Internationalization vs. inequality: A bibliometric analysis of global gaps in higher education

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ABSTRACT

This study integrates a systematic literature review (SLR) with bibliometric analysis to examine global disparities in the internationalization of higher education from 2000 to 2025. Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, 58 empirical studies were selected from Scopus and Web of Science. The research identifies thematic and methodological patterns, maps key regions and actors, and reveals tensions and inequalities embedded in internationalization processes. Results show a marked concentration of publications in the Global North, particularly in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, and Japan, reinforcing structural imbalances in knowledge production. English-language journals dominate scholarly dissemination, limiting visibility for research from Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia. Thematic clusters include academic mobility, educational diplomacy, institutional branding, and epistemic justice, with recent studies incorporating critical perspectives on race, gender, and power. Despite emerging inclusive narratives, persistent barriers remain, such as linguistic hierarchies, dependence on global rankings, and limited South–South collaboration. The findings indicate that internationalization is not a neutral or universally beneficial process but is shaped by power dynamics favoring specific institutions and regions. This study contributes by advocating for more equitable approaches and emphasizing epistemic justice, multilingualism, and horizontal collaboration as essential for democratizing higher education.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes by integrating a systematic literature review with bibliometric analysis to reveal structural inequalities in higher education internationalization. It uniquely highlights underrepresentation of the Global South, linguistic hierarchies, and epistemic exclusion, while proposing inclusive approaches such as epistemic justice, multilingualism, and South-South collaboration as pathways toward more equitable global academic engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, the globalization of higher education has emerged as one of the most significant transformations in the global university landscape. Initially promoted as a means to enhance academic quality, foster international partnerships, and increase institutional competitiveness, internationalization has become a core component of educational strategies across different regions. However, this expansion has also led to discussions, particularly regarding its impact on equity and the global distribution of knowledge.

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Many researchers have highlighted that internationalization tends to sustain rather than rectify historical disparities between the Global North and South [1, 2]. The concentration of mobility programs, research funding, academic publications, and collaborative networks in universities in the Global North raises questions about the inclusiveness of this process. Furthermore, the predominance of English as the main language for scientific endeavors and the emphasis on specific international rankings reinforce epistemic hierarchies that restrict the visibility of localized knowledge and alternative perspectives [3, 4].

In this context, it is crucial to thoroughly examine how internationalization is treated in the scientific literature and to address the persistent structural deficiencies in its conceptualization and implementation. Despite a growing body of academic research on this topic, studies that combine bibliometric methods with analytical frameworks centered on social and epistemic justice remain scarce.

This study introduces a bibliometric and systematic literature review analysis that examines the link between university internationalization and global inequality. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach guided by the PRISMA 2020 protocol, this study aims to identify the primary thematic trends, key contributors, and significant tensions within the scientific literature on this subject from 2000 to 2025.

The research is guided by the following central question:

How does the scientific literature address the gaps and inequities associated with the internationalization of higher education on a global scale?

It is structured around three sub-questions:

- Q1: What are the thematic and methodological trends in the study of university internationalization?
- Q2: Which regions, institutions, or actors are overrepresented or underrepresented in this scientific production?
- Q3: What tensions, limitations, or inequalities emerge from the internationalization process according to the literature?

Based on these questions, the study aims to provide a critical and evidence-based overview of the current state of the field, identifying not only quantitative patterns but also gaps, biases, and opportunities to promote a truly inclusive, diverse, and transformative internationalization. The article is organized into seven sections: Section 1 introduces the context; Section 2 outlines the methodology, combining systematic review and bibliometric analysis under the PRISMA 2020 protocol; Section 3 presents the main findings regarding scientific productivity, journals, authors, collaboration networks, geographic distribution, and thematic areas; Section 4 offers an interpretive discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions; Section 5 synthesizes general conclusions; Section 6 proposes practical implications for more equitable academic policies; and Section 7 suggests future research directions to deepen the critical analysis of higher education internationalization from a global and plural perspective.

