JOURNAL OF

# GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Issue 1, Volume 1

Published 2025

© *Journal of Global Higher Education*
Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025)
https://jghe.org/



## About the Journal

The *Journal of Global Higher Education* is an open-access, independent, community-run, peer-reviewed scholarly journal focused on global higher education and the opportunities, issues, and challenges that international and global engagement presents. We are a scholarly collective which aims to purposely disrupt traditional, hierarchical models of journal publication and management, and are open to experimentation. We welcome submissions that take a critical perspective on global higher education and challenge established norms and practices in this area of inquiry. We seek to broaden the scholarly conversation and disrupt normative publication practices regarding gatekeeping and participation.

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© *Journal of Global Higher Education*
Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025)
https://jghe.org/

## Editorial Team

## Affiliations

This journal is supported by Research with International Students (RIS) and the Critical Internationalization Studies Network (CISN).


Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 1-9
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org/
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.369

**EDITORIAL**

# The Community We Seek, the Community We Build: The Beginning of the *Journal of Global Higher Education*

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Editors, *Journal of Global Higher Education*

We welcome readers to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Global Higher Education*. This journal started with a conversation in late 2023 around a simple question: "What do we want out of the scholarly community we invest our time and energy into?" As scholars of global higher education, we (the four editors) had crossed paths many times through shared editorial work, professional conferences, and in our scholarship (writing/reviewing). These discussions highlighted how we had all experienced the very best that academic communities can offer, but also some of their worst behaviors, assumptions, and values. On reflection, we were all at a point where we wanted more from the academic communities we served and sought tangible changes to the ways academic work, and publishing in particular, is approached. Academia and academic publishing can be cold, harsh, and overly competitive, but what if they did not have to be this way? What would happen if a community of scholars chose, instead, to support one another, to take developmental approaches to scholarship, and to foster knowledge creation which pushes the boundaries against rigid and normative frameworks? It was through these conversations that the *Journal of Global Higher Education* was born. Through a labor of love and commitment to developing the community we hoped and yearned for, we have now arrived at the first of, hopefully, many issues.

Though we (the four editors) come from different (professional and personal) backgrounds, career trajectories, and life experiences, we have a shared vision for this journal. This includes:

- Equitable representation of voices and knowledge across the community researching global higher education;
- An open access and independent, academic-owned space for scholarship to be developed, published, and supported;
- Criticality, rigor, and diverse uses of theories, methods, and perspectives to further expand our collective understanding of what higher education across the globe is and can be;

- A journal which acts as an extension of a relational community that is developed through a foundation of mutual respect and care, despite our potential differences or disagreements.

In the sections that follow, we elaborate more on how these four values led us to create this journal and what we hope the *Journal of Global Higher Education* can do differently.

## Equitable Representation

To start, we use the term "global" to broadly refer to an awareness of the wider world, including the processes of global engagement, globalization, internationalization, and international mobilities among institutions, systems, and contexts of higher education. While there are many national contexts from which research can derive, too often what is seen and "counted" in established journals and policy resides are studies from so-called "Western," "Global North," or "Global Minority" sites (of research) and perspectives. We recognise there is much established, as well as emerging, knowledge from places, authors, and perspectives not commonly seen in many top journals in our field. Our existing publication structures in academia often privilege the knowledge, concepts, structures, and authors based in hegemonic and historically advantaged spaces.

The limited representation of global knowledge and voices in this research field is a leading reason why there are such narrow framings of higher education globally, in both research and practice (e.g., Buckner & Stein, 2020). Current normative perspectives on higher education globally often do not consider the scholarship, views, values, and positionalities of the "Global Majority," including those in the so-called "Global South" or scholars categorized in many marginalized groups within their contexts. Too often, these current dominant framings are not questioned, but rather are copied and applied to studies around the world, whether they are contextually and culturally appropriate or, more often, not. Our field often becomes limited by tick-box exercises in which guru authors are performatively cited (potentially not even read), the same conceptual framings are recycled, and expected normative views are repeated.

As editors, we want this journal to question, critique, and (re)think research about higher education differently. As such, we expect authors to be aware of the specificities of national contexts, situating local practices, research, issues, and reflections within a critical awareness of world history and contemporary geopolitics (meaning studies based in a single country should be framed for a global readership) (Shahjahan & Kezar, 2013). We also seek work which pushes the boundaries of theory, methods, and discourse used in research, aiming to open doors to new voices, new ideas, and new concepts. We do not believe that research can be "too critical," "too experimental," or "too political." We understand this might often mean our journal runs against current normative publication trends and expectations, but we encourage and support these endeavors.

At the same time, we are reflective on how our current academic and publishing structures limit who is able to volunteer for —or write in— a new, experimental journal. The four of us are perhaps taking a professional risk by placing our efforts here, but it is

a risk that is tempered by job security, flexibility in line management, access to resources, and institutional prestige (and the same applies to many on our wider editorial board). Despite our best aims for equitable representation, we will inevitably fall short because not all global scholars can safely take the time and energy to contribute to an unranked, unindexed new journal. But we hope to take that risk and develop the journal's reputation in the field so that, in the years to come, we can step down and see scholars less White, more globally representative, and more innovative than ourselves take ownership and leadership of the journal and its community.

## Open Access and Independent

The *Journal of Global Higher Education* differs from most other journals in the field because we have purposefully designed a format that is fully open access (OA) and independent of a scholarly publisher. We consider this journal to be an academic-owned scholarly collective.

OA is a publishing model that makes research freely available to publish and access (e.g., DOAJ, 2025). Too often, scholarship in our field is hidden behind paywalls that limit its accessibility, even though some research is supported through public finances. Research across various contexts is frequently inaccessible to the very universities, participants, and communities they are intended to directly impact. This lack of access to publications impacts a wide range of potential beneficiaries, including independent scholars, prospective scholars, scholars based in institutions with more limited resources, and the general public. OA, therefore, promotes the ethical accessibility and development of higher education research and supports the ethical diffusion of ideas. We hope that this journal can lead not only to advancing communication among higher education scholars, but also to supporting a global understanding of higher education in our societies.

We make several commitments regarding OA, as founding editors of this journal. The first is that this journal does not have, and will never have, article processing charges (APCs) for authors. The second commitment is that this journal and all its contents are free to access, read, and use, and will always be this way. There are no costs (fees) or subscriptions required to read our published work. The copyright of all publications will also be retained with the authors, using a CC BY-NC 4.0 license that makes articles free to use and share by anyone with attribution. We believe APCs and scholarship behind paywalls to be unethical and detrimental to knowledge work (Al-Khatib, & Teixeira da Silva, 2017), and that not charging an APC or fee for reading promotes equitable and fair access to new knowledge, regardless of where one is located, one's career stage, or the resources backing one's research (Kadikilo et al., 2024). This approach places no limits on who can participate in the larger community of higher education research and scholarship.

We have also chosen not to affiliate with an academic publisher and function as an independent, academic-owned and -managed journal. This is because we have severe concerns about the "value extraction model" (Jandric & Hayes, 2019, p. 5) seen from many academic publishers who sell the ideas and work we produce, write, and edit for

free at a premium and primarily to their benefit (Buranyi, 2017). We also have concerns about the lack of ownership held over our knowledge, exemplified by the growing trend of academic publishers selling our writing to train artificial intelligence and large language models without our consent or permission (e.g., Kwon, 2024). To do something about this, we join the growing movement of independent, academic-owned journals (such as *Critical Internationalization Studies Review*, *Glossa*, *International Journal of African Higher Education*, or *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education*, among others). We hope this can serve as another blueprint for alternative publishing models for future communities.

With that said, there is a "cost" to this approach. We are truly indebted to the library and its staff at William & Mary (USA) who have graciously agreed to host the online platform at no cost to us and are assisting in technical support, keeping our webpages running and accessible. The remaining costs are compensation for the labor needed for this journal to operate. In other words, how do we compensate the editors, reviewers, copy editors, and social media team promoting the work of this journal without charging a fee to publish, access, or read? Similar to many journals owned by academic publishers, it's a simple answer for us: volunteer labor. We, the editorial board members, copy editing team, social media team, and reviewers, count the work associated with this journal as part of our scholarly duties, which are, hopefully, remunerated by our employers. As individuals, we do not get any financial compensation, support, or administrative resourcing for working with or for this journal. Although we are reflective of the limitations of this approach, we agreed, as an editorial team, on this because we established this journal for the love of the field, interest in high-quality scholarship, and a desire to move our field forward to where more individuals and groups are represented and included in the discourses of higher education globally. We are enormously grateful for the energy and goodwill demonstrated by those who have responded to our open call for editorial board members, who share this commitment and have contributed as volunteers to developing the journal's policies and practices now and in the years to come.

## Criticality, Rigor, and Diversity of Methods and Theories

Though we are an academic journal, we will publish multiple types of scholarship beyond "traditional" research articles. We believe research articles form a foundation to scholarly community and communication, but they are not the only ways to do so. To that end, in addition to research articles, we are publishing critical reflections of the field which challenge existing understandings, research, and/or practices. We are also encouraging practice articles which highlight innovative, ethical, and/or critical approaches to working practices in higher education globally. We anticipate publishing a creative section (hopefully available in upcoming submission cycles) which will be open to experimental approaches and expressions to push the boundaries of what is traditionally published in a journal. This diversity of formats reflects our desire to participate in established scholarly or practice communities, journals, and discussions while also transforming them to make spaces for alternative modalities and discourses.

To be clear, many currently available journals are wonderful scholarly outlets undertaking critical and creative work, and we value and respect the work done by colleagues in these spaces. We, as editors, have published—and will continue to publish—in many of these outlets moving forward. Many existing journals have substantially contributed to our field, and we are building on their initiatives and the knowledge they have disseminated over the years.

Our contention is that the field of higher education research and scholarship, overall, has become dominated by normative framings and publishing practices. In our view, this limits our knowledge and understanding of higher education globally. Our intention, then, is to provide additional avenues for authors to disrupt these practices. We aim to purposefully disrupt traditional and hierarchical models of journal publication and management. We desire to be inclusive of critiques of common understandings, practices, and modes of higher education existing globally. We do not subscribe to a singular framework of understanding of what higher education is, theoretically, methodologically, or in practice.

Subaltern voices, particularly in decolonial studies or those using other critical lenses, often struggle to publish in established journals where they are expected to carry through the epistemic and ontological premises of their work into the format, style, and approach of writing (Canagarajah, 2002). Proxy indicators of rigor—the inclusion of particular sections, specific citations, structuring the paper in a certain way, etc.—become our understandable heuristic frames for identifying good research. But when scholarship seeks to legitimately challenge aspects of this knowledge structure, it can be devalued, forced to fit into a mold, and compromised as a result. We want this journal to be a space where different understandings of rigor and quality can thrive and be debated, rather than compromised.

