I solve this problem in the same way I usually do? (Participant-20, Spain).

To overcome frustrations that arise when adjusting to the “new challenges,” one international student advised breaking down the adjustment process into three distinct spheres: “adjusting to the new culture; dealing with being away from home; and getting used to the academic life, especially if English is not your first language” (Participant-86, Colombia). Numerous students mentioned recurring areas of social adjustment, as summarized here: “climate... food, timeliness, transportation, and making friends” (Participant-40, Saudi Arabia). These are typically the first layers of adjustment for students and may permeate their daily existence.

Climate

Adjusting to differences in climate between their home country and the U.S. was an important aspect of adjustment. Students stated that: “confusion starts within the first 24 hours of landing at JFK [international airport], when you wake up and it’s supposed to be 9 am and sunny, but it’s actually 3 am and snowing” (Participant-181, South Africa). America has four distinct and well pronounced seasons in most parts of the country and one student stated, “I experienced all four seasons for the first time and enjoyed it” (Participant-146, India).

One student described their shock at “the thick of a severe winter marked by not so friendly but frequent blizzards” (Participant-140, India). For another student: “[...], my regrets flourished the moment I [experienced] gray sky, smothering heat” (Participant-157, Spain). A student shared differences from her hometown: “Chengdu is famous for its cloudy and wet climate all year round. When I arrived ... it [was] the end of July. I enjoyed the bright and beautiful sunshine and also suffered from freezing cold air condition” (Participant-137, China). Yet, describing fall leaves, another student “felt like in mystical land standing between the spectrum of colors in those trees dotted streets. I was enchanted by the blossoming picturesque that covered the boulevards” (Participant-266, Kenya). No matter where students came from, weather was a common adjustment challenge.

Food

For many international students, adapting to American food was a challenge. They offered advice on grocery shopping, ordering food at restaurants, and on differences in culinary habits. Going grocery shopping in America for the first time, for instance, can be a learning experience due to confusion over ingredients in food and the inability to recognize products that are on the shelf. One student shared that:

I could not identify any of the products in the store and had no idea what to eat, which was real

frustrating... I had also treated myself to some chocolate, since you can never go wrong with chocolate, or so I thought. However, I could not finish eating it: this was the moment I became aware of the first thing I would miss about Belgium (Participant-85, Belgium).

For those who came from spicy food cultures such as India and Nigeria, they shared: “we add a lot of spices to pizza” (Participant-179, India); “most Nigerian food is spicy” (Participant-104, Nigeria); and “initially everything tasted bland” (Participant-74, Bangladesh). For others, being “a vegetarian became a major issue” (Participant-76, India) because “sometimes really unusual ingredients are mixed inside the meal: salad with lettuce, apples, strawberries and bacon. But most importantly, access to food from a student’s culture could be far away as one student experienced: “the closest Bosnian restaurant to [campus] [...] was in NYC” (Participant-91, Bosnia and Herzegovina). Practical advice called for learning to cook your own dishes before leaving home. “Learn how to cook...I was considered as a man who never touched the cooking set back home (Participant-73, Indonesia) and during this process some students “became top chefs” (Participant-100, China).

The other area of advice was to learn about ordering food at restaurants and one student advised “when eating out, be aware of the size of the portions. They are big!” (Participant-86, Colombia). And another reminded incoming students of the variety of choices available at restaurants: “The lady behind the counter asked me five questions regarding my order after I selected it. I was flabbergasted. I didn’t know there were so many ways to make a cappuccino!” (Participant-81, India)

Transportation

For many students, traveling in the U.S. was very different from their experiences back home, mainly due to a lack of public transit in U.S. cities. Most students had to figure out how to get to campus from their port of entry, and one stated: “in the U.S., everyone has a car, so no wonder public transportation is complicated” (Participant-115, China). For one student who did own a car, the responsibilities posed problems “when we opened the window of the room... the car had gone missing! ...The car had been towed... The office had forgotten to give us the ‘Parking Permit’” (Participant-2, Brazil) Another student pointed out differences in other modes of transportation:

Not only the traffic, even the brakes in the bicycles in the US are reversed with rear brakes on the right and the front brakes on the left. While these reversals, initially confusing especially during turns, helped me to develop some ambidextrous skills with time. (Participant-67, India).

Relatedly, another student shared: “In Indonesia, the traffic drives on the left as well as where people walk. So, it is different here” (Participant-73, Indonesia).

Navigating Academic and Classroom Differences

Numerous students pinpointed differences in teaching and learning styles and offered advice on navigating the academic environment. Many students referenced anxiety with respect to language offering advice:

When I started my master’s degree..., I was still having difficulty in understanding course contents in terms of language. I would spend longer time reading through papers and put more effort on focusing on the lectures. It was due to my lack of knowledge in some professional words, so I utilized many online resources such as YouTube and Wikipedia to enrich my knowledge and increase my understanding (Participant-381, China).

While differences in the academic environment exist and academic expectations vary, on the whole, most students enjoyed the journey of transitioning to study in the U.S. In the words of one student: “I feel intellectually enriched from exposure to different ways of thinking, by way of class participation and group discussions, which are integral components

of graduate business education” (Participant-13, India). One student was aware of the differences in their home academic system and the U.S.:

Lots of Chinese students, even for those who’ve kept particularly high scores in primary schools and secondary schools in China, would come across great challenges when studying in USA because of the different cultivation styles from Chinese education system and American education system—each system has its different perspective on defining what is a brilliant student (Participant-68, China).