While this study addresses internationalization and inequality as global challenges, its implications are particularly relevant for Asian higher education systems. Asia has emerged as a central hub of academic mobility, with countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea actively shaping global education through policies of educational diplomacy, institutional branding, and transnational programs. At the same time, Asian universities face tensions between global competitiveness and local equity, especially in balancing international rankings with inclusive access for underrepresented groups. The rapid growth of cross-border student flows in the region highlights persistent linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical asymmetries that mirror and often magnify those observed at the global level. By situating Asia within this discussion, the study underscores the importance of critically examining how regional dynamics both reinforce and challenge the structural imbalances of internationalization, making its findings especially relevant to Asian institutions seeking equitable and sustainable strategies.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a Bibliometric Analysis, adhering to the PRISMA 2020 protocol [5]. The objective is to critically analyze and map the gaps, inequalities, and trends related to the internationalization of higher education from 2000 to 2025.

2.1. Research Design and Search Protocol

The PICo model was employed to formulate the main research question.

- *P (Population)*: Higher education institutions.
- *I (Interest)*: University internationalization processes and policies.
- *Co (Context)*: Global inequalities, structural gaps, and knowledge distribution.

2.1.1. General Research Question

How does the scientific literature address the gaps and inequities associated with the internationalization of higher education on a global scale?

2.1.2. Sub-Questions

- Q1: What are the thematic and methodological trends in the study of university internationalization?
- Q2: Which regions, institutions, or actors are overrepresented or underrepresented in this scientific production?
- Q3: What tensions, limitations, or inequalities emerge from the internationalization process according to the literature?

2.2. Information Sources and Search Strategy

Two primary databases were used: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), selected for their multidisciplinary scope and global coverage. Search equations were designed to capture studies addressing both internationalization and its implications for equity.

Web of Science: TS= ("Internationalization of higher education" OR "higher education internationalization" OR "academic mobility" OR "transnational education") AND TS= ("Inequality" OR "equity" OR "global disparities" OR "educational gap" OR "access to education"). *Scopus*: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Internationalization of higher education" OR "higher education internationalization" OR "academic mobility" OR "transnational education") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Inequality" OR "equity" OR "global disparities" OR "educational gap" OR "access to education").

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
2.3.1. Inclusion Criteria

- Articles published in any year.
- Written in English or Spanish.
- Empirical studies (Excluding systematic reviews, editorials, and purely bibliometric studies).

2.3.2. Exclusion Criteria

- Duplicate documents, thematically irrelevant studies, or those focusing on corporate internationalization or other educational levels.

2.4. Selection and Screening Procedure

Results were exported in .csv and .xlsx formats. Duplicates were removed, and filters were applied by reviewing titles, abstracts, and keywords. Full texts were consulted when necessary. The process was documented using the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (see Figure 1), detailing.

- Initial number of records.
- Screening and filtering phases.
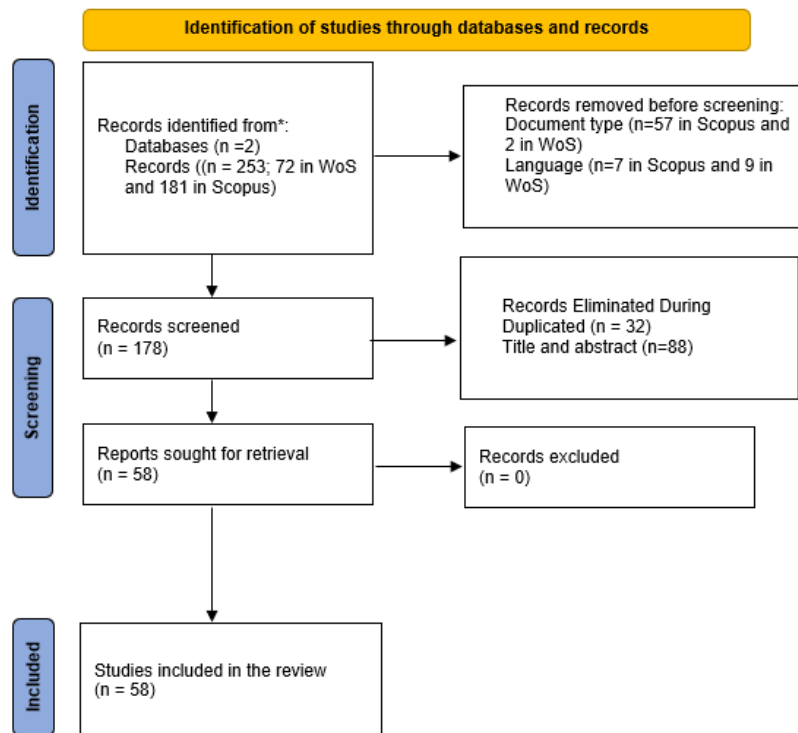- Final number of studies included in the analysis.