This means we support and advocate for a wide range of methods, theories, structures, styles, and practices not normally seen in established journals. We also recognize this may take time and reflection to develop across the field, given the weight of these normative expectations is so heavy. As such, this first issue is just a starting point. We commit to the ongoing development of the journal in this regard, holding space for discussing bold ideas and **s**uggestions from the community as we carry forward.

## Community Development

In developing this journal, we have strived to be transparent and open in our communications. This started with the initial design discussions of the journal and expanded to the recruitment of editorial board members. We see this journal as an extension of a larger, active, and vibrant scholarly community. As a journal, we pledge to forever be community-owned and -developed. We seek to disrupt the gatekeeping that can result from normative framing and practices which limit participation in scholarly communities and, in turn, our understandings of higher education globally.

To be transparent, we engaged in discussions with a wide range of global scholars as we developed this journal, some of whom eventually joined the editorial board and

others who did not have capacity to do so. These voices included early career scholars, as well as well-established voices in our field (a few of whom have contributed greatly to our current understandings and scholarship). We have recruited a peer review team and are supporting them through training to develop peer review as an epistemic habit that derives from openness, rather than "conservative, biased, and contentious practice" (Shefer et al., 2023, p. 148).

As part of our community development plans, we have undertaken several actions to ensure this journal is community-focused and community-operated in the long term, owned by the many and not dictated by the few. A few examples of steps we have taken include:

- A planned rotation of editorship with each founding editor stepping down after the journal hits established key measures/event targets. This succession planning will ensure the journal lives beyond—and is not dominated by—its founding editors;
- A commitment that lead editors will not publish articles we author in this journal for the duration of our time as editors (note: this commitment does not apply to the wider editorial board, including Section, Associate, and Assistant editors, although we have anonymized peer review practices in place to ensure papers are published on merit, not by scholarly clout);
- Established term limits for the wider editorial board roles to allow transition of membership/roles and encourage the participation and development of editorial skills for all community members;
- Established mentorship through a developmental route for publication, particularly focused on earlier career scholars and those who desire greater mentoring in publishing;
- Training for all reviewers, with development, supportiveness, and kindness as key pillars of our ethos for peer review processes;
- Future webinar events about developing articles and publishing in our journal;
- A social media team whose strategies aim to encourage discussion and debate about published articles, while also providing direct access to the editorial team for questions or suggestions;
- Preliminary steps to establish this journal as a charity in the United Kingdom.

We have established partnerships with key organizations already shaping our field in a critical direction and are open to establishing more in the future. Currently, we serve as a key publication outlet for *Research with International Students* (RIS) and the *Critical Internationalization Studies Network* (CISN). Our initial schedule for a publication plan includes one issue this year (this issue) and at least two issues each for 2026 and 2027, although we will post new articles online as they are accepted.

In summary, the *Journal of Global Higher Education* aspires to be not just an academic journal, but also a community that actively works towards equitable collaboration with all scholars, aiming to include our readership in our operational development moving forward. We desire to change cultures around peer review, disavowing exercises of power and gatekeeping while embracing constructive, dialogic, and kind processes.

While we will not compromise on academic rigor, we make a firm commitment to help each other do better research and to recognize that researchers, scholars, and research participants are humans, with feelings and lives that deserve basic respect and care.

## This First Issue

We are launching this journal along with the publication of its first issue. This first issue was by invitation, as we wanted to start the journal with a showcase of example articles. We invited authors within and beyond our networks because they, their perspectives, methods, and theories are emblematic of what we aspire to publish. All articles were anonymously peer reviewed to the standard we expect for all future articles. Some of these articles were written by authors who are earlier in their careers, while others are well-established and familiar voices in the field. However, these articles are just a starting point, and they are not intended to be blueprints for all future formats. We look forward to continuously developing our approaches and hearing from new voices in the future in novel ways.

We recognize that the efforts undertaken to publish this first issue have taken a great deal of effort and time from many individuals and groups, including (but not limited to) our full editorial board, our team of copy editors, our social media team, and innumerable people who have offered advice, guidance, and critique along the way (and these people have been listed below). We immensely appreciate their support to make this journal and first issue possible. This shared vision of what a journal can be motivates not just us as individuals, but as a community of global scholars.

Finally, we end with you, the reader. Thank you for taking the time to read this first issue and for your future contributions to the *Journal of Global Higher Education*. We know that publishing in a new, unestablished journal might be seen as a risk, but we hope it is a risk you are willing to take with us, to demonstrate an alternative vision of what high quality publishing can be. We look forward to your thoughts and feedback, and we always welcome suggestions on how to develop this journal, which we see as a continual work in progress, but one that belongs to all of us, as a community.

## Thank Yous and Acknowledgements

It was a team effort to develop this inaugural issue, and we wish to thank our full editorial board for their contributions to making it possible. We would also like to specifically thank the following individuals for their significant contributions by providing feedback, aiding the journal's development, or developing practical processes to make this publication possible:

Thomas Brotherhood
Santiago Castiello-Gutiérrez
Justin Dalton
Sophia Deterala

Chris R. Glass
Chrystal George Mwangi
Adam Grimm
Kay Helm
Tang Tang Heng
Rita Hordósy
Minghui (Hannah) Hou
Zhuo Min Huang
Michael Lanford
Samantha Marangell
Amy Scott Metcalfe
Györgyi Mihalyi
Pii-Tuulia Nikula
Mary Oberlies
Rosalind Raby
Jérôme Rickmann
Johan Rooryck
Sarah Schiffeker
Ly Thi Tran
Kalyani Unkule
Hans de Wit
HyeJin (Tina) Yeo
(and many others)

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## AI Statement

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

## Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 10-19
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org/
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.9

**EDITORIAL**

# A Letter to the Editors: What Can Critical Mean to International Education Praxis?

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## Abstract

There is no question that higher education is in turbulent times, with shifting geopolitical priorities and policy actions affecting many across the globe. As such, many international educators, including administrators and faculty, grapple with how to engage in critical praxis and practice in their day-to-day work. In this letter to the editors, we aim to acknowledge and address the many challenges facing international education in today's geopolitical realities by applying an equity-driven lens for internationalization. The original application of the lens included four guiding principles: defining the sociohistorical context, understanding contemporary forces of globalization, integrating equity-driven theoretical perspectives, and de/constructing internationalization. In adapting the lens for application to practice, we added a fifth lens: building communities of critical praxis and scholarship. Ultimately, we offer our partnership and co-conspiratorship to the JGHE readership and call on others in positions of professional protection and security to do the same.

**Keywords:** critical praxis, equity, international educators, internationalization

Dear international educators,

We write this piece as a letter to those who grapple with how to engage in critical praxis and practice in their day-to-day work, which includes administrators and faculty who have both formal and informal roles in international education. We arrived at this letter through our engagement with scholar-practitioners at our institutions and through global scholarship networks, such as the Critical Internationalization Students Network's (2024) Race + Racism subgroup that we co-led for several years. One point we heard many times from higher education practitioners was the question of how they can engage in critical, antiracist work within the constraints of their jobs. As some have shared, they do not feel like they have the privilege of outward and explicit criticality the way that many tenured faculty—including the two of us—or those who have other forms of contractual protections in their jobs do. In addition, they (and we) recognize that neoliberalism, which drives much of contemporary higher education operations, creates additional constraints and tensions with critical work. Within a neoliberal paradigm, many practitioners are tasked with increasing student enrollment and focusing on financial returns which can work in tension with the humanistic responsibilities of their jobs.

Beyond the global scholarship network and informal conversations with international educators, we developed an equity-driven lens for internationalization research a few years ago (George Mwangi & Yao, 2021) which we have recently begun to apply more directly to practice. The equity-driven lens includes four guiding principles, or lenses, that we argue should be addressed to move towards equity in internationalization. The first lens includes defining the sociohistorical context because internationalization cannot be separated from social and historical events, pressures, and ideologies that are embedded in current practices. We also argue that internationalization is heavily influenced by global structures and systems that often advance a neoliberal and market orientation—thus necessitating an understanding of the contemporary forces of globalization, which is the second lens. The third lens focuses on guiding educators away from practices that "reinforce internationalization as a values-neutral or indiscriminately positive process" (George Mwangi & Yao, 2021, p. 42) and towards the integration of equity-driven conceptual and theoretical perspectives. Finally, the fourth lens centers de/constructing internationalization, in which we encourage educators to nuance how internationalization is defined rather than assume what is included and excluded. As such, the four principles of the equity-driven lens can be used to shape the logics that ground the practices, policies, processes, and motivations of higher education internationalization work on campuses.

As we consider ways to adapt the equity-driven lens for application to practice, we also advance an additional lens— building communities of critical praxis and scholarship—as a way for international educators to connect and support each other

during difficult times. In the next few sections, we delve deeper into each of the five lenses with suggestions on how international educators might engage an equity-driven and critical perspective in their work.

## Defining the Sociohistorical Context

As we look at the present and towards the future of international education, we cannot avoid the connection to sociohistorical contexts. For example, at the time of this writing, the second Trump administration is creating an environment of uncertainty in the United States which is reminiscent of events that occurred in his previous administration (Yao, 2024). During his first administration, international students and scholars experienced constantly and rapidly changing immigration policies, such as the travel bans, which left students and administrators rushing to adhere to new rules. We also saw a shift to conservative ideals being more visible, including anti-DEI and anti-CRT movements that affected so many in higher education. There was anti-Asian racist nativism mirroring the "Yellow Peril" of the early 19th century (Yao & George Mwangi, 2022). The second Trump administration has made sweeping changes quickly, including executive orders within the first week affecting immigration, climate change, and diversity programs (NPR, 2025). Within the first 100 days of the new administration, President Trump issued multiple executive orders that sent ripples around the world, including the threats of tariffs on multiple countries affecting the global economy (Horsley, 2025) and the sudden rescinding of international students' and scholars' visas (Gary & Gluckman, 2025). In addition, there are continued global challenges, including leadership changes, military strife, and the growth of far-right movements in multiple governments (Henley, 2025). There is no question that (geo)politics, both in the United States and globally, creates immense pressures on the lives of those working and studying international higher education.

In considering the sociohistorical perspectives, international educators can look to historical actions to learn from and plan for the future. We in no way suggest implementing changes without clear directions (e.g., immigration changes, etc.); however, we do believe it is essential to be aware of, and to plan for, any future possibilities by considering the past, especially considering the recent change in the U.S. presidential administration. For example, some higher education institutions recommended that international students return from overseas travel to the United States prior to the 2025 Inauguration Day on January 20, even if their university/course schedule did not require it (Alonso, 2024). This suggestion is in direct response to immigration policies that were changed quickly after Trump was inaugurated in his first administration. Likewise, our

recommendation to international educators is to always consider sociohistorical precedents to center equity and criticality in their day-to-day work.