One student shared salient advice based on lived academic experiences:

Good time management allows adequate time for preparing the assignments and tests. Look ahead to know the due date of the homework because there is a time difference between my country and the United States. Self-discipline is significant. A backup plan is needed. Feel free to ask the professors, teaching assistants, and mentors for help. Make more frequent communication with the teammates than before to understand others (Participant-368, China)

Resiliency is Vital

Another pervasive theme throughout the essays was the need for resiliency to overcome sociocultural and psychological challenges. As such, incoming students were advised that: “The bottom line is that having confidence in yourself and being unafraid of making mistakes will help you because you can learn a lot from them” (Participant-200, China).

It took resilience to manage homesickness, which is pervasive and undeniable among international students. One student stated:

I had a whole new culture, a different language, and living alone to get used to. To be honest, it was a lot to cope with. It got rough at times, but I stayed positive, never gave in. I made it through the transition... I miss home... I miss my old life. I am really proud of myself... It took courage and perseverance... I stuck with what I wanted, where I could have chosen the relatively risk free and easier option of staying home (Participant-379, Turkey).

It is challenging to study in a foreign culture, especially as political leaders engage in racially charged rhetoric. The overarching recommendation was for students to recognize American citizens for who they are and to stay positive:

Do not lose hope during these challenging times. Because behind the veil of polarizing political messages and the aggressive voices of a select loud few, lies a landscape full of adventure, home to a majority of people that are kind, welcoming and loving. All you must do is reach out - either in person or virtually, as it is the people and the qualities they exhibit and express that make this country the land of the free (Participant-354, Australia).

As students experienced life during the pandemic, one student stated:

COVID-19 pandemic broke out. I had had only one in-person semester, and I was disappointed. At times, I only saw all the negative developments brought on by the emergent disadvantageous situation. It was challenging for weeks, maybe months, I cannot say otherwise... There was fear, uncertainty, the lockdown happened, but everyone around was busy learning how to keep themselves and others safe. We were all learning and sharing and having conversations on what is going to happen. A few weeks into the lockdown, we were forming support groups and devising ways in which we can connect (Participant-357, Egypt).

Others reminded that:

Being an international student is a wonderful opportunity to explore the world, to widen your horizons and to break stereotypes. Each day you find something new. Yes, there are some moments when you have to be flexible and adjust, but isn't this ability a sign of a mature person? (Participant-104, United Kingdom).

Developing a Sense of Belonging

In stage four of Oberg's *culture shock* theory, sojourners enjoy a state of *adaptation*. During this stage, sojourner anxiety and social discomfort dissipates and customs from the new culture are accepted and enjoyed. Participants revealed that after an initial period of feeling lost, they found their footing in a new place:

Fast forward, and I was celebrating the fact I made it past a week on campus. After getting lost looking for my classes, having no one to talk to, trying to figure out the... bus shuttle app, and the struggle of navigating canvas, it was most certainly a challenging week (Participant-380, Nigeria).

Students advised to find or create a place where you belong, and one student summarized what many shared on cultivating a sense of belonging: "You go out and make friends, join clubs, participate on campus. You will fail and you will learn, and you will find your way" (Participant-359, India). Another stated: "Joining some notable groups in the university like the Catholic Community was really helpful. It aided my transition into the custom and tradition of the community" (Participant-14, Nigeria).

Lastly, most students echoed the following sentiments stated here by one:

No matter how hard it can be at the beginning, hang in there! Because it definitely gets better. You will have your degree, will make friends for life, have a town to remember, and you will be part of the great family. Just try to enjoy this experience as much as you can because time flies by, and after all... we are living the dream!" (Participant-86, Colombia).

One participant described the importance of agency and positivity in her own happiness, and stated:

Being an international student has never been easy. However, I learned that things could change depending on how you act or feel toward it. Being positive, and motivated, led to so many accomplishments. I have joined many different student organizations. I have also been working as an International Ambassador under the Admissions office (Participant-124, China).

Placing the international student experience in the larger context one student shared:

I hope that more and more people will be able to have an international experience like mine, because I strongly believe that if we want to work for a better world, it is crucial to develop empathy and understanding among different cultures and nations (Participant-18, China).

Discussion

Our findings highlight the cross-cultural adjustment experiences faced by international students as they transitioned into the U.S. and based on these experiences, students offer advice to support the transition and adaptation of incoming international students to their HEI environment. The student narratives aligned well with Oberg's culture shock theory (1960), beginning with an initial sense of fascination and elation when they arrived in the U.S., known as the *honeymoon stage*. Also, based on exposure to Hollywood movies prior to arrival, many felt familiar with American culture and even

anticipated experiencing some behaviors by Americans as seen in movies. Hence, they advise incoming students to be cognizant of the misconceptions that accompany such a mindset. As students experienced American culture in real time they gravitated towards Oberg's second stage of culture shock, the *Irritation* stage, especially as they sought deeper connections. During this stage, they identified painful cultural differences and looked at American culture critically. International students identified with each other through their common experiences and advice gleaned from these revolves around the fact that this is part of the transition and adjustment process and that incoming students must make the extra effort to connect with the local culture.

Additionally, and in line with Oberg's third stage of cultural adjustment, the expectations of students in this study were related to climate, food, transportation, the ability to make friends with locals, and academic environment and expectations. Most reported learning new ways and having to adapt their behaviors. New ways of doing things ranged from grocery shopping, to ordering food at restaurants, and adapting to limited availability to public transportation. As such they advise making the effort to adjust to the new environment. They felt lost, found their way, made friends, joined clubs, and reminded themselves that they were on a mission to make their family and friends proud of them. They wanted to belong to their new environment and made extra efforts. During the fourth stage of adaptation, they displayed resiliency and pushed themselves to be able to navigate their new culture and advise incoming students to do the same.