Figure 1. Flow diagram of the study selection process (PRISMA 2020).

Note: * Records were identified exclusively from Scopus and Web of Science databases. No additional sources or registers were used.

The initial search was conducted on June 20, 2025. Following the PRISMA-guided selection protocol, 58 studies that met the methodological and thematic criteria were selected, forming the final corpus for analysis.

2.5. Bibliometric Analysis

The R software (Version 4.4.2) [6] was used with the following packages.

- *readxl*, *data.table*, *dplyr*, *openxlsx* are used for importing, cleaning, and merging datasets.
- *ggplot2*, *gridExtra* for visualizing publication and citation trends.
- *VOSviewer* for generating keyword co-occurrence maps.
- *Rworldmap* for visualizing geographic distribution.

Analyzed metrics included:

- Productivity and citations by year.
- Journals with the highest volume and impact.
- Structure of international collaboration networks.
- Thematic areas.

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3. RESULTS

3.1. Productivity and Citations by Year

The temporal analysis of literature on higher education internationalization and its links to inequality reveals a progressive evolution in scientific production from 2001 to 2025. In the early years, academic output was limited and sporadic, with only one or two articles annually. However, certain studies from this period achieved high visibility, such as Van Der Wende [7], whose analysis of tensions between regional integration and national interests in Europe has been cited over 100 times, establishing it as a foundational work.

From 2015 onward, a sustained increase in both publication volume and impact is observed, characterized by greater theoretical and methodological articulation. Studies such as Herrero-Crespo et al. [8] analyzing the role of country image in attracting international students, and Mählck [9] focusing on academic trajectories from gender and race perspectives, mark a shift toward a more critical examination of internationalization.

The years 2017 and 2018 saw significant citation spikes (150 and 133 citations, respectively), despite a moderate publication volume, indicating the emergence of high-impact studies. Examples include [10], who used multilevel models to explain scientific mobility, and Gerhards et al. [11], who highlighted structural biases against Global South researchers. Similarly, George et al. [12] employed an intersectional approach to explore African students' experiences in U.S. universities, revealing persistent racial hierarchies.

From 2019, and particularly from 2020, a more consistent growth in academic production is evident, with emerging research on epistemic justice [13], educational diplomacy [14], and institutional inclusion [15] reflecting thematic and geographic diversification. The years 2022 and 2024 recorded the highest publication counts, with eight documents each, followed by 2025 with seven, indicating growing scholarly interest. However, recent publications, such as those in 2025, have low citation counts, with only three citations, likely due to their limited exposure time. This pattern is common in bibliometric studies, where newer publications tend to have fewer citations initially. Overall, the field's evolution reflects a transition from an exploratory phase to one of academic consolidation. Citation peaks in specific years highlight seminal works that have shaped key research lines. However, the concentration of impact in certain studies and regions raises questions about exclusion and visibility dynamics in the global circulation of scientific knowledge, underscoring the need to critically examine both quantitative trends and the structural conditions shaping the field's development and influence. Figure 2 illustrates the Annual evolution of publications and citations.
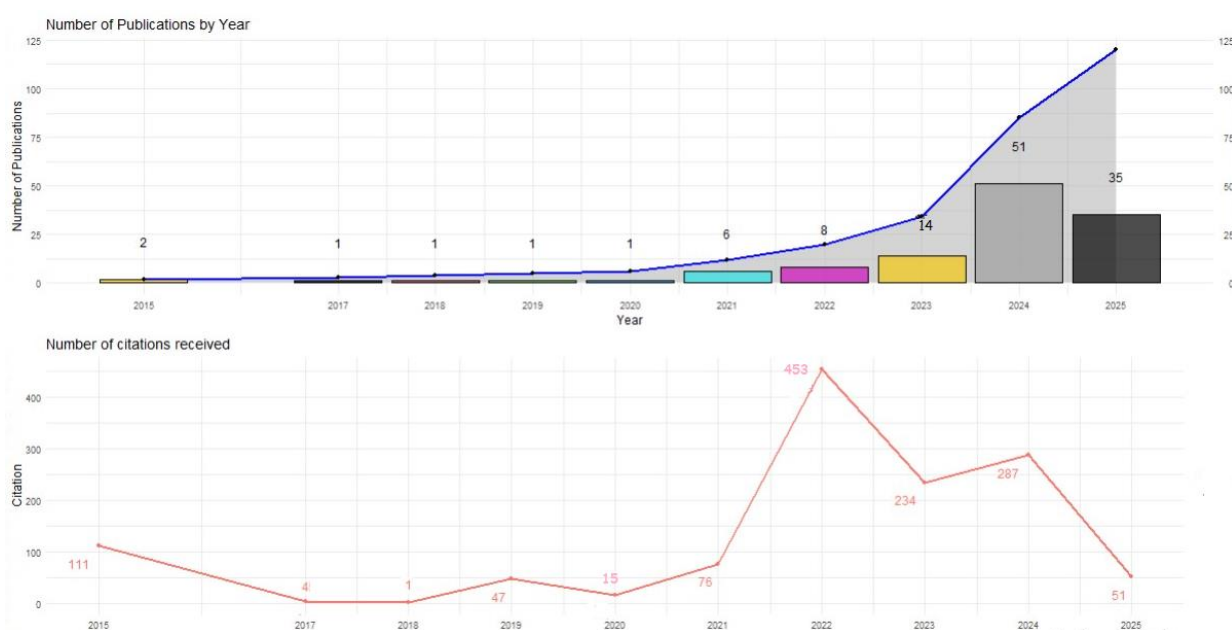