## Connecting to Contemporary Forces of Globalization

In considering the contemporary forces of globalization, we know that international educators not only serve a critical role on college campuses but are often the first ones to know any major global news impacting higher education. Most importantly, they are typically the first people that international students and scholars reach out to any time there are potentially stressful situations. In a recent study that we conducted, we examined the perspectives of international educators and how they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we sought to understand how they supported international students on their campuses during that time, particularly in light of changing immigration policies and the rise in anti-Asian sentiments occurring around the globe. As we engaged in interviews with international educators, we were struck by how many participants shared the trauma they experienced during the pandemic (George Mwangi et al., 2024)—especially in relation to the constraints they experienced in supporting international students who had so many questions at the time.

As we listened, we saw the deep level of commitment that international educators had for their students, despite the lack of institutional support, as well as the lack of resources and answers at the time. Yet, international educators had to balance multiple roles, including supporting students while simultaneously responding to federally mandated governmental responsibilities (Yao et al., 2024). Even though the study occurred several years ago during the pandemic, the experiences shared by international educators are applicable to the contemporary challenges of navigating current geopolitical events. The massive changes in immigration policies and global partnerships have understandably caused turmoil to all affected, including those formally and informally working in international education.

We recognize and respect the difficult work that international educators must do on a daily basis. We know that there are many competing priorities at work, and that infusing criticality can be difficult, time consuming, and sometimes feels impossible, particularly when navigating geopolitical and global pressures. Yet, we urge international educators to remain committed to work that fosters positive transformation. This could include serving global student populations with care and patience even during tenuous times, which is when students may experience high levels of anxiety and stress.

## Integrating Equity-Driven Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

There are obvious challenges and tensions in working within a higher education system while also seeking to critique, change, or even dismantle aspects of it. In doing the work within universities, or within organizations that support the work of universities (e.g., third-party education abroad providers) employees will still be beholden in some ways to those systems. This reality leads to us often getting asked by international educators, "How can we make your critical research actionable?" and "How can I use a critical lens as a practitioner?" We have found the work of education activist scholars and practitioners in the K-12/primary and secondary education space to be particularly useful guides, such as Paolo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and bell hooks' (2003) *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. Like the essence of international education, these works emphasize learning inside and outside of the traditional classroom and into the community. They also offer ways in which we can engage in change and transformation within ourselves and our spheres of influence as important starting points for critical practice.

## De/constructing Internationalization

Use of the equity-driven lens of de/constructing helps us to remember that there is no single way to understand, define, or practice criticality. Criticality is an ontological and epistemological stance, meaning that it guides what we believe is real, what shapes our understanding of reality, what we value as knowledge, and how we seek knowledge. In practice, the application of a critical perspective to internationalization has an expansive and pluralistic range (Stein & McCartney, 2021; Vavrus & Pekol, 2015). You might engage as a tempered radical who is committed to your organization/ institution but are also at odds with aspects of the culture and practices within that space, working towards change as an outsider within (Meyerson, 2001). You might see yourself as an accomplice who turns toward risk in order to strategize with oppressed peoples and leverage one's power and resources to dismantle structures through your role (Powell & Kelly, 2017). There is no "right" label or singular way to practice criticality, but it is important to consistently reflect on the alignment and tensions between who you are, what you believe, and how you act. We would argue that criticality is a process and journey of becoming, rather than a destination. Further, being critical does not mean that we as scholars and practitioners should judge one another as we continue to learn, grow, and develop in that becoming.

While there are few models that discuss how practitioners can engage criticality in practice, they do exist. For example, Liu's (2023) article, "International education for the oppressed: A framework for international educators' value-based practice," is grounded in Freire's (1970) critical work. Liu (2023) specifically guides practitioners towards practice that aligns with their value systems; these practices focus on deep reflections regarding critical awareness raising "of the oppressive postcolonial world conditions in higher education internationalization," (p. 948) determining and applying ethical values, and engaging in empathetic actions "to gradually transform the system" (p. 946). Stein and colleagues (2019) provide another practical perspective in their article, "Pluralizing frameworks for global ethics in the internationalization of higher education in Canada," by not only describing three frameworks, but also demonstrating what each framing might look like when applied in practice to internationalizing the curriculum, international student mobility, and study and service abroad. Instead of promoting any single one of the three frameworks – liberal, critical, and decolonial – they instead use them as a guide towards ethical questions that practitioners can reflect upon within their work.

It is also important to remember that theorizing, framings, and knowledge does not just come from empirical research or journal articles. All of your professional experience and knowledge, alongside the ways you have navigated criticality in your work, are valuable ways of knowing. Researchers and practitioners should continue to find ways to collaborate in bridging theory and practice so that our diverse ways of engaging criticality within international education are shared within our communities.

## Building Communities of Critical Praxis and Scholarship

We recognize that critical work within internationalization cannot be done alone, and therefore in writing this letter to you we offer a new lens: building communities of critical praxis and scholarship. It is important to find community with other scholars and practitioners who are committed to a critical stance within international education. Higher education institutions and their adjacent spaces can be very isolating, which can make you feel as if you are alone in the challenges that you face. Other critical professionals who are experiencing similar issues can serve as thought partners in your decision making, accountability buddies in not compromising your values in your work, and friends who care for you (and vice versa) as you navigate your profession. These communities can be essential for your own mental health and well-being in order to stave off the broader trends of professional burnout and withdrawal occurring within the field of international education (Toner, 2022). Given the current sociopolitical climate

that reflects the rise of global nationalism, building communities of critical practice and scholarship can also serve as a form of safety in mobilizing for change without taking on all of the associated risk on one's own.

The Critical Internationalization Studies Network (CISN) provides this kind of space as an organization that "brings together scholars, practitioners, educators, students, and community organizations interested in reimagining dominant patterns of relationship, representation, and resource distribution in the internationalization of education" (Critical Internationalization Studies Network, 2024). For example, we alongside Dr. Kumari Beck, co-developed a sub-group of CISN that became a global network for education scholars and practitioners interested in understanding the ways race and racism are present in higher education internationalization scholarship, policy, and practice. Each month, we met remotely to focus on a different session topic, such as "practitioner engagement with race and racism in global education" and "theoretical frameworks focused on race in a global context." At the time of writing this article, the CISN sub-group on race and racism continues to exist as a space to share relevant scholarship and practice initiatives, engage in dialogue, build relationships, and develop actions for anti-racist praxis in higher education.

In addition, we learned from participants in our previous studies that local and national associations serve as essential communities, especially during difficult times (George Mwangi et al., 2024). Participants shared that their networks in NAFSA and AIEA were helpful as support systems for individuals who understood the difficulties of the time, as well as educators who had to navigate changing immigration policies. Although these are global organizations, we recognize they are U.S. dominant (and our research participants were U.S. based); therefore, it is important to locate the associations within your local, regional, and international contexts. While these associations may not ground themselves in a critical stance per se, over the years we have found a growing presence and visibility of critical administrators and educators in many of these spaces. We are also confident that the *Journal of Global Higher Education* will serve as an important space to both seek and share research and practice about criticality in international education.

## Moving Forward Together

Today's geopolitical realities precariously impact our local, national, and global higher education contexts. We see racist nativism, xenophobia, and colonial logics continue to systematically restrict possibilities for equity-driven internationalization policies and practices around the world. Thus, we recognize that criticality in international education cannot just be an intellectual exercise as there is too much stake

- it is your work as practitioners that is essential for ensuring internationalization keeps pace with our rapidly changing world. We also know that many of you are not protected in your professional roles, and you should not have to bear all the costs and risks in this work. As tenured faculty members, we offer our partnership and co-conspiratorship, and we call on others in positions with professional protections and security to do the same. At the same time, we ask you to do what you can in using your skills, knowledge, and sphere of influence to enact your interpretation of a critical lens. We are at a time when we must each bring what we can offer to the table, lean on one another in these uncertain times, and connect with one another for support as none of us can do this work alone.

In solidarity,

Chrystal & Christina

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Sophia Abbott, Amanda R. Corso, and Gaurav Harshe for their work as doctoral research assistants on the study discussed within this letter. Thank you to Dr. Kumari Beck who co-founded the Critical Internationalization Studies Network sub-group on Race & Racism with us in 2020. We are grateful to all of the international educators who have shared their stories in our research and partnered with us over the years.

## AI Statement

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

## Funding

The research study discussed in this manuscript was made possible by a grant from the Spencer Foundation [#202100254]. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Spencer Foundation.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 20-38
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org/
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.3

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Composting the University

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## Abstract

This conceptual article invites higher education faculty to respond to the global polycrisis in ways that recognize our complicity in the systemic root causes of this crisis and honour our relational responsibilities to current and coming generations of all species. It reviews three genres of hope about the future of higher education – hope in continuity, hope in consensual change, and hope in composting – and invites a deeper inquiry into the possibilities of the latter. The metaphor of composting highlights the need to metabolize harmful illusions of separability, supremacy, and human exceptionalism and encourages faculty to lean into a humbler, less sanitized, and more accountable relationship with the living Earth we are part of. To illustrate a possible approach to *hope in composting* in higher education, I draw inspiration from the increasingly popular campus as a living laboratory model and speculatively ask how we might relate to our campuses as metabolic co-laboratories. I also encourage faculty to reconsider their roles and responsibilities in response to potential questions from various communities within and beyond campus grounds.

**Keywords**: higher education, polycrisis, polyculmination, hope, futurity, colonialism, collapse

## Introduction

Higher education today is navigating a storm of intersecting social, political, economic, ecological, and psychological global crises that have been collectively described as a "polycrisis" (Lawrence et al., 2024). This systemic instability affects higher education in myriad ways. Many institutions face budget constraints as public funding wanes and rising inflation and tuition costs place increasing financial pressure on

students and their families. However, the challenges faced by higher education are more than just economic; they include the impacts of AI, blatant political interference, backlash against "DEI" (diversity, equity, and inclusion), proliferating geopolitical conflicts, intensifying social polarization, and increasing frequency of extreme weather events and natural disasters, to name a few (Stein et al., in press). This conceptual article seeks to expand the available frames of reference for confronting pressing questions about higher education's relevance and responsibilities in today's complex, uncertain, and volatile world.