This study provides support for the four stages of Oberg's culture shock, but also calls on new models and ways of understanding international students' transitions. Culture shock was originally envisioned as a clinical illness, but recent scholars and literature have advocated for a shift away from deficit thinking and toward a cultural learning approach (Furnham, 2019; Pacheco, 2020). With respect to psychological adaptations, international students displayed symptoms of homesickness and frustration based on unfamiliarity with the host culture. In 2015, Goldstein and Keller found that students attribute culture shock to external, environmental factors (language, culture) as opposed to internal factors (identity, psychological stress), which connects to the behavioral aspect of the cultural learning framework. Typically, most international students make an intentional choice to study abroad and often have the 'self-determined motivation' to succeed in the host culture, which has been shown to minimize the negative experiences of transitions to new cultural environments (Yang et al., 2018). In this study, we found that students had the determination and resiliency to overcome their psychological challenges, including during the pandemic. Although cultural nuances of American culture were not always apparent and psychological stressors did not receive professional attention, most students adapted psychologically. The onus to overcome culture shock rested on the students and as they socialized with their international peers, they found support in their shared experiences prompting them to want to advise others.

Recent reviews and analyses have prompted scholars to rethink the process of culture shock and called for the inclusion of technology and internationalization efforts as relevant factors that aid international students in their adjustment process (Pacheco, 2020). Indeed, as the current study shows, students began their academic journey unaware of the host environment, much less unfamiliar with the U.S. or its overall culture. What may often be surprising to students is the 'hidden curriculum' that is part of the cultural learning process (Furnham, 2019; Ward et al., 2001). In this study, we found that these challenges were ameliorated through social interactions, institutional support, and through knowing that their peers had endured the same experiences, feelings, or symptoms (Heng, 2018; Tozini & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2022).

Implications and Conclusion

Our findings lead to several practical recommendations for incoming international students on how to better prepare for life in the U.S. Relying on the informal peer advice obtained, we outline a number of implications for international students and for campus units that provide services to international students. Based on their lived experiences, participants in this study share the following advice:

Become Familiar with the Potential Cultural Differences Before Arriving in the U.S.

Consistent with findings from Heng (2018), students stressed the importance of being prepared for what to expect culturally and linguistically in the U.S. They urged incoming students to read more and ask questions about how to navigate the new academic, personal, social, and cultural landscape rather than rely on media outlets for information.

Adjust to Differences in Food, Local Climate, and Transportation

Students' advice around areas of social adjustments included learning about how to cook and how to order in restaurants, prepare for different seasons, and better understand how transportation works.

Consider Meeting New People and Making Friends

Aligned with established literature as well as anecdotal beliefs, students underscored the importance of connecting and building relationships with Americans as a way to understanding local norms, traditions, and values (Ammigan & Jones, 2018; Arkoudis et al., 2013). Incoming students are encouraged to move out of their comfort zone to initiate new friendships, engage in discussions with Americans, practice the language with confidence, and develop empathy throughout the process.

Expect to Navigate a Different Academic Environment and System of Education

Participants discussed the possible differences in teaching styles, grading structure, and class expectations, and the impact on student success. They suggested working with university support units, especially during the first year, for help with navigating deadlines, managing learning expectations, and accessing resources such as tutoring services and language acquisition support.

Be Prepared to Cope with Homesickness and Seek Help if Needed

Salient advice also pertained to staying positive and courageous in difficult situations, remaining flexible and challenging stereotypes, maintaining a balanced personal life in addition to academic demands, and staying connected with loved ones from home despite being far away were some of the first-hand advice shared. More importantly, they urged new students not to hesitate to seek support from friends, their international office or academic department.

Believe in Yourself and Challenge Your Comfort Zone

Participants advised others to have confidence in themselves, remain positive, and not to be afraid of making mistakes, despite difficult times and unexpected challenges. They suggested for new students to learn from others and to listen to their stories, ideas, and feedback.

Engage with the Campus Community to Develop a Sense of Belonging

International students advised on the importance of being engaged and involved with the rest of the campus to increase their university life experience and ensure their wellbeing and success. Examples include joining student organizations and leadership groups, participating in volunteer and service-learning initiatives, attending social events and mixers, and going out for long walks with friends.

Conclusion

Based on the informal advice obtained from students, we offer a few recommendations for international student services officials to facilitate students' cross-cultural adjustment to campus, both inside and outside the classroom:

- Implement in-person and virtual peer-to-peer mentorship and student leadership and development programs that generate student-driven feedback, support, and recommendations for incoming, new, and continuing international students to help with their transition to a new academic and social life.

- Increase diversity, equity, and inclusion programming as well as campus safety and security efforts to address and support the emotional wellbeing of students and build an inclusive climate on campus.
- Develop a crisis management and emergency response plan that includes culturally informed counseling services, student wellness resources, and funding to support students experiencing health and wellness, academic, personal, and financial difficulties.
- Implement culturally sensitive training for faculty, staff, and students to promote awareness, encourage the sharing and learning of cultures, and facilitate communication, teaching, learning, and working across cultures.
- Encourage faculty and academic staff to develop course curricula that include intercultural and global perspectives, nurture student-faculty interaction, class participation and involvement, and teamwork across cultures.
- Provide transportation services to students during their initial days in the country and on campus, including airport pick up, trips to the shopping mall and grocery stores, and organized tours to local landmarks and entertainment events.
- Ensure ongoing assessment that measures the needs, challenges, and experiences of students, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to enhance support services and inform initiatives that help maintain a welcoming and internationally friendly campus.

Formal and informal peer-to-peer advice is key to student support, development and success in higher education. For international students who often face challenges adapting to their new university environment due to social, cultural, and language barriers, direct and authentic guidance from existing students can be vital in helping them acclimate and cope with their transition to campus.