Figure 2. Annual evolution of publications and citations.

3.2. Journals with the Highest Volume and Impact

The analysis of publication distribution by journal indicates a thematic focus on outlets dedicated to higher education and internationalization. Table 1 illustrates the journals with the highest publication volume and citation impact within the analyzed corpus. As shown, the Journal of Studies in International Education stands out with three articles and 205 citations, making it the journal with the highest cumulative impact and volume in the examined collection. This prominence underscores its central role in the field and status as a key platform for significant studies from a global perspective. Notable examples include [7], who examined internationalization through the lens of comparative governance in Europe, and Myers and Griffin [16], who investigated gender disparities in access to international opportunities. Additionally, Aktas et al. [17] challenge the global citizenship narrative promoted by universities and highlight its potential to mask structural inequalities.

Research in Comparative and International Education ranked second, presenting three articles with 45 citations.

Despite its overall lower impact, this journal is distinguished by its comparative and critical examination of the dynamics of regional internationalization. Works such as Howe [18], focusing on Japan, and Mammadova and Allen [19], exploring Eurasian academic mobility through a postcolonial lens, demonstrate the dedication to investigating structural disparities across various geopolitical settings.

Higher Education, featuring two articles and 101 citations, demonstrates an exceptionally high citation-to-publication ratio. Its work is characterized by a critical approach, supported by strong empirical evidence. For example, George et al. [12] explored the experiences of African students in the U.S. through an intersectional lens, while Gerhards et al. [11] uncovered implicit biases in the assessment of Global South researchers using a controlled experiment.

From a strategic standpoint, the International Marketing Review and the Journal of Marketing for Higher Education enhance the field by examining internationalization from the perspectives of institutional positioning and national branding. For instance, Herrero-Crespo et al. [8] investigate the impact of country perception on the selection of academic destinations, while Yousaf et al. [14] analyze how China uses its education system to shape its national image and attract international talent.

Several journals, including Research in Higher Education, Language and Education, Review of Research in Education, and Journal of Informetrics, contributed meaningfully despite having a smaller volume of publications. For instance, Netz and Jaksztat [10] explore the motivations behind academic mobility decisions; Zheng and Qiu [13] discuss epistemic injustice in programs taught in English; and Momeni et al. [20] perform a bibliometric analysis of global academic mobility in the Journal of Informetrics.

Collectively, this distribution demonstrates that, while certain journals concentrate higher volume and impact, the literature on internationalization and inequality in higher education forms an interdisciplinary network. The thematic diversity of these journals spanning critical studies, educational marketing, and bibliometric analyses reflects the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation.

However, the findings also confirm a notable editorial concentration in English-language, Global North-based journals, reinforcing the study's central hypothesis regarding asymmetries in academic knowledge production and dissemination.

This centralization poses challenges not only in terms of access and visibility for Global South researchers but also in the validation of alternative, contextually situated approaches. In this context, creating more inclusive and diverse editorial environments is crucial for expanding the dissemination and acknowledgment of varied viewpoints in the global discourse.

Table 1. Most relevant journals by publication volume and citations.