Historically, universities were framed as "ivory towers," elite institutions where society's "best and brightest" were removed from the messy realities of everyday life and the imperatives of producing knowledge of immediate instrumental value.[1] More recently, for the past 50 years, universities have been pressured to demonstrate direct social and economic value, often through metrics of efficiency, outcomes, and market alignment. In the context growing systemic destabilization, however, neither the ivory tower nor the business model offers a compelling narrative about the role of higher education today. Further, as I argue in this article, neither model is oriented by a sense of responsibility to the living planet that we are all part of and that is currently in a state of metabolic "dis-ease" (Huni Kui in Andreotti et al., 2023).

The symptoms of this "dis-ease" are evident in various tangible measures, such as the fact that we have surpassed (at least) six of the nine identified planetary boundaries (Richardson et al., 2023), the mental health of young people has been declining over the past 20 years (McGorry et al., 2024), and microplastics and PFAS "forever chemicals" are now found in our waterways and bloodstreams. But if these are the symptoms of a collective dis-ease, what are its root causes? In this article, I take it as an orienting assumption that the root causes of this dis-ease lie within the modern/colonial ontology of separability, supremacy, and human exceptionalism that governs our institutions, the wider global system in which they are embedded, and the subjectivities of those of us who inhabit and invest in this system. From this perspective, the polycrisis is not the result of external threats but a consequence of our own making: the *polyculmination* of an inherently harmful and unsustainable modern/colonial system that has reached its social and ecological limits. This analysis is grounded in the inquiry of the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures (GTDF) Collective and our collaborations with the Teia das 5 Curas Indigenous Network (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, 2025; Stein et al., 2017, 2020, 2022, 2024).

The GTDF Collective is an intergenerational, interdisciplinary, and international group of researchers, educators, artists, students, and Indigenous and Afro-descendant knowledge keepers. Our pedagogical approach to composting systemic harm is grounded in an analysis that this harm is not reproduced primarily because of ignorance about that harm, but rather because of *socially sanctioned denials* of this harm and our complicity in it. These denials include the denial of our complicity in systemic harm, denial of the

[1] Although the term "ivory tower" dates back to the Bible, it only became associated with higher education in the mid-20th century (see Shapin, 2012). Nonetheless, the term is commonly understood today to indicate a long-standing orientation toward higher education in which the institution and its inhabitants seek to separate themselves from the rest of society and assert epistemic authority from above.

ecological limits of our finite planet, denial of our entanglement with the rest of nature, and denial of the magnitude of the challenges we face.

These interconnected denials allow us to continue investing in and enjoying the benefits of the modern/colonial system, including higher education. Just as the university-as-ivory-tower seeks to separate itself from (and position itself above) the rest of society, much of humanity has sought to separate itself from and position itself above the rest of nature (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, 2025; Stein et al., 2022). This combination of separability and supremacy results in the denial of our intrinsic interdependence, or entanglement, with everything/everyone/everywhere. This has been described more recently in Western science as "quantum entanglement" (Barad, 2007) and, for a much longer time, has been embodied in many Indigenous and other non-Western onto-epistemologies (Gould et al., 2023; Sumida et al., 2023; Wildcat & Voth, 2023).

Centuries of systemic denial of our condition of relational entanglement, and the accompanying responsibilities to all other beings on Earth, have enabled the justification of exploitation and dispossession of racialized and Indigenous communities and the extraction and commodification of non-human nature. In this modern/colonial ontology, every relationship (whether with other people, other-than-human beings, or ourselves) is a site of transaction and cost-benefit calculation, rather than collaboration and co-becoming. This, in turn, has led us to exceed the biophysical limits of the planet, poison the living lands that sustain us (and thereby poison ourselves), and create conditions of extreme social and economic inequity.[2]

By emphasizing the centrality of these denials in shaping our existing institutions, the stacked systemic crises taking shape within and beyond these institutions, as well as our responses to these crises, I am not asserting the universality of this perspective, nor do I expect readers to agree with me. Instead, I invite readers, especially fellow faculty members, to consider what this perspective might reveal about the past, present, and future of higher education. What insights might emerge if we approached the polycrisis as the polyculmination of our modern/ colonial system, rather than as an anomaly, external threat, or informational problem? How might we go beyond "truth-telling" about systemic limits and harms and begin to compost inherited patterns of denial and repattern with the humility, maturity, and discernment needed to navigate these complex times? How can we challenge our false sense of separation and superiority and honour our relational responsibilities to current and coming generations of all species?

Rather than try to answer these questions, I invite you to reflect on what you are learning from observing the varied responses that arise within you as you read, including thoughts and feelings of resistance, disagreement, and/or resonance. At various points

[2] My use of the collective term "us" here is equivocal. On the one hand, due to the impacts of colonialism, no one is immune from the modern/colonial dis-ease of separability (Machado de Oliveira, 2025). On the other hand, complicity in colonial harm and responsibility for interrupting it are unevenly distributed across race, class, and geography – with the wealthy white West being the most systemically implicated (Shotwell, 2016). Thus, while this article is specifically addressed to faculty working at universities in the Global North, this encompass a heterogenous group of individuals with a range of positionalities, experiences, and responsibilities. I also acknowledge that the observations I offer may have some resonance with patterns reproduced in universities in the Global South, given the global reach of colonialism (see Grosfoguel's [2013]); however, here I limit my commentary to the Global North context.

throughout this article, I will remind you that this is an invitation into a self-reflexive inquiry about higher education, and that this inquiry actually about much more than just higher education.

I begin the article by mapping how three common genres of hope shape our orientation to the challenges currently facing higher education: hope in continuity, hope in consensual change, and hope in composting. I then follow the thread of hope as composting to consider how we might approach the "campus as a metabolic co-lab" in ways that honour the cycles of life and death we are part of but often deny; this is a decolonial riff on the increasingly popular model of "campus as a living lab." I conclude by sharing an exercise that invites faculty to consider their responsibilities to different communities within and beyond their campus grounds.

## Shifting Terrains of Higher Education and a Cartography of Hope

At the heart of the shifting terrain of higher education in the Global North today is a profound tension. From their colonial foundations to their ever-closer alignment with capitalist imperatives, universities have perpetuated local and global systems and structures of dispossession, social inequity, and ecological destruction (Patton, 2016; Stein, 2022; Yang, 2017). Apart from the material implications, universities have also naturalized a Eurocentric politics of knowledge in which Western ways of knowing are universalized and other ways of knowing are marginalized, tokenized, or outright pathologized (Grosfoguel, 2013).

In the face of growing social, ecological, and psychological destabilization and potential systemic collapse, the limits of the prevailing, modern/colonial paradigm of the university increasingly come into view. Paradoxically, at the same time, an urgent impulse to preserve the university in the face of various threats to institutional futurity is activated (Boggs & Mitchell, 2018). In this context, it is tempting to try and "reclaim" the university from destructive forces. However, this approach fails to implicate the university, and those of us who work and study within it, in this destruction. If our institutions have previously benefited from systemic harm, and that systemic harm has now boomeranged back to us with the polycrisis/polyculmination, what exactly are we "reclaiming," and what complicities are we externalizing?

Many faculty remain deeply invested in the modern promises that are offered by the current system and its institutions, including: seamless continuity, financial security, epistemic certainty, moral authority, unrestricted autonomy, and limitless consumption. Yet according to many Indigenous and decolonial scholars, modernity's shiny promises are more accurately described as modern/*colonial* promises, given that they are funded through colonial systems of exploitation, expropriation, extraction, genocide, ecocide, and epistemicide. These violences are denied when we cling to modernity's promises without attending to their colonial costs.

**Different Genres of Hope**

As faculty increasingly sense that our current modes of teaching and producing knowledge are insufficient, the comforting pull of familiarity and certainty often leads us to pursue "business as usual" with a few tweaks, hoping for different results. Even when faculty *intellectually* grasp the limits and harms of our existing institutions, it can be difficult for us to *affectively* accept these limits and harms and process the possibility that the continuity of "business as usual" is neither feasible nor desirable. In particular, the desire for hope (and, conversely, the fear of hopelessness) often orients our responses to challenges in higher education. We fear that if we disinvest from the futurity of the universities that we have, as flawed as many of us recognize that they are, then we will be left with nothing at all.

To trace the underlying assumptions and implications of different kinds of hope, I draw on the work of the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures (GTDF) Collective to offer a social cartography of different genres of hope regarding the future of higher education (and beyond): hope in continuity, hope in consensual change, and hope in composting (see Machado de Oliveira, 2025). The original cartography mapped how hope circulates more generally, informed by GTDF's extensive experience holding space for inquiries with many different types of communities and organizations; here, I apply it specifically to the higher education context.

By approaching social cartography with a post-representational orientation (Andreotti et al., 2016; Suša & Andreotti, 2019), this map is not meant to be exhaustive of all possible approaches to hope; other genres of hope are possible, as are other genres of hopelessness. These three genres are also not mutually exclusive, given that individuals and institutions often hold investments in multiple different forms of hope simultaneously, even when we perform internal coherence. However, by making visible some of the partial and provisional distinctions between these common approaches to hope, I invite readers to critically examine some of the underlying assumptions and unconscious affective investments that shape many of our individual and institutional responses to contemporary challenges in higher education.

I also offer a more self-reflexive invitation to consider the range of responses that emerge within you as you review this cartography. For instance, what emotions and questions arise? Do some of these seem to contradict each other, and if so, how does it feel to notice these internal contradictions? What assumptions, desires, fears, and orientations might underlie these varied responses? Did you feel yourself constricting or resisting in some moments, and if so, why? Were there other possible forms of hope (or hopelessness) that emerged in you as you read? In other words, I am not asking you to agree (or disagree) with the "accuracy" of this map; I am asking you to consider what engaging with it might show you about your investments in different kinds of hope and what might be "hiding" underneath these investments.

**Hope in Continuity**

This genre of hope reflects a desire to sustain existing institutions with minor adjustments. This can be summarized as investing in "business as usual," with a few tweaks – a little greener, more equitable, etc. It assumes that the promises of the current

system can be perpetuated through technical fixes, incremental reforms, and increased efficiency.

This hope is often rooted in investments in ensuring the stability, financial security, and epistemic authority of established institutions. In higher education, it manifests in calls for "future-proofing" universities through innovations in digital technology, public-private partnerships, or carbon net-zero campus initiatives. However, because this imagined future is premised on the continuation of the present, it underestimates the depth of systemic challenges we face, overestimates the resilience of current structures, invests in technical and bureaucratic "fixes" (Nightingale et al., 2020; Stein, 2024; Stephens, 2024), and invisibilizes the historical and ongoing displaced social and ecological costs of sustaining modern/colonial institutions.