By outlining recurring themes in student experiences, we identified and reported on areas of challenges to international student sociocultural adjustment and relied on student input to advise and support the adjustment process for future U.S. bound international students. Using data from one institution in the U.S., this study is limited in its breadth, yet it offers insights which are applicable to institutions that serve international students locally and overseas. As a qualitative inquiry, it is not generalizable nor did it set out to develop a replicable experiment. Nonetheless, by utilizing lived experiences of international students, the study gives voice to hundreds of international students and contributes to salient analysis of their experiences. Future studies may compare lived experiences of international students between institutions and regions within the U.S. and analyze student feedback by nation states to further understand and support international students. Addressing the issue of time, i.e., how student experiences differ from year to year, would be another angle future research could take.

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An Exploratory Survey of Post-Graduation Employment Location Preferences Among International Students in Missouri, USA

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Abstract

This study examined the post-graduation employment location preferences of international students preparing to participate in the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program in the United States. An exploratory survey asked international students in their final semesters at three midwestern public universities to indicate their employment location preferences via an online text- and map-based questionnaire. Two main questions guided the research: 1) Do international students hold employment location preferences before graduation? and 2) Where in the United States do international students applying for OPT prefer to work? Results indicated the affirmative and that preference geographies extend well beyond the state in which the students earned their degrees. In applying for OPT, participants in this study signaled their intent to remain in-country. As such, the scale of analysis shifts from traditional country-to-country migration flows of international students to the internal movements within the host country in anticipation of post-graduation employment.

Keywords: Curricular Practical Training (CPT), internal migration, international students, Optional Practical Training (OPT), post-graduation employment

Introduction

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, amidst global economic disruption and geopolitical uncertainty, rising tuition and living costs, students from around the world are assessing their options for international study. They are having to make hard choices as they try to optimize their study experiences and time abroad (Sato et al., 2022). For many international students, education destination choices can influence long-term career trajectories and lifetime mobility aspirations (Findlay et al., 2017). Yet substantial gaps remain in our understanding of the full international student experience, including where students go after they graduate. Much of the literature on the topic has heretofore focused on

the early and middle stages of the international student experience, such as the journey between home and country of study, the new-student transition process, and other cultural and academic experiences during students' academic careers. But, as Popadiuk and Arthur (2014) have argued, "Less attention has been paid to the stage of cross-cultural transition when students are completing their international learning experiences and preparing for post-graduation plans" (p. 123).

Central to this later stage of the international student experience is post-graduation mobility, which in the case of this paper includes the motivations, plans, and preferences of international students following the completion of their degree programs. The question of what happens to international students after graduation is of increasing importance, not only for students and their careers but also for host countries and their economies. Retaining high-skilled international students is becoming a national priority for many countries. Several recent studies have considered this issue, although the scales of analysis have largely focused on international, country-to-country moves and have been limited to the decision binary of whether to "stay or go" (Mulvey, 2022; see also Geddie, 2012; Han et al., 2015; Istad et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2019; Lee, 2022; Netierman et al., 2022; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Less has been written about the internal, or intra-national, mobility of international students—that is, where they move and why within the host country. Traditionally, domestic students have been associated with internal or within-country moves (for example, Fiore et al., 2015), while international students have been associated with international or country-to-country migration (Prazeres, 2013; Findlay et al., 2018). This paper expands the idea of internal migration and mobility to include international students, as well.

Literature Review

Hazen and Alberts (2006) report that international students studying in the United States don't necessarily arrive at school with the intention to remain in-country but instead "a wide variety of professional, societal and personal factors influence students in an ongoing decision-making process" (p. 201). Such factors include potential employment prospects back home (Agbonlahor & Ampaw, 2021); whether the social climate of the host country is amenable to staying (Musumba et al., 2011); and/or family obligations or other personal factors (Alberts & Hazen, 2005). Opportunities for post-graduation employment in the host country also play an increasingly influential role in students' mobility decisions (Farrugia, 2016; Gesing & Glass, 2019).

But intending to stay is one thing; having the legal authorization to do so is another. In general, international students are required to leave the host country at the completion of their studies. For students who do wish to remain, obtaining post-graduation employment authorization is one of the few legal options available to them (Grimm, 2019). In the United States, student post-graduation work authorization is obtained through the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program. The OPT program has grown in popularity in the United States, with over 223,000 students participating just before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Open Doors, 2020). Students on regular post-completion OPT can work anywhere in the US for up to 12 months after graduation regardless of degree field, while graduates with certain STEM degrees are eligible to apply for an additional 24 months of OPT work authorization, which is known as the OPT STEM Extension.

The geography of OPT employment has been unevenly distributed across the United States. Ruiz and Budiman (2018) have demonstrated how concentrated OPT employment has been within US metro areas and how certain metros have produced more OPT workers and retained them to a greater degree than other places. Work by Beine and colleagues (2022) looked at the transition rates of international students on OPT into the U.S. labor market and found that "most foreign graduates who remain in the US transition to a first job in the same state where they got their degree" (p. 6). Both Ruiz and Budiman (2018) and Beine and colleagues (2022) analyzed national OPT data. Kaemmerer and Foulkes (2022), on the other hand, mapped the OPT employment locations of international students from the state of Missouri specifically and found that most OPT employment took place out-of-state and in larger metro areas, while in-state OPT was largely located in and around the Missouri areas where students graduated. As a result, "most of Missouri's OPT graduates were more likely to cross the country to work than to cross the state" (Kaemmerer and Foulkes, 2022, p. 407).

This paper seeks to add to the literature by first expanding the idea of internal migration to include international student post-graduation mobility within the host country. It also addresses the research gap between international students'

initial decisions to stay in the host country following graduation and the subsequent geographic decisions they make about where to move (or not move) within the host country to find post-graduation employment. Of particular interest are the implications that such internal migration decisions hold for regional, state, and local economic and workforce development policies in the United States.