Source title	Quantity	Citations
Journal of Studies in International Education	3	205
Research in Comparative and International Education	3	45
Higher Education	2	101
International Marketing Review	1	36
Research in Higher Education	1	31
Language and Education	1	26
Journal of Marketing for Higher Education	1	22
Review of Research in Education	1	22
Journal of Informetrics	2	41

From a strategic standpoint, the *International Marketing Review* and the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* enhance the field by examining internationalization through the perspectives of institutional positioning and national branding. For instance, Herrero-Crespo et al. [8] investigate the impact of country perception on the selection of academic destinations, while Yousaf et al. [14] analyze how China uses its education system to shape its national image and attract international talent. Studies published in journals such as the *International Marketing Review* and the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* were included because they address internationalization from the perspective of institutional branding and national image, dimensions directly tied to inequality in global student mobility.

Several journals, including *Research in Higher Education*, *Language and Education*, *Review of Research in Education*, and *Journal of Informetrics*, contribute meaningfully despite having a smaller volume of publications. For instance, Netz and Jaksztat [10] explore the motivations behind academic mobility decisions; Zheng and Qiu [13] discuss epistemic injustice in programs taught in English; and Momeni et al. [20] perform a bibliometric analysis of global academic mobility in the *Journal of Informetrics*. Similarly, works published in the *Journal of Informetrics* provide methodological insights through bibliometric analysis, offering quantitative evidence on global academic mobility patterns that complement the educational perspective.

3.3. Geographic Concentration of Studies

The examination of the geographical distribution of scientific output concerning internationalization and inequality in higher education reveals a significant concentration in countries of the Global North, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, and Japan. This pattern underscores the vital role these nations play in the global academic landscape and highlights the structural inequalities involved in the production, dissemination, and recognition of scientific knowledge. Figure 3 illustrates the geographic concentration of scientific production on internationalization and inequality in higher education, revealing a dominant contribution from the United States with the most publications (13) and citations (247), highlighting its crucial influence on fostering and advancing academic dialogue in this field. This dominance is attributed to its robust university infrastructure, wide-ranging international ties, and substantial presence in the indexed journals. Research by George et al. [12], which explores the experiences of African students through an intersectional perspective, illuminates the persistent racial and epistemic challenges within the realm of academic mobility.

Germany holds significant influence, particularly due to its comprehensive analysis of the dynamics within the global academic system. A study conducted by Gerhards et al. [11] demonstrated how an academic's nationality influences perceptions of their profile's quality, revealing inherent biases against researchers from the Global South.

In the Asian landscape, China stands out as a crucial thematic and geographic hub of the study. In addition to its increasing volume of publications, it has become a primary subject of analysis in discussions about educational diplomacy, national branding, and geopolitical influence. Yousaf et al. [14] explore how China's national image affects the decision to pursue studies there, highlighting the strategic application of soft power in the realm of international education. Japan and the Netherlands also contribute key perspectives. Van Der Wende [7] from the

Dutch case examines how globalization affects European university cooperation, while Japanese studies reflect historical internationalization processes through critical approaches.

Beyond the prominence of China and Japan, the broader Asian context reveals both dynamic growth and persistent asymmetries. East Asian nations such as China, Japan, and South Korea have positioned themselves as strategic actors, leveraging international education for soft power and economic development. China, in particular, stands out as both a producer of research and a focal point of studies on educational diplomacy and academic branding. However, South and Southeast Asian regions remain markedly underrepresented. Countries such as India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines, despite their rapidly expanding higher education sectors and increasing participation in international student mobility, contribute only marginally to the indexed literature. This gap suggests that structural barriers such as limited access to high-impact English-language journals, resource constraints, and weaker global collaboration networks continue to marginalize diverse Asian voices. The uneven representation of Asia not only reinforces global knowledge hierarchies but also narrows understanding of how internationalization affects equity across varied regional contexts. In contrast, regions such as Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia exhibit marginal participation in terms of volume and citations. While there are occasional contributions from countries like Ecuador, Cuba, or Kazakhstan, these tend to have lower visibility. For instance, Serikkaliyeva et al. [21] analyze educational mobility between Kazakhstan and China, identifying asymmetric geopolitical relationships, yet their work has limited citation impact. Similarly, Ecuador appears with only one document and no citations, reflecting the challenges of academic positioning from peripheral regions.