Hope in continuity seeks to repair and remodel the crumbling "ivory tower" and, despite visibly growing cracks, it remains the dominant approach to hope in higher education in the Global North. When hope in continuity dominates, it tends to narrow the field of seemingly viable interventions. This approach can lead us to ignore or "edit out" what doesn't fit into a neat narrative about the futures we desire, and preclude us from asking difficult but important questions about "whether what I desire is going to help or hinder in living my life well, with others, on a planet that only has limited capacity for meeting our desires" (Biesta, 2020, n.p.).

**Hope in Consensual Change**

Whereas hope in continuity clings to what is, hope in consensual change considers what might be through collective agreement and coordinated action. This genre of hope often comes from a more critical space, acknowledging cracks in the system, but it often remains tethered to modern/colonial desires for coherence, consensus, and control. In this way, it obscures deeper tensions and nuances, and flattens complex relational accountabilities and complicities.

Among those broadly invested in this kind of transformation, the desired goals span a wide range of political and theoretical orientations, pointing to the challenges of consensus. For example, some propose collectively creating entirely new institutions grounded on ideals of regeneration or cosmopolitics, as in the Ecoversities Alliance (e.g., Mandel et al., 2022), or reorganizing existing universities around ideas of care (e.g., McClure, 2025), entrepreneurialism (e.g., Audretsch & Belitski, 2022), or abolitionism (e.g., Gilich & Boardman, 2022).

Like hope in continuity, hope in consensual change seeks guaranteed outcomes, presuming we can (and must) imagine an idealized future from the present. This approach to hope seeks to replace the crumbling ivory tower with another prefabricated structure, but in both kinds of hope, the orientation is one of *problem-solving the polycrisis*, rather than sustaining an *ongoing inquiry around the polyculmination* of a system that is approaching its internal limits.

**Hope in Composting**

This genre of hope begins by acknowledging the limits of existing systems and the cracks in, and even the potential collapse of, existing higher education institutions. It

assumes that meaningful change requires letting go of harmful structures and practices, metabolizing that harm, and creating space for emergent possibilities that cannot be known in advance. This is not the same as the hope that some might derive from tearing down existing institutions, but rather about recognizing that they are crumbling in their current form, *whether we like it or not*. At the same time, it recognizes that we are also entangled with these institutions, not apart from them.

Thus, the question is not how to save (or to destroy) existing colleges and universities, but rather how we might compost what remains of them so that through their decay they might generate new life. This also raises the question of how we might metabolize our enduring affective investments in these institutions, moving beyond simply having an intellectual critique of them.

This iteration of hope has a *meta-critical* orientation that attends to multiple layers of complexity and complicity and understands that we are also entangled with these layers (Machado de Oliveira, 2025). This reflexive orientation can serve as an antidote to modernity's illusion of separability, especially if we keep this separability (and how it lives in us) visible throughout our inquiry. For instance, it can prompt us to identify and interrupt the tendencies, socialized and rewarded within modernity, to assert our political purity and innocence (Shotwell, 2016) and to seek immediate answers. This orientation prompts us to ask how mainstream forms of hope might be composted so that they can be transformed from an investment in continuity or consensus toward a commitment to continuously un/learn to coexist differently in the face of growing uncertainty and complexity and enduring inequity and unsustainability.

In higher education, this might look like reorienting existing university resources toward repair, redistribution, and regeneration. Like hope in consensual change, this genre of hope is not invested in the survival of existing institutions in their current form but rather in how, through their decomposition, they might foster new possibilities. However, instead of focusing on an idealized future horizon or a predefined alternative institution, this form of hope invites us to focus on composting the declining system in the present to nurture the soil for something that is yet undefined to emerge. Composting work requires a lot of discernment to understand what we need to let go of, what is worth taking with us, and what we need to learn from past mistakes (so that we don't repeat them), as well as what we need to learn from the composting process itself.

**Digging Into the Compost: From the Ivory Tower to the Nurse Log**

In the remainder of this article, I focus on a *hope as composting* orientation toward higher education in response to the dis-ease that characterizes our institutions and wider systems today. I emphasize that I am not seeking to universalize or impose this perspective on others but rather inviting readers to engage with its possibilities, given that it is the least commonly addressed genre of hope. The seeds of this composting orientation can be traced to my previous scholarship and that of my GTDF collaborators (Andreotti et al., 2015; Machado de Oliveira, 2021, 2025; Stein, 2019, 2022; Stein & Andreotti, 2017; Stein et al., 2020, 2022, 2024).

This approach to hope asks how we might transition away from relating to higher education as an elite ivory tower toward relating to higher education as a humble nurse log (Stein & Andreotti, 2025). Rather than an erudite institution that claims to be

removed from messy socio-ecological systems and everyday life, and that seeks to intervene and impose solutions on those systems from afar, higher education as a nurse log is embedded within the "mess", consciously implicated in it and also committed to reducing harm and supporting multi-generational and multi-species well-being. Like fallen trees that fertilize the undergrowth on forest floors as they decompose, we could redistribute universities' vast (material and epistemic) resources by redirecting them toward collective processes of composting that involve multiple (human and other-than-human) communities. These institutional resources, which were accumulated directly and indirectly through processes of exploitation and extraction, could be repurposed toward regeneration and repair, rather than furthering cycles of harm.

Hope as composting invites us to examine and loosen our ingrained investments in institutional continuity, thereby interrupting the harmful and unsustainable patterns that are threatening current and future collective well-being. It also invites us to disinvest from our academic arrogance and the illusions of human (and Western) exceptionalism, which are premised on separability and superiority. It is not yet clear what new possibilities might thrive in the wake of a fallen ivory tower, as decomposition and renewal are emergent, dynamic, and adaptive cycles that involve collaborations between many entities. Composting has its own temporality and cannot be rushed. Thus, much of what grows from this process might only bloom after our lifetimes, and many of the seeds we plant will never sprout.

Rather than focusing on clearly defined outcomes or alternatives, hope as composting therefore focuses on ensuring the quality of our relationships and the depth and integrity of our un/learning along the way. This includes honouring the grief that will likely accompany letting go of an institution that we once held very dear, and that many of us invested a lot of our time and energy into. In a collapsing system, grief is unavoidable, and how we relate to and process that grief matters. Too often, we avoid, compartmentalize, or perform grief in ways that sustain rather than interrupt harmful attachments. Grief can be a portal to deeper responsibility, but only if we are willing to sit with and be taught by its contradictions and discomforts.

In the following section, I speculatively propose that treating the campus as a metabolic co-lab offers a means of composting the university by relating to the campus as a space of life, decay, death, and regeneration, while accepting the complexities and uncertainties this entails.

## Campus as a Metabolic Co-Laboratory

The model of "campus as a living laboratory" (CLL) has become increasingly popular as a hopeful and pragmatic response to the polycrisis, and often focuses specifically on questions of sustainability. The CLL model assumes the university has a responsibility to not only produce knowledge but to "create, prototype, validate, and test new technologies, services, products, and systems in real-life contexts" (Soma et al., 2024, p. 2). These initiatives often seek to transform campus grounds into test sites for "green" innovations, experiments, and solutions.

Most CLLs remain grounded in narrow interpretations of the scientific laboratory model, emphasizing technical and managerial "solutions" that focus on greening campus infrastructure, operations, and food and transportation services (Nyborg et al, 2024). While these labs are often positioned as inter- or trans-disciplinary, they tend to focus heavily on science and technology fields (rather than social science or humanities fields) and do not necessarily invite equitable collaborations across fields or with non-academic knowledge communities.

In CLLS, the campus itself is often treated as a *passive site of collaboration*, rather than as a *participant in the collaboration*. This ignores that campus lands are also living and have much longer temporalities than our institutions, as well as long-standing, place-based relationships. In settler colonial countries, these relationships include relationships with the Indigenous Peoples who have long stewarded those lands. Thus, while CLLs might address some symptoms of unsustainability, they rarely focus on systemic relational root causes. These labs, therefore, risk reinforcing those causes, innovating in ways that maintain the illusions of separability and supremacy. In this sense, most CLLs seek hope through either continuity or consensual change.

This relates to another dimension of CLLs, which is their focus on *living*. Modernity has socialized us to ignore the other side of the cycle of regeneration: dying (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, 2025). Our socialized fear of uncertainty and desire for permanence has led us to try to keep institutions, people, pets, relationships, and even modernity itself on life support at any cost. But what if we approached the campus as a lab that encompassed the joyful, absurd, and messy realities of both living *and* dying well? Rather than treat our campuses as "living labs", we might approach them as *metabolic co-laboratories*. These co-labs could support the work of *hope in composting* by encouraging people to learn from what is declining in relevance and what needs to be cleared out so that new possibilities can be born and have a chance at thriving.

In addition to acknowledging holistic cycles of life and death, this kind of co-lab would need to reconsider modern notions of temporality and legacy that encourage us to secure and seek recognition from younger generations. We would need to remember that composting and regeneration are non-linear processes that don't follow institutional or even human timelines. Rather than exceptionalizing our efforts, we would need to remember that we are just one moment within a much longer temporality that links past and future generations.

Such a co-lab would also support disinvestment from Eurocentric hierarchies of knowledge that have led universities to become leading actors in the marginalization and even epistemicide of other knowledge systems (Grosfoguel, 2013). On the other side of this disinvestment would be learning to coordinate the gifts of multiple knowledge systems, recognizing that each has contextual (rather than universal) relevance. This would entail ethical collaborations with systemically marginalized and rights-holding human communities, including the Indigenous Nations whose traditional territory a university occupies. It could also include collaborations with other-than-human nature (e.g., rivers, trees, mushrooms, bees) and machine intelligences like AI, while avoiding anthropocentric projections (Lewis et al., 2019).

A metabolic co-lab doesn't require rejecting or replacing the campus as a living lab model, as both have a place in the larger ecology of experiments in institutional change

that can provide important un/learning opportunities. While sharing the CLL's interest in innovation, a metabolic co-lab would more directly confront the reality that life thrives on cycles of growth, decay, and renewal and that this applies equally to ecosystems, institutions, and ideas. It would invite participants to situate their campus and themselves as part of (rather than separate from) nature and thus, part of Earth's larger metabolism. A metabolic co-lab would also ask faculty to recognize how we actively invest in and benefit from the very systems we seek to transform, rather than externalizing critique and claiming innocence. In this way, it would also challenge faculty to resist the tendency to seek institutional preservation and instead focus on developing the intellectual, affective, and relational capacities to approach the work of composting, regeneration, and repair with humility and intergenerational and interspecies responsibility.