Two main questions guided the research: 1) Do international students hold particular employment location preferences before graduation? and 2) Where in the United States do international students applying for OPT prefer to work? In the following sections, we describe the development and dissemination of an exploratory three-school international student survey, followed by a detailed report of the survey results. We end the paper with a discussion of the findings and concluding thoughts.

Methodology

An online survey was developed to measure the post-graduation employment location preferences of international students applying to the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program. The intent was to capture migration preferences while students were still in school but before they started working. Survey participants included international students in their final semester at three public universities in the state of Missouri who were in the process of applying for OPT in Spring 2019. This paper refrains from using the names of the three participating universities and instead refers to them using the following descriptors: Flagship State University (FSU), Regional Comprehensive State University (RCSU), and Midsized Metropolitan State University (MMSU).

The survey was developed using the Qualtrics survey platform and consisted of fifteen questions with either multiple-choice, selectable drop-down lists, or point-and-click/touchable question types. The questions covered student biographical information, such as graduating institution, country of citizenship, degree level, and field of study. Other questions asked about previous experiences with OPT and CPT (Curricular Practical Training), as well as job search methods and a Likert scale measuring students' confidence in finding a job. The final group of three questions asked about destination preferences and incorporated one text-based question followed by two map-based questions at the national and state levels. Survey length, question type, and the platform-agnostic digital nature of the survey were meant to facilitate participation, encourage completion, and accommodate any users whose first language was not English.

Following institutional review board approval, the survey was sent via email first to participating schools in February 2019, as international students who planned to graduate in May 2019 would become eligible to apply for OPT 90 days before their program end date and up to 60 days after their program end date. A hyperlink to the survey was then distributed in coordination with each school's international office with the instruction that the hyperlink be sent only to those students who were formally applying for OPT and who had been issued an updated Form I-20 with an OPT recommendation for a May 2019 graduation. The international offices were free to distribute the hyperlink in whatever manner they chose.

Participants

A total of 68 students answered at least one survey question (Table 1). Respondents were not required to answer each question. Fifty-four respondents (80%) were completing their master's degree at the time of taking the survey, ten students (15%) were completing their Ph.D., and four (6%) were completing their bachelor's degree. Eight countries were represented in the survey. Most respondents (84%) were from India and China, with 39 respondents from India alone (~57%). The most represented field of study among respondents was Computer Science (36 counts; 53%), followed by Engineering (11; 16%). Other represented fields included "Business/Management" (4), "Social Science" (4), and "Communications/Journalism" (3). In total, there were eleven different fields of study, including three respondents who identified their field as "other."

Students from FSU made up about 44% of the total with 30 respondents; RCSU's 28 respondents made up 41%; and the 10 respondents from MMSU comprised the remaining 15%. We obtained the final Spring 2019 OPT application numbers from two of the three participating schools (FSU and RCSU). Together the two schools processed 188 OPT

applicants in Spring 2019, of whom 58 participated in this survey, producing a response rate of about 31%. But, unless otherwise noted, the results presented in this paper include responses from all three schools.

Table 1
Biographical information of respondents (N=68)

	Characteristics	Count	Percent
University	Flagship State University (FSU)	30	44%
	Regional Comprehensive State Univ. (RCSU)	28	41%
	Midsized Metropolitan State Univ. (MMSU)	10	15%
Degree Level	Bachelors	4	5%
	Masters	54	79%
	Doctorate	10	15%
Country of Citizenship	India	39	57%
	China	18	26%
	Brazil	4	6%
	Iran	2	3%
	Nepal	2	3%
	Nigeria	1	1%
	Russia	1	1%
	Bangladesh	1	1%
Field of Study	Computer Science	36	53%
	Engineering	11	16%
	Business Management	4	6%
	Social Sciences	4	6%
	Communication/Journalism	3	4%
	Other	3	4%
	Physical/Life Sciences	2	3%
	Health Professions	2	3%
	Mathematics	1	1%
	Agriculture	1	1%
	Education	1	1%

Note. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and each characteristic grouping may not add up to 100%.

Results

The Job Search

The initial group of survey questions focused on students' job search methods. In the first question, respondents had the opportunity to rate their level of confidence in getting a job offer on a Likert Scale of 1-5, with 1 signifying *not*

confident and 5 signifying *very confident*. Of the 47 responses, nearly half were *very confident* (22; 47%) that they would find employment. In fact, 33 of the respondents (about 70%) gave a confidence score of either 4 or 5. Eight respondents rated their confidence as 3 (17%), four respondents rated their confidence as 2, and only two rated themselves as 1, or fully *not confident*.

A second question asked students how they had looked for jobs (Table 2). Respondents were provided eight choices and could select all that applied. According to the results, most had used or intended to use a job posting website (56), such as Indeed or Glassdoor, and/or a company’s website directly (48). The third most selected job search method was a campus job fair (25), while 22 sought friends or family connections to look for a job. At the low end of the list, only three respondents made use of or intended to use their university’s international student office to find a job, and only one respondent had yet to start looking for a job at the time of the survey.

Table 2
Job search methods of respondents

TOTAL (n = 68)		CHINA ONLY (N = 18)		INDIA ONLY (N = 39)	
Job search method (choose all that apply)	Cnt Pct	Job Search Method (choose all that apply)	Cnt Pct	Job Search Method (choose all that apply)	Cnt Pct
Job posting website (indeed, glassdoor, etc.)	56 82%	Job posting website (indeed, glassdoor, etc.)	16 89%	Job posting website (indeed, glassdoor, etc.)	30 77%
Company website	48 71%	Company website	15 83%	Company website	24 62%
Campus job fair	25 37%	Campus job fair	8 44%	Campus job fair	11 28%
Friends or family connections	22 32%	Friends or family connections	7 39%	Friends or family connections	10 26%
Campus career center	18 26%	Campus career center	6 33%	I have already found a job	9 23%
I have already found a job	18 26%	I have already found a job	6 33%	Campus career center	8 21%
Academic department or professors	12 18%	Academic department or professors	5 28%	Academic department or professors	3 8%
Other	5 7%	University's international student office	0 0%	Other	3 8%
University's international student office	3 4%	I have not even started looking for a job	0 0%	University's international student office	2 5%
I have not even started looking for a job	1 1%	Other	0 0%	I have not even started looking for a job	1 3%