The limited articulation within international collaboration networks is further evidenced by the low "total link strength" in most Global South countries. Only the United States, Japan, Germany, and China demonstrate consistent ties in terms of co-authorship and institutional cooperation. This indicates that collaboration dynamics are dominated by a few hubs, perpetuating a knowledge hierarchy that excludes or marginalizes less privileged researchers and contexts. Collectively, these findings confirm that academic internationalization is neither equitable nor truly global. Scientific production remains concentrated in dominant centers that act as gatekeepers of knowledge. From a critical perspective, it is essential to promote mechanisms that foster the inclusion of Global South voices and realities. Approaches such as South-South collaboration, enhancement of regional publications, and encouragement of open access can help democratize the creation and sharing of knowledge, moving towards a more equitable, diverse, and representative form of internationalization.
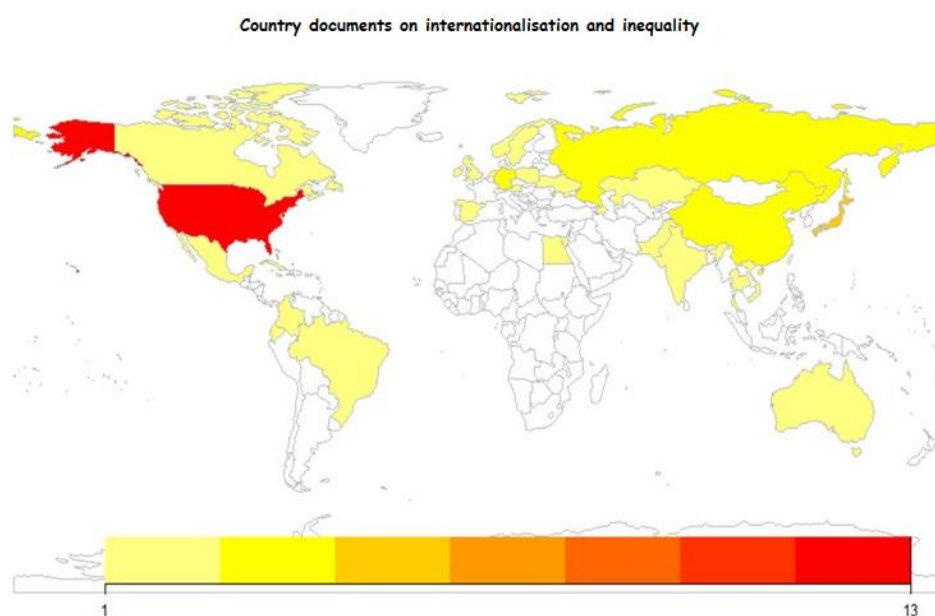

Figure 3. Geographic map of publication distribution by country.

3.4. Thematic Areas

Figure 4 illustrates the co-occurrence network of keywords within the analyzed literature, revealing five interconnected thematic clusters, with key concepts such as internationalization, academic mobility, higher education, global citizenship, and China acting as central points in the semantic network. This arrangement reflects the primary research focus and emphasizes discussions concerning specific geographic and institutional entities.

One of the most prominent themes is the movement of academics across borders. Terms such as study abroad, transnational education, and international students are frequently linked to challenges such as neo-racism, geographical distance, and gender equality, highlighting the growing recognition of the systemic inequalities inherent in these processes. In this context, Serikkaliyeva et al. [21] demonstrate how exchanges between Kazakhstan and China reinforce geopolitical and cultural hierarchies, while George et al. [12] explore the dynamics of racial exclusion in the context of mobility to the United States.

Another important element is ensuring fairness and social justice in the global expansion of universities. Although terms such as diversity, inclusive education, social inequality, and educational integration were mentioned, they were not as prominent, suggesting that these areas are still emerging subfields within the broader context. Ramaswamy et al. [22] advocate an internationalization approach that emphasizes social justice rather than merely concentrating on mobility figures or institutional rankings.

Critical discourse analysis is distinguished by its methodological approach, reflecting the increasing integration of critical theoretical perspectives into the study of institutional discourse related to internationalization. Research such as that by Aktas et al. [17] and Zheng and Qiu [13] exemplifies this approach by questioning prevailing narratives like "global citizenship" or English-medium instruction, which are frequently regarded as indicators of modernization, and uncovering how these practices can obscure epistemic and linguistic inequalities.

From a geographical perspective, the China node stands out not only for its frequent appearance but also for its thematic significance. This underscores the country's role as a hub of knowledge creation and its central position in research on educational diplomacy, institutional branding, and geopolitical influence. Yousaf et al. [14] illustrated how China's international image influences the attraction of foreign students through a combination of educational tactics, marketing, and soft power.