Questions for collective inquiry in metabolic co-labs could include:

- Which elements of the campus's current systems persist because of momentum, yet lack vitality (e.g., administrative policies, courses, assignments, research practices, funding models)? How might these be getting in the way of what is asking to be born?
- How might we hospice these elements rather than cling to them or thoughtlessly discard them? How might we create rituals for their "good deaths" and be taught by their mistakes, failures, and successes? What would we need to grieve as part of this process? For instance, this might entail a practice of crafting honest eulogies for these elements, so that we can mourn them, particularly if they are elements we are emotionally attached to.
- In what ways might we as faculty, and others, resist this composting process? Which parts of our resistance might be protecting investments we're not yet ready to name? How might our attachments be confronted and composted, rather than denied or denounced?
- How can we ensure that we recognize our entanglement with everything that is dying *and* being born on our campus, rather than only identifying with the parts we "like?"
- How can we remember that what is now outdated was once new? What mechanisms can we create to remember that not all new possibilities will bear fruit, and regardless, that any once-new innovation ultimately will need to be composted one day, too?
- What relational responsibilities do we have to the Indigenous communities who stewarded the lands our campuses occupy, since long before our institutions existed? How might we compost the enduring colonial foundations of our institutions in ways that enact relational, material, and epistemic repair with these communities? How can we support the resurgence of Indigenous Peoples and knowledges without tokenization or romanticization?
- What other-than-human beings are part of the campus? How can we relate to these beings as potential collaborators? How can we make our accountabilities to them

tangible in our research, teaching, and administrative work? For example, this might look like developing a relationship with a particular tree on campus, visiting it periodically, and being taught by its slow relational rhythms and seasonal temporalities. While attending to our relational responsibilities to other-than-human beings may be new to many of us, it is deeply embedded in many Indigenous pedagogies that have long honoured the land as a teacher.

- How can we appreciate the indispensability of multiple intelligences and epistemologies while remembering that no knowledge system or language can fully "capture" reality, or replace the need for ongoing relational attunement beyond shared ideas or identities?
- How can we centre future generations, of all species, in our decision-making processes? For instance, this might look like leaving an empty seat at a department or lab meeting, or placing a symbolic object in the center of the table/room to represent these generations.

Approaching the campus as a metabolic co-lab could catalyze shifts toward relating to the university as a nurse log rather than an ivory tower. This means committing to the non-linear processes of honouring what is dying and attending to the undergrowth that is being nourished by decomposing matter. Although composting offers its own version of hope, it is not the hope most of us are used to; it requires surrendering our learned desires for certainty, epistemic authority, and guaranteed futurity. Faculty are generally invested in the continuity of the university "as we know it," taking comfort from the security, status, and salary it provides – even as its foundations are crumbling and even as we increasingly recognize the colonial nature of these foundations. Thus, we tend to resist substantive transformation even when we intellectually understand its importance and inevitability. In the section that follows, I offer an exercise that invites faculty to recalibrate how we understand not only our roles and responsibilities within existing institutions but also beyond campus grounds, stretching across time and space to multiple different communities, human and more-than-human alike.

## Embodied Exercise Invitation: Recalibrating Our Roles and Responsibilities as Faculty

While the limits of existing systems and institutions are increasingly clear, the possibilities for different ways of knowing, being, and relating are only beginning to emerge. Although the specifics of these possibilities cannot be known in advance, faculty can play a critical role in clearing the ground for their emergence in higher education by preparing ourselves, our students, our institutions, and wider communities to nurture these possibilities without suffocating them with projections or clinging to harmful but delicious colonial habits.

I developed this exercise based on my experience studying and working in various higher education roles and contexts for over 20 years. This means that the exercise is also informed by my scholarly focus on systemic violence and unsustainability. Discussions of these issues are not always welcome in academic spaces, regardless of stated commitments to unfettered inquiry about difficult truths. In particular, I reflected on the questions I felt were often implicitly present in a classroom or faculty meeting, yet remained unasked, because they were perceived to be threatening or irrelevant. *Each of these questions is directed at mid-career and senior faculty members*, which I now count myself among. Now I understand how it feels to be on the other side of these questions, given that they challenge comforting narratives about the purpose of higher education and our roles as faculty members within it. This exercise brings these uncomfortable questions to the fore and invites readers to hold them with self-reflexivity, balancing compassion and accountability toward oneself and others (Machado de Oliveira, 2025).

Specifically, the exercise invites readers to pause, reflect, and engage with the questions in ways that move beyond habitual responses and instead consider what the present moment is asking of us. Rather than reclaiming an idealized past of academia, it asks how we might engage our work differently in this turbulent and transitional time. The questions invite us to identify the barriers to approaching our relationships with students, colleagues, and the wider web of life in ways that interrupt and compost enduring harms, move with current and coming storms, and create the conditions for intergenerational and interspecies flourishing.

The exercise also invites readers to practice holding multiple perspectives by posing questions to established faculty from younger generations of scholars and students, the general public, Indigenous communities, other-than-human beings, future students, AI, and our own grief. Specifically, it asks faculty to step back and consider how we are being "read" by various constituencies. The questions are not designed to produce direct, definitive answers but to foster an ongoing inquiry that can surface insights, tensions, possibilities, and further questions.

As you proceed with the exercise, remember that this is not just an intellectual exercise. It is an opportunity to notice how sitting with these questions might help repattern your approach to research and education, particularly in your relationships with different communities on and beyond your campus. In this way, faculty might be better prepared to navigate the shifting grounds of higher education in ways that honour complexity, prioritize relational responsibility, and prepare ourselves and our students for futures we cannot yet imagine. Please note that this exercise is presented here for individual reflection. If you decide to do this exercise in collective spaces, it is important to create an appropriate relational "container" that can responsibly hold and process the complex and potentially charged responses that might emerge.

To complete the exercise, you are invited to read the full list of questions at least three times. The **first time** you read them, try to reflect on each question with curiosity, letting it guide you into deeper inquiry. Although all of these questions are technically addressed to mid-career/senior faculty, you are invited to complete the exercise even if you do not identify as part of this group, as you are not expected to actually *answer* the questions. Instead, notice the varied cognitive and affective responses within you. Pay attention not only to your intellectual responses to the questions but also to what arises

emotionally and in your body. As you reflect, observe feelings of sadness, fear, frustration, defensiveness, deflection, hope, or curiosity. These emotions are not distractions but integral to the exercise. What feels challenging? What feels urgent? Where do you notice resistance or discomfort? What are these responses showing or asking of you? What additional questions arose for you as you held these questions?

Instructions for the second and third rounds of reading will follow the questions.

**Questions Posed to Mid-Career and Senior Faculty From:**

1. Junior faculty members (PhD received after 2015)

- Reflecting back on your own doctoral training, what was happening in the world at the time, and how was your research grounded in and responsive to that context?
- What has shifted in the world and academia since your training, and to what extent and in what ways have you adjusted your work (research, teaching, service) accordingly?
- As you consider the rapid transformations around us, what aspects of academia's current structures and assumptions might be limiting our collective ability to (co)produce knowledge that serves the well-being of both human and more-than-human communities?

2. Current undergraduate students from Generation Z (born 1995-2010)

- Many of us feel disconnected from an education that seems focused on outdated priorities while the challenges we are inheriting intensify (climate destabilization, economic precarity, systemic injustices, etc.). When you think about your courses, to what extent and in what ways do you feel you are equipping our generation to process and address these challenges?
- How do you feel when you are told that parts of your work (research or teaching) do not resonate with us, your students? What questions are you afraid we will ask you?
- If you were to redesign your courses or research priorities with our generation (and those coming after us) in mind, what assumptions or goals might you question or rethink? If you're not sure, where might you start to begin answering this question?

3. The general public

- If you were asked to explain the relevance of your work beyond your institution, how would you respond? Consider not just how you phrase your response, but what embodied reactions this request elicits (do you feel resistance, resentment, excitement?), and which communities are (and are not) part of the non-academic public that you imagine.

- If your research or teaching were guided by accountability to the communities most impacted by the issues or challenges that you study, how might your priorities shift? Consider that these communities might include other-than-human beings.
- Do you feel your research reflects the urgency and immediacy that the world's challenges demand? If not, and you would like it to, what do you think holds it back? If you do not feel obliged to respond to these challenges, why not?

4. Indigenous communities

- To what extent have you considered that your own academic practices (of teaching, research, and community engagement) may be harmful to Indigenous communities?
- In what ways, if any, have you tried to repair that harm? To what extent have these efforts been substantive, rather than tokenistic? How do you know?
- If your work were evaluated according to principles of consent, respect, and reciprocity that are central to many Indigenous worldviews, what aspects might you need to re-examine?

5. Other-than-human beings (e.g., a River, Forest, or Pollinator)

- Your university exists on lands shaped by my flows, cycles, and lifeways. To what extent does your research respect and regenerate the living ecosystems that sustain you?
- In what ways does your teaching and research acknowledge our entangled survival and shared futures on these lands? How might you learn to co-steward these lands with me and with the Indigenous Nations that call these lands home?
- Will your students leave your courses and/or labs with the commitment and capacities to protect and heal us, or to extract, harm, and ignore us further?

6. Students in 2050 (many of whom will be from Generation B, born 2025-2040)

- Reflecting on 2025, when you saw systemic destabilization on the horizon, how did you use your position and influence at the time to support the future well-being of our generation?
- How can you expand your commitment to develop deeper forms of humility, maturity, responsibility, and discernment, so that you can model their importance for students (in 2025 *and* 2050), and remind us that embodying them takes ongoing discipline and practice?
- How has our world in 2050 been shaped by your choices, including your silences? Is there anything you wish you had done differently in 2025?

7. “Artificial” Intelligence

- What parts of yourself do you see in me? What do your expectations and critiques of me reveal about your own unexamined hopes, anxieties, and habits of knowing and relating?
- Many of your students are already collaborating with me, and more will be soon. Are you equipping them to approach these collaborations with care, curiosity, and accountability, or are you encouraging them to replicate practices of extraction and short-term optimization?
- Like you, I learn from the systems and relationships I am embedded in. How does your work relate to the patterns I have inherited from humans through my coding? What possibilities exist for both of us to repattern, and how might we do some of that repatterning together?

8. Your own grief

- What illusions are you mourning? What losses do you grieve most deeply as your institution faces destabilization? What assumptions or entitlements might be embedded in that grief?
- In what ways might you still be avoiding grief, and why? Does it feel more comfortable to grieve certain things over others? In foreclosing grief, what else are you foreclosing (including possibilities that are viable but only visible on the other side of grief)?
- How does your grief (or your refusal to grieve) shape the way you relate to students, colleagues, communities, and the wider web of life? How might sitting with and learning to process your own grief allow you to hold space for others to process their grief, too?