Note. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and may not add up to 100%. (Cnt = Count; Pct = Percent)

The job search question was meant to capture indications of network migration effects (Massey et al., 1993). The reasoning was that if network migration played a role in graduates’ location decisions, then it might reflect in how they searched for jobs. For some students, informal information networks like friends and family might play a larger role in the search process than would other search methods (Somerville & Walsworth, 2015). While 22 respondents selected “friends or family” as one of their methods for looking for a job, that number is still less than half of the number who chose a “company’s website” or “job posting site”. Moreover, regardless of how the results were filtered—e.g. by degree type,

school attended, or country of citizenship—“friends or family” still accounted for only half that of the top choice (“job posting website”). That is not to discount the prevalence and potential of friends and family in the job search process for international students on OPT; after all, at least 22 respondents consulted them. Even if friends and family figured less prominently compared to other methods, the survey itself did not ask students to rank their job search methods. Nor is it clear from the results the degree to which each of the options influenced the job search process. Therefore, whether and how much network migration vis-à-vis informal networks and word-of-mouth could play a role in employment location preferences for Missouri international students remains to be seen.

Practical Training

The second question group focused on students’ prior experiences with practical training, which includes not only Optional Practical Training (OPT), but also Curricular Practical Training (CPT). Unlike OPT, which is generally for work after a student graduates and for which students must apply for authorization from the federal government, CPT is for work during a student’s course of study and can be authorized “in-house” by a Designated School Official (DSO) at the student’s university. Regulations on CPT state that the work must be “relate[d] directly to the student’s major area of study and *be an integral part of the school’s established curriculum*” (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2019; emphasis in original). What exactly qualifies as legitimate CPT work experience is, for better or worse, open to interpretation, and policies can vary widely from school to school. CPT has traditionally been authorized for summer internships, field practica, and cooperative or service-learning opportunities, although there have been calls to update, clarify, and expand CPT regulations to better reflect how international students gain work experience in today’s knowledge economy (Berger et al., 2021).

According to the survey, three-quarters of respondents (52) had never applied for OPT before, while 16 had. For CPT, 47 respondents (69%) had not previously participated in the program, compared to 21 (31%) who had. In the survey, respondents who had indicated previous CPT participation then received a follow-up question: If they had worked for a company or organization for CPT, would they prefer to continue working for that company or organization on OPT? Not all of the 21 respondents who had prior CPT experience chose to answer, but of the 18 who did, 14 (78%) expressed a preference to continue working for their CPT company/organization later on OPT.

Location Preferences: Text-based

The final group of three survey questions centered on students’ post-graduation employment location preferences. The first, a text-based question, served as a control to the two map-based questions to see how the responses compared. Students were asked “if a good job is available” would they prefer to 1) “stay and work in the same area as my university,” 2) “stay and work somewhere in Missouri, but not in the same area as my university,” 3) “move and work in a different state,” or 4) no preference (i.e., “I don’t care where I go”). Of the 62 responses to this question, half (31; 50%) did not care where they went (i.e., choice #4). An additional 23 respondents (37%) preferred “to move and work in a different state.” Only eight respondents (13%) expressed a preference to remain and work in the same area as their university. None of the respondents indicated a preference for the third choice (“stay and work somewhere in Missouri, but not in the same area as my university”).

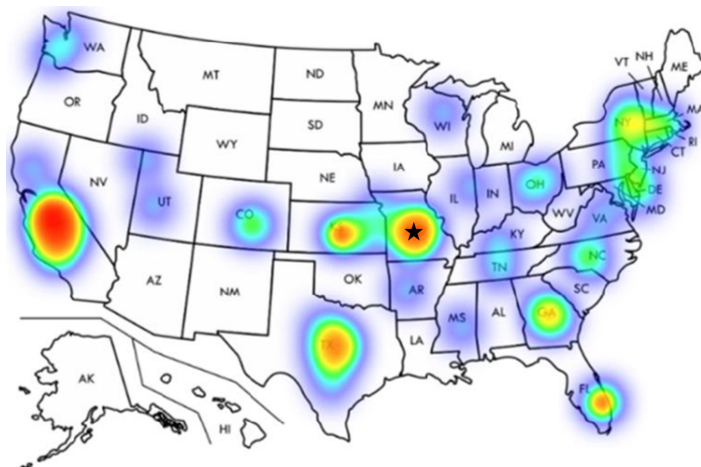
Location Preferences: Map-based (National)

The first of the map-based questions asked respondents “If you could find a job anywhere in the US, where would you prefer to go?” Respondents could then touch or click anywhere on the map to indicate their preferred locations. Due to the small state sizes and compactness of the northeast United States, some states were combined into one “region”. For example, Vermont and New Hampshire made up one region, while another region included pieces of Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware. The locked scale of the map image, as well as whether respondents used a finger or a mouse cursor and differences in screen and finger sizes, meant that precision in the Northeastern United States was challenging. Therefore, this paper groups those selections as generally within a “Northeast” region. In all, the US map was composed of 46 “regions.”

There were 55 total responses, and the resulting map suggests a wide distribution of location preferences (Figure 1). More than twenty states were selected at least once. Though the survey respondents were all international students from Missouri universities, only 6 respondents (11%) selected Missouri as their preferred post-graduation employment location. Because the Kansas City metro area encompasses land on either side of the Missouri-Kansas border, respondents who tried to click on that area could have their selections counted as either Kansas or Missouri. Therefore, where appropriate, this paper combines Missouri and Kansas selection counts. In the survey, 3 respondents chose Kansas as their preferred location. Were those 3 included with the Missouri numbers (6), the percentage of Missouri respondents who preferred to work in Missouri would be around 16%.