Additionally, peripheral clusters linked to emerging themes such as gender, cultural diversity, linguistic mediation, and digital skills have been recognized. For instance, Gomes [23] investigated how gender disparities in international contexts affect female academics' career trajectories. These findings open new avenues for research aimed at gaining a more intersectional understanding of this issue.

The use of multilingual keywords such as mobilité académique, educação superior, estudiantes internacionales, and ciência sem limites suggests a growing effort to connect with scientific communities that do not primarily speak English. However, this linguistic diversity has not yet resulted in the successful decentralization of knowledge, as the most frequently referenced works continue to be published predominantly in English-language journals located in the Global North.

The thematic map collectively reveals that the exploration of internationalization in higher education revolves around central themes such as academic mobility, a critical analysis of global policies, educational branding, and equity. However, it also highlights geographic and epistemic fragmentation: while certain concepts and regions dominate the discourse, others are only beginning to attract attention. This underscores the need to broaden the field's theoretical and methodological frameworks to encompass a diverse range of voices, perspectives, and realities, aligning with the objective of achieving genuinely inclusive internationalization.
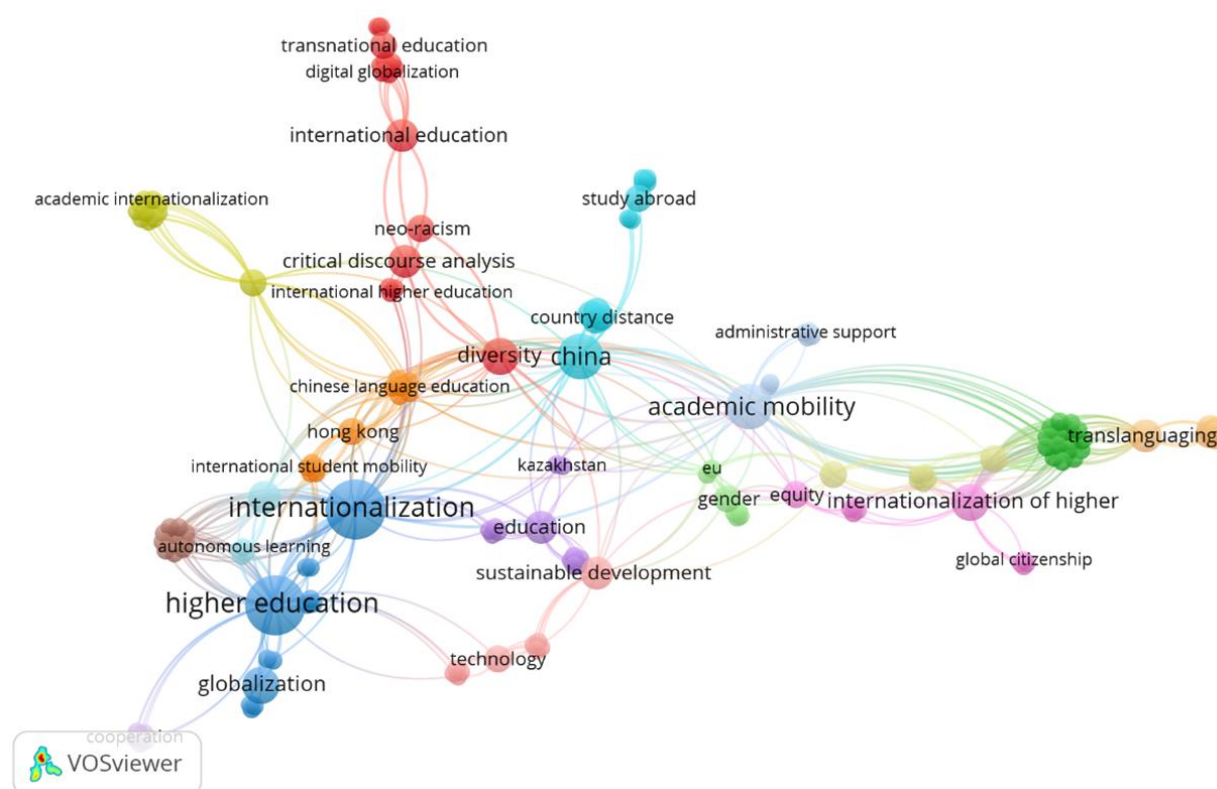
Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence network in the analyzed literature.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Thematic and Methodological Trends in University Internationalization

The findings of this study reveal a significant shift in the literature on the internationalization of higher education, moving from descriptive approaches to more critical and intersectional perspectives. Between 2001 and 2014, the primary focus of these studies was on academic mobility and the status of institutions [7], highlighting the benefits and opportunities of internationalization. However, beginning in 2015, there was a discernible shift in both methodology and themes, incorporating perspectives that addressed gender, race, geopolitics, and social justice issues [9, 12, 14].