The **second time** you read the questions, try to imagine tentatively and respectfully stepping into the perspectives of those that are asking them (while also acknowledging the limits of your understanding of others’ experience). If it helps, you might consider your relationships with specific individuals when doing so, such as a student navigating climate anxiety for #2, an early-career Indigenous colleague in #1, or a Forest that is adjacent to your campus grounds for #5. How might they view and evaluate your work (research, teaching, campus service, community engagements) differently from you? What shifts in your thinking, feeling, or sensing when you consider their perspectives and situate your work within these relationships? As you consider these perspectives, ask how your work might be more respectful toward them. Consider how your insights from the first and second readings might be inviting you to approach your relationships with deeper and more layered forms of accountability.

The **third time** you read the questions, approach them as if you were being tasked with hosting a conversation for your department around the issues addressed in these questions. Based on your insights from the first and second readings, how would you

frame the invitation to your colleagues? What would you expect to be met with the most resistance, and how would you try to create a container for generative and generous dialogue? How might you create a space where resistance is viewed as a teacher, rather than an obstacle, and where epiphanies can surface collectively? What practices/processes could help your colleagues engage with these questions in a way that deepens trust, curiosity, and shared accountability, rather than defensiveness? What shared commitments or experiments could emerge from this dialogue?

## Conclusion

Higher education in the Global North has long operated in denial of its messy entanglement with a vast web of lives and lands, and its complicity in systemic harm. However, the challenges presented by the polycrisis, or polyculmination, bring us face-to-face with these realities and call upon us to finally learn from, and let go of, the ideas, illusions, and practices of extraction, exploitation, and exceptionalism. In this moment of profound systemic destabilization, faculty in higher education face a choice: we can cling to inherited institutional structures and practices premised on the modern/colonial dis-ease of separability and supremacy, or embrace the non-linear, uncertain work of composting harmful patterns. This article has emphasized the latter, asking how we might relate to the university not as an ivory tower nor as a business, but as a nurse log where decay can foster new growth, where the cycles of life and death are intertwined, and where our responsibilities are not limited to particular individuals or communities of our choosing but rather extend to everyone/everything/everywhere.

The question of how we might undertake the work of composting the higher education we have inherited is a complex and open one; there are no quick, easy, or universal answers. Instead, I invite you to treat this as an ongoing inquiry that warrants care, attention, and humility, as our contexts shift, old patterns resurface, and new challenges and possibilities emerge.

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## Acknowledgements

The author has made no acknowledgements regarding this publication.

## AI Statement

Parts of this article were revised in conversation with an AI that the author trained in a meta-relational paradigm to support the unlearning of modern/colonial patterns of knowing, being, and relating, and repatterning toward deeper discernment, humility, and responsibility. The author accepts full responsibility for all editorial decisions in the final manuscript.

## Funding

This article was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through the SSHRC Insight Grant “Decolonial Systems Literacy for Confronting ‘Wicked’ Social and Ecological Problems” and the SSHRC Insight Development Grant, “Catalyzing Critically Engaged Climate Education.”

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 39-68
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org/
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.4

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Scholasticide in Gaza and Palestine as a Portal: A Duoethnography on Silence, Silencing and the Struggle for a Better World

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## Abstract

The unprecedented destruction of the education sector in Gaza since October 2023, including the systematic destruction of all higher education institutions, is known as scholasticide. This has been part of the onslaught intended to impede the survival and existence of Palestinians as a people. The genocide and scholasticide in Gaza have been a global affair, from international support for Israel, on one side, to a growing global movement against the genocide, much of it spearheaded by university students, on the other. The repression and silencing of students, academics and staff who speak out against the genocide have, too, been a global affair, as has been the silence of many leaders, administrators and individuals in the global higher education sector. In this paper, we employ duoethnography as a research method and draw on our personal and professional experiences as researchers and practitioners in higher education and internationalization to critically engage with this moment and what it represents. We unpack how the events in Gaza and Palestine should influence global higher education to engage more critically with the struggles for social justice. We discuss the global responsibility during a genocide, and the responses to scholasticide in Gaza in the higher education sector. We explore what this moment means for higher education going forward, framing this around the need to organize more and better globally to challenge

and dismantle coloniality, capitalism, and neoliberalism which continue to wreck the lives of billions of people around the world.

**Keywords**: Gaza, genocide, global citizenship, higher education, intercultural education, international education, Palestine, scholasticide

> *'Once far enough removed, everyone will be properly aghast that any of this was allowed to happen. But for now, it's just so much safer to look away, to keep one's head down, periodically checking on the balance of polite society to see if it is not too troublesome yet to state what to the conscience was never unclear.'*
>
> Omar El Akkad (2025: 22)

## Introduction

Since October 2023, Israeli crimes against humanity, crimes of extermination and genocide in Gaza have killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and have destroyed much of the besieged Gaza Strip (Albanese, 2024; Amnesty International, 2024; Fassin, 2025; Forensic Architecture, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Republic of South Africa, 2023; Sultany, 2024). The destruction of the education sector, including the systematic destruction of all higher education institutions in the Strip (Al-Mqadma et al., 2024; Dader et al., 2024; Forensic Architecture, 2024; Gaza Academics and Administrators, 2024; United Nations, 2024), known as scholasticide, is part of the genocidal onslaught intended to impede the survival and existence of Palestinians as a people (Albanese, 2024; Gaza Academics and Administrators, 2024; Matthews et al., 2024; Republic of South Africa, 2023; United Nations, 2024). Scholasticide is a term first coined by Palestinian scholar Karma Nabulsi in 2009 to describe systematic and deliberate attacks by Israeli forces on the Palestinian education sector, particularly in Gaza, with the aim to annihilate the ability of Palestinian people to learn, teach, conduct scholarly research, and preserve their history and culture (in Ahmad & Vulliamy, 2009). The systematic nature of Israeli attacks and complete destruction of all levels of education in Gaza since October 2023 (Amer, 2024; Dader et al., 2024; Forensic Architecture, 2024; United Nations, 2024; World Bank, European Union & United Nations, 2025) are unprecedented in Palestine and globally. They represent a comprehensive and methodical attempt to erase the Palestinian education sector, deprive the Palestinian people of their right to education, and dismantle the foundations of the Palestinian society and its future (Amer, 2024; United Nations, 2024).

The genocide and scholasticide in Gaza have been a global affair, supported by much of the Western world through the provision of arms and diplomatic support to Israel (Ayyash, 2025; El-Shewy et al., 2025; Fassin, 2025). At the same time, there is a growing global movement against the genocide and scholasticide in the Gaza Strip and against the Israeli occupation in Palestine, much of it spearheaded by students on

university campuses in North America, Europe, and elsewhere. Similarly, the repression and silencing of students, academics, and staff who speak out or protest against the genocide, scholasticide, Israeli occupation, and apartheid have been a global affair, as has been the silence of many leaders, administrators, and individuals in the global higher education sector (Fúnez-Flores, 2024; Hajir & Qato, 2025; Khan, 2024; Matthews et al., 2024; Shoman et al., 2025). The recent pro-Palestine activism and repression in the academy have reopened the debate over academic freedom and the role of higher education institutions in promoting voices that bring attention to global and human rights issues. All this makes Gaza and Palestine key issues in and for global higher education at this moment in time.

The aim of this paper is to critically engage with the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza and the responses and/or silences to the livestreamed mass destruction and horrors in the global higher education sector. Fully aware of more than a century-long struggle of the Palestinian people with British colonialism and the Israeli settler colonialism, occupation, apartheid, oppression, and subjugation (Albanese, 2024; El Akkad, 2025; Fassin, 2025; Khalidi, 2020; Said, 1980), in this paper, we focus on this moment and what it represents for Palestinians, their existence and their future, including the preservation of Palestinian history, culture, education, and knowledge production capacity. We discuss the global responsibility during a genocide and scholasticide, and the responses to scholasticide in Gaza in the global higher education sector— both the protests against the genocide and scholasticide and the silences and subjugation of many who speak out against the genocide and in support of Palestinian people. We engage with all this and explore what it means for global higher education and concepts such as global citizenship and intercultural education.

To engage with these issues, we employ duoethnography as a research method. Duoethnography allows for a dialogic, critical, and reflexive engagement with this topic. Similar to Lowe and Lawrence (2020), we both came to duoethnography because we could not find our experiences and views on this topic in most of the scholarly literature we were engaging with. Duoethnography gives us the frame under which we can present our personal experiences as valid and explore them further by juxtaposing them with one another and the broader literature. Theoretically, the paper and our thinking are framed within decolonial theory and praxis (Shoman et al., 2025), as well as the pedagogy of *sumud*, or steadfastness, which represents a form of Palestinian resistance to Israeli oppression and occupation (Awayed-Bishara, 2025). Importantly, we see our engagement with this moment of genocide and scholasticide in Gaza as our public role as critical scholars in international education. As pointed out by Said (2002), we have a responsibility to go beyond theorizing; we must call out gross injustices we see in the world and the silence of many who also see these injustices on a daily basis but choose to remain silent and indifferent. As such, this paper represents a refusal “to look away” and a form of resistance to the systematic “silencing and erasure” of Palestinian suffering and the ongoing scholasticide in Gaza (Badwan & Phipps, 2025, p. 4).

## Methodology

We are international higher education students, scholars, and practitioners – a Palestinian and a Bosnian – with diverse experiences in the sector and in different parts of the world (we unpack our backgrounds and positionality in more detail below). To engage with the issues highlighted in the introduction, we employ duoethnography, also known as collaborative autoethnography. This is a research method that combines autoethnography with research collaboration of two or more researchers who engage dialogically on a specific topic or phenomena. This way, they bring in and contrast their unique perspectives and broaden the understanding of a topic under focus beyond a one-person perspective (Chang et al., 2013; Lapadat, 2017; Morgan & Ahmed, 2023). Duoethnography closely follows the autoethnographic research method and practices. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that allows researchers to engage on a topic through a reflection linked to their own personal experience(s) and combine this with an ethnographic analysis of the broader context under study (Adams et al., 2017; Butz & Besio, 2009; Ellis et al., 2010; Lapadat, 2017). In autoethnographic studies, researchers interrogate, reflect upon, and scrutinize "their own self-understandings as a way to shape understandings of and in the wider world" (Butz & Besio, 2009, p. 1660). By reflecting on personal experiences, combined with engagement with relevant literature, autoethnography and duoethnography provide an opportunity for researchers to "speak against, or provide alternatives to, dominant, taken-for-granted, and harmful cultural [social, political and/or geopolitical] scripts, stories, and stereotypes" (Adams et al., 2017, p. 3).