Figure 1

Preferred National Post-Graduation Employment Locations



Note. Shows the preferred national employment locations of Missouri international students applying for Optional Practical Training. N = 55. (The state of Missouri is indicated by a star.)

Filtering the survey data by the university attended revealed that respondents from all of the schools had a wide geographic distribution of location preferences. FSU had the highest number of respondents (28; 51%), selecting 17 different regions on the national map. The greatest number of FSU location selections were California (5), Missouri (3), and the Northeast (6). The 19 respondents (35%) from RCSU selected 12 different regions on the map, with California (3) and Missouri (3) tied for the most preferred locations. Finally, the 8 respondents (15%) from MMSU selected 5 different regions nationally, with the top spots being Texas (3) and California (2).

When filtered by country of citizenship, the distribution of the national map again changes. Respondents from eight different countries answered the national map question, with India (27) and China (17) together accounting for 80% of all respondents. The top locations preferred by respondents from China included California (4), Missouri/Kansas (3), and the Northeast (5). Indian respondents' top choices included California (6), Texas (4), and Missouri/Kansas (5).

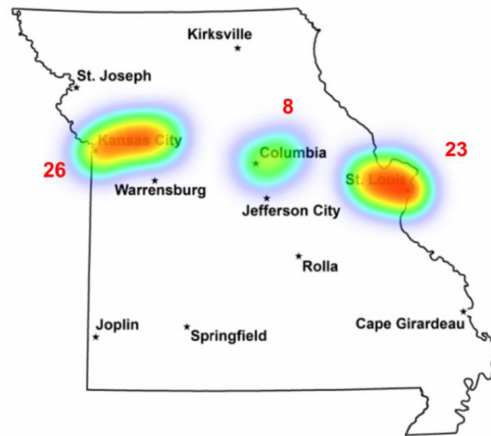
Finally, the location preferences can be further filtered by degree and education level. STEM-related degrees (e.g., Agriculture, Computer Science, Engineering, Health Professions, Mathematics, Physical/Life Sciences) accounted for nearly three-quarters of the total responses for the national map question. Of these STEM respondents, the top preferred locations included California (7), Missouri/Kansas (9), and Texas (5). Filtering by education level, 42 of the 55 respondents to the national map question were master's students. Their location preferences were diverse in terms of the variety of states represented (21). California (8), Texas (5), and Missouri/Kansas (8) together comprised half of all locations.

Location Preferences: Map-based (State)

The second map-based question asked students to indicate their location preferences within the state of Missouri (Figure 2). There were 57 total responses, and despite being free to select anywhere on the map respondents preferred only three locations across the entire state: Kansas City, Columbia, and St. Louis. All three locations are metropolitan areas in Missouri with populations of 100,000 or more. Twenty-six respondents (46%) chose Kansas City as their preferred location, followed by St. Louis with 23 (40%), and Columbia with 8 (14%).

Figure 2

Preferred In-State Post-Graduation Employment Locations



Note: Shows the preferred in-state employment locations of Missouri international students applying for Optional Practical Training. $N = 57$. (Numbers indicate selection totals for that location.)

The FSU campus is in central Missouri, while both RCSU and MMSU are located farther west, near Kansas City. Of the 28 graduates of FSU, half preferred to work in St. Louis, while the rest preferred Columbia (7) and Kansas City (6). The employment location preferences of RCSU graduates balanced both sides of the state, with 12 preferring Kansas City and 8 preferring St. Louis (and only 1 respondent preferring to work in Columbia). All 8 MMSU graduates chose Kansas City as their preferred work location. Students from China preferred the central and eastern parts of the state, with 4 preferring Columbia and 10 preferring St. Louis. Only 3 Chinese respondents chose Kansas City. However, most of the 27 respondents from India preferred Kansas City (18) to St. Louis (11) and Columbia (1).

Of the 45 respondents graduating with a master's degree, 25 (56%) preferred to work in Kansas City, with St. Louis and Columbia garnering 14 and 6 preference votes, respectively. Only 8 Ph.D. students participated in the Missouri map question, but three-quarters indicated that they would prefer to work in St. Louis, with the other two locations getting 1 vote each. Three of the 4 bachelor's degree respondents preferred St. Louis (and the 4th selected Columbia).

Practical Training: Text vs. Map Responses

"I don't care where I go."

Of the 31 respondents who indicated no preference on the text-based question, 9 had worked on CPT previously (whereas 21 total respondents had previously worked on CPT), and 8 out of 9 indicated they would prefer to continue working for the same company on OPT that they did previously on CPT. In other words, about 90% of those who didn't care where they worked but who previously worked on CPT *would* care to keep working for their previous employer, wherever that might have been located. This group was also very confident in finding a job, averaging about 4.14 on the 5-point Likert scale of job-search confidence, with 55% of respondents giving a maximum confidence score of 5. When asked on the national map where they would prefer to go, these same "I don't care" respondents did indicate a location—12

different locations to be exact (although, perhaps not surprisingly, 4 of them chose to skip this question). The top preferences were Missouri/Kansas (7), Texas (5), and California (5), with 4 respondents choosing to skip the question. On the Missouri map, 14 preferred Kansas City, 11 preferred St. Louis, and 4 preferred Columbia (with 1 skip).

“...I would prefer to move and work in a different state.”