This transition is also evident in the embrace of sophisticated methodological strategies. Methods such as critical discourse analysis [13, 17] and multilevel models [10] have enabled the exploration of not only mobility and academic branding phenomena, but also the epistemic and symbolic tensions that support the dissemination of knowledge. Consequently, a more complex and critical field has emerged, which continues to be characterized by significant thematic and linguistic centralization.

4.2. Overrepresentation and Underrepresentation of Actors and Institutions

This research underscores notable disparities in the field of university internationalization, especially in terms of editorial and geographic emphasis. The United States leads in both publication volume and citation count (n=13; 247 citations), with other Global North countries, such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan, also being prominent. The most influential journals, like the Journal of Studies in International Education and Higher Education, are based in English-speaking areas, limiting the visibility of authors from the Global South [11, 16].

In contrast, regions such as Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia are significantly underrepresented. Countries such as Ecuador and Kazakhstan have a limited presence, with research from these areas having a low citation impact [21]. This imbalance not only affects the dissemination of knowledge but also hampers the development of international collaboration networks. Only the United States, Germany, China, and Japan

demonstrate high levels of co-authorship and institutional ties, establishing themselves as major contributors to global academic discussions [13].

4.3. Tensions, Limitations, and Inequalities in Internationalization

Although internationalization is frequently depicted as an equitable and democratizing endeavor, the findings indicate that this portrayal often conceals the deep-rooted structural inequalities. Studies by George et al. [12] and Gomes [23] demonstrate how academic trajectories are shaped by the forces of racial, gender, and cultural exclusion. These inequities are perpetuated through institutional practices, such as the exclusive use of English in academia, the standardization of rankings, and the concentration of resources in universities situated in the Global North [17, 22].

Furthermore, although educational branding and academic diplomacy serve as strategies for institutional positioning [8, 14], they also reinforce competitive and hierarchical dynamics among institutions, masking the structural disadvantages faced by universities in peripheral countries. In this scenario, internationalization emerges as a double-edged sword: it offers opportunities for global collaboration while simultaneously sustaining mechanisms of epistemic exclusion [13].

In response, many voices are advocating for major reforms in university internationalization, emphasizing epistemic justice, recognizing local knowledge, and strengthening collaborations between countries in the Global South [19, 22]. These proposals support a more varied, inclusive, and transformative approach to internationalization.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This research indicates that the internationalization of higher education is not equally distributed or accessible to all. Although there has been a movement towards more critical and intersectional methodologies, the influence of the Global North continues to overshadow less prominent regions. New paradigms, such as epistemic justice and South-South collaboration, present opportunities to reshape internationalization in a way that promotes greater inclusivity and diversity.

For Asian universities and policy frameworks, the findings of this study have particular resonance. Countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and India are not only emerging as hubs of academic mobility but are also at the center of debates about soft power, global rankings, and educational diplomacy. However, the uneven participation of Southeast Asian nations such as Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines reflects ongoing disparities that limit the inclusiveness of regional internationalization. Strengthening South-South collaboration within Asia, promoting multilingual publication channels, and designing policies that value equity alongside competitiveness are crucial steps to address these gaps. By situating Asia within the broader conversation on internationalization and inequality, this study underscores the urgency for regional strategies that balance global engagement with the protection of local academic ecosystems, thereby ensuring that internationalization contributes to sustainable and equitable higher education development.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

1. Reformulate institutional strategies to prioritize equity and diversity.
2. Redefine quality metrics to value linguistic and interdisciplinary plurality.
3. Strengthen peripheral editorial channels through regional journals and open access.
4. Promote horizontal academic networks, particularly South-South collaboration.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

1. Longitudinal studies on the impact of internationalization in peripheral contexts.

2. Comparative analyses of inclusive internationalization models.
3. Critiques of global academic evaluation systems.
4. Studies on multilingualism and epistemic accessibility.
5. Decolonial analyses of educational diplomacy.

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