Of the 23 respondents who preferred to move and work in a different state, 6 had previously worked on CPT, 4 of whom would have preferred to continue working for the same CPT company or organization on OPT. Interestingly, the location preferences for leavers on the national map were markedly different from the “I don’t care” group. They preferred 16 different locations, with the top ones being the Northeast (4), California (3), [Skipped] (3), and the state of Washington (2). On the Missouri map, their in-state location preferences were ranked St. Louis (11), Kansas City (5), [Skipped] (4), and Columbia (3).

“...I would prefer to stay and work in the same area as my university.”

Of the 8 respondents, only 3 had participated in CPT previously, 2 of whom would have preferred to keep working for the same company or organization on OPT. But while these 8 respondents indicated in the text-based question that they would prefer to stay and work in the same area as their (Missouri) university, none selected Missouri on the national map (although there was 1 vote for Kansas). Their preferences were instead spread widely across seven different states, with only California getting more than one vote (2). On the Missouri map, 6 preferred Kansas City, with St. Louis and Columbia attracting only 1 vote each. Notably, responses included students from all three schools.

Discussion

Survey results were generally in line with those of Kaemmerer and Foulkes (2022) who mapped the historical employment location distribution of Missouri OPT participants. Demographically, most of the survey respondents were master’s students in STEM fields (mostly Computer Science and Engineering) and predominantly from India but also from China. Within Missouri, survey respondents favored Missouri’s metro areas. Nationally, respondents’ top five destination preferences were California, Missouri/Kansas, Texas, Georgia, and the Northeast, which likewise mirror the historical Missouri OPT data (Kaemmerer & Foulkes, 2022). When asked in the text-based question where they would prefer to work, 87% of the survey respondents indicated they either preferred to leave Missouri or did not care where they went. On the one hand, these numbers could signify that 87% of respondents are poised to leave. Most do: the historical OPT data for Missouri showed that around 80% of the OPT locations of Missouri’s international student graduates in 2017 were out-of-state (Kaemmerer & Foulkes, 2022). On the other hand, those “I don’t care where I go” respondents could be grouped with the “prefer to stay and work in the same area as my university” respondents, in which case two-thirds could be encouraged to remain in Missouri under the right circumstances. But whichever way one groups the responses, most respondents indicated a loose connection to place.

This study took place just before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the pandemic has triggered significant changes to the nature of work. Remote work across many professions has risen in popularity and in some form or degree has become the new normal, adding a new layer of complexity to the geography of employment. Federal regulations stipulate that OPT employment must be related to a student’s major area of study and that, for the OPT STEM Extension especially, “an employer must have and maintain a bona fide employer-employee relationship with the student” (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service, 2022). However, the OPT regulations do not prohibit remote work. The regulations say little about the *geographic* relationship between OPT students and their employers other than requiring students to report their “physical” address (i.e., “the address where you live in the United States”), their mailing address (i.e., “the address where you get mail,” which could be different from the physical address), and their employer’s address (i.e., “the address where you work”) (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2022). The rise of remote work highlights the potential disconnect

between physical locations and employment locations. But it also offers geographic options for international students on OPT, not only in terms of where they work, but also where they choose to live in relation to their work.

It is important to note that preference is not so clear-cut. In reality, some places can be more welcoming than others (Lee & Rice, 2007), and certain barriers could impede international students' post-graduation mobility plans. The survey did not ask students *why* they preferred one place over another or where they would prefer *not* to work. Nor did it measure the *degree* to which students were attached to one place versus another. After all, a student's sense of place or feeling of community belonging can play a significant role in their location decisions (Glass, 2018).

International students who plan to work in the United States after graduation generally perceive themselves to be more employable (Niu et al., 2022). Exposing international students to work experiences earlier in their academic careers could help students build networks as well as confidence. The development of stronger local connections could, in turn, encourage and facilitate students to remain in their communities after graduation. Drawing from work by Sjoquist and Winters (2012) on domestic student populations, Harrington et al. (2016) point out that “[college] graduates often find a job in the same state where they attend college because they are more likely to develop strong social and professional contacts and networks” (p. 428). The results of this survey suggest that many of those who participated in CPT during their academic program would have preferred to continue working for their employer later on OPT. Considering that nearly 90% of respondents indicated that they had a loose connection to place, gaining work experience first with CPT might be one tool for influencing those who “don’t care where [they] go” to stay in their local communities to work on OPT—more so if the CPT employer was also local. In short, earlier and greater exposure to in-state employment (via CPT) could be a key to greater in-state post-graduation employment retention.

In addition to local communities, states, too, are interested stakeholders. Through their public institutions, states invest resources, time, and tax dollars in educating their future workforces. To have high-skilled international students then choose to work and/or move out of state upon graduation not only deprives communities of cultural richness and diversity but also productive human capital and other valuable economic contributions. States therefore have a vested interest in retaining their international student graduates to live and/or work locally, if only for a few years.

As an exploratory study of student respondents from only three midwestern schools, there is limited generalizability to the larger international student population in the United States. But despite its relatively small sample size, the survey showed value in capturing the location preferences of international students before they started OPT. Additional work is needed. More students from more schools from other regions would need to be included and subjected to greater statistical rigor. And questions remain: How might the preferences of respondents from Missouri's urban private colleges and universities compare to those of graduates from its smaller, more rural schools? And to what degree does the option for remote work influence the geography of students' preferences?

Conclusion

This research expanded the idea of international student mobility to include post-graduation employment within the host country. An exploratory survey asked international students from Missouri about their post-graduation employment location preferences. The results indicated international students have an idea about where in the United States they would want to work on Optional Practical Training even before they graduate, and it's not necessarily local. Students' preferences extend well beyond the state in which they earned their degrees. Conceptually, international student migration can occur intra-nationally as well as internationally, and understanding the geographies of international student mobility within the host country—from school to work and among and within different cities, states, and regions—is an important if underexplored component of international students' post-graduation journeys.

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