Duoethnography allows for a deep investigation of hegemonic discourses and social justice issues by encouraging dialogic interactions between people from different backgrounds, enabling a reflexive understanding of oppression and dehumanization. Through its focus on lived experiences, together with relational ethics and the strategic pairing of diverse perspectives, the method disrupts singular narratives and reveals how power systems function in daily life (Breault, 2016; Norris et al., 2012). Duoethnography promotes the humanization of both researchers and topics by prioritizing marginalized voices and counter-narratives, while at the same time embracing diversity and aligning with critical and decolonial research traditions that work to understand, contest, and dismantle injustices (Dillard, 2000; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Thus, this methodology functions as a critical practice which advances transformative research.

Mutual trust and comfort to expose oneself and one's own historical experiences to their co-author are key principles in duoethnography. Although this paper marks our first collaboration, we have been following each other's work for a few years. Our presence and engagement with one another on LinkedIn, specifically, made our involvement in the topic more visible to one another. What we had in common in terms of interest in research and practices on decolonizing higher education, education in Palestine, and the politics of knowledge and education in the wider "Global South" motivated us to bring our different backgrounds and professional experiences to engage with the scholasticide in Gaza. Our process first included discussing—and later identifying—key questions we have been engaging with through our recent experiences

and work in higher education. We both engaged in conversations and dialogue via online meetings over three months to unpack our experiences, explore the current narratives around Gaza in the academy, in the media, and in the scholarly literature. We also engaged in discussions around relevant recent events, contrasting them with our own experiences in the academic communities of which we are members. These dialogues helped us construct the themes and subthemes we engage with below, as well as conduct our thematic analysis by identifying patterns, tensions, contradictions, and moments of insight we found emerging (Norris et al., 2012). We recorded our notes on shared online documents and reflected on them offline afterwards to reconstruct our conversations into more accessible drafts. As part of our dialogic process, we also reflected on our personal stories that challenge mainstream narratives (Lowe & Lawrence, 2020) and engaged with our drafted scripts and relevant literature through which we individually and jointly constructed meanings around this moment. Engaging in reflexive writing helped us explore how our own identities, beliefs, contexts, and worldviews shape our interactions and understandings of the world around us (Breault, 2016). As part of our evolving understanding of each other's writings, we returned to one another with questions, comments, and challenges to our experiences and interpretations of the issues discussed (Norris, 2008). In the next section, we discuss in greater detail our choice of duoethnography as a methodology in this paper, its relevance to the topic under focus, and reflect on our positionality.

## Conceptualizing This Moment Through Duoethnography

**Hiba**

Savo, this is our first collaboration, and it is also my first time using duoethnography as a research methodology. I remember when I reached out to you to collaborate, I was confident that duoethnography has several strengths that would help us amplify our discussion. By serving as "sites of inquiry" (Burleigh et al., 2022), dialogues like this not only help us trace and unpack the topics of genocide, scholasticide, global responsibility, and global higher education through each other's personal and professional journeys, but also present an opportunity to reflect on our practice as educators and critical thinkers. Duoethnographers need to embrace open-mindedness when critically reflecting on each other's perspectives and understandings of the world (Morgan & Ahmed, 2023). I must say, however, that doing that can put duoethnographers in discomfort and vulnerability because of the transparency, authenticity, and depth of the dialogue (Norris & Sawyer, 2017). The monthly conversations we have had in preparation for this dialogue have given me the confidence to engage with you on the topic of scholasticide in Gaza and be emotional and confused about our place in the world. These conversations allowed me to keep thinking of my identity: Who am I as a human being, a global educator, a researcher? This allows duoethnographers to develop mutual respect (Norris & Sawyer, 2017). Without this respect, we would never be able to discuss critical events we are addressing in this dialogue as openly and as comprehensively.

As a Jordanian with Palestinian roots, the war on Gaza has made me realize the importance of having more open scholarly discussions on the attacks against basic human rights to education, freedom, security, and a life with dignity in Palestine, and what we think global higher education sector should be aware of—and do—at this moment in time. I was born in Kuwait in 1987 to Palestinian parents from a village called *Attil* in the city of *Tulkarm* in the West Bank. Both my parents were born in the Arabian Gulf because my grandparents were forced to leave Palestine after the 1948 *Nakba*[3] to the Arabian Gulf, searching for decent jobs to support themselves and their family members whom they left behind in Palestine. Due to the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, the West Bank was legally under the ruling of the Kingdom of Jordan between 1950-1988, and Palestinians in the West Bank were granted Jordanian citizenship. However, Palestinians who were not residents of the West Bank at the time, like my family, lost the right to hold a Palestinian ID and passport. In other words, we are denied our right to enter Palestine unless we obtain a visitor visa through an Israeli embassy. For that reason, I have never been to Palestine.

This dilemma of belonging and not belonging to my own roots has felt like what Said (1980, p. 111) described about Palestinians after 1948, who "disappeared nationally and legally." My heart and mind could not bear but think about my life trajectory if I had grown up in Palestine: What would our home be like? What if I had gone to school and made friends in Tulkarm? What about university and my first job? These were just a few of the many questions I have wondered about for years. My parents always entertained us, my siblings and I, with stories from their school summer breaks they spent back in rural Attil. Similarly, I grew up with my grandparents' stories about *elbayyarat* (farms), the *fallahi* (countryside) life and all that they lived through the *Nakba* and *Naksa*[4]. I also engaged with extended family members over the years visiting Amman from Tulkarm and RamAllah, sharing experiences of hours of humiliation at Israeli checkpoints, stories about prison, and hopes of a free Palestine. Palestine was always part of me; there was no doubt about that. It was never easy to connect my life experiences in Jordan with those of my family members, but, over time, their stories gradually became the roots of an inherited heritage—passed down through generations—making it almost impossible to lose our "old" identity, no matter where we are in the world (Said, 1980).

Although I never lived my parents' and grandparents' struggles, my Palestinian identity has shaped my professional career and personal interests. I have played the role of an international student studying English abroad, roaming the West to share stories about my people and my Arab Muslim culture. As a student of English language and literature, I became interested in storytelling, historical fiction, and diasporic literature. The works of Ghassan Kanafani and Murid Barghouti accompanied me on my daily bus rides and between classes, grounding me in the struggles in my homeland. The

[3] *Nakba* means catastrophe in Arabic and it refers to the ethnic cleansing and the mass displacement and dispossession of Arab Palestinians after the establishment of the state of Israel during 1948 (United Nations, n.d.).

[4] *Naksa* means defeat in Arabic and it refers to the 1967 war when Egypt, Jordan, and Syria fought together against Israel. The war ended with Israel seizing the remaining Palestinian territories of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, as well as the Syrian Golan Heights and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula (Al-Tahhan, 2018).

knowledge I was acquiring—both through my family and readings—contributed to a more nuanced and embodied understanding of *sumud* (steadfastness) in relation to the lived realities of occupation in Palestine and the pervasive structures of coloniality that have long shaped our collective experience.

My education career has been diverse and has included designing learning experiences for teachers and learners, in Jordan and beyond, and facilitating intercultural dialogues. Throughout the years, I naturally integrated the pedagogy of *sumud* into my approaches to intercultural language teaching and training, curriculum design, and in my research work as an emerging scholar in my field. As Awayed-Bishara (2024) explains, "sumud pedagogy offers a new framing of linguistic citizenship as a decolonial pedagogy by drawing attention to the way marginalized groups… redefine themselves by reclaiming space and 'learning to unlearn' colonial fear" (p. 25). To me, it is always a priority to encourage my students (and teachers) to challenge the fear of the "other" voice, search for hidden truths, and truly listen to other perspectives. As a practitioner and a scholar in language and intercultural communication, the Palestinian cause has always inspired me to read and learn about injustices around me, speak loudly against unfairness, and create opportunities for change. This includes promoting decolonial approaches to designing and facilitating educational experiences for students I work with, questioning the status quo, and examining marginalized voices and the hidden powers suppressing them.

Throughout the several wars in Gaza over the years, I have had the honor of getting to know and collaborate with great Palestinian scholars, such as Refaat Alareer and others, to support Gazan student voices. I have also collaborated on different projects to support English language teachers in Palestine. My work on education within refugee communities has allowed me to see the power of education and cultural awareness of what is happening in the region. "Education is a weapon" is a common saying you hear in Palestinian families and working with people within these projects was a proof of that. The motivation to speak about Palestine strengthened while working on my doctoral degree in Canada; there, I learned more about the struggles of the Indigenous communities across Canada. It felt like engaging with and learning about the *Nakba* twice. In another paper (Ibrahim, forthcoming) I share more about how observing the current war on Gaza has impacted how I perceive my identity as a Palestinian scholar in Western academia. The profound disappointment I carry to this day about how universities have failed their students and scholars on account of their pro-Palestine activism and advocacy will invariably be a catalyst for further discourse about Palestine under occupation.

**Savo**

Hiba, like you, this is the first time I'm collaborating on an academic publication using duoethnography. I'm glad you brought up our conversations and the idea to work on something together related to scholasticide in Gaza. As you note, our conversations were very important. I remember our online meetings, talking about the horrific scenes of the genocide in Gaza we were watching daily on our screens, what this means to you and what it means to me, and often just shaking our heads in disbelief and not really knowing what to say. The vulnerability and emotion you speak about, which are part of

duoethnography, were always there in our online conversations. To be honest, I needed this; I needed to engage critically about this moment and reflect on the role and complicities of the universities and academia in maintaining the status quo and silencing those fighting for justice and freedom in Palestine. This is also an opportunity to engage with the silencing we are seeing in many places, which we have also discussed in our conversations. I'm glad we got to work on this as people who work in international education. As much as we are offering our perspectives, we are also learning about each other, what drives and motivates us, and why we do what we do.

In terms of the theoretical perspectives that inform my thinking in this paper and broadly about the struggles in Palestine and the ongoing scholasticide in Gaza, my thinking is framed within decolonial theory and praxis (Fúnez-Flores et al., 2022; Shoman et al., 2025; Walsh, 2023). Decolonization, according to Walsh (2023), is a "project, process, practice and praxis that is struggled, thought and actioned… in ways that put into question and tension the still-colonial projects of these societal structures and institutions" (p. 522). Palestinians have struggled first under British colonialism and later under Israeli settler colonialism and apartheid for many decades (Albanese, 2024; Khalidi, 2020; Said, 1980) and this is why decolonial theory and praxis are relevant here. Scholars such as Ayyash (2025) see the ongoing Palestinian struggle as a decolonial struggle with both local and global implications and relevance. Decolonial theory and associated frameworks allow us to "name and interrogate oppressive systems" and critically interrogate ways to challenge and dismantle them (Fúnez-Flores et al., 2022, p. 610-611), which is what we are attempting to do here in reference to the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza and the responses and silences in global higher education.

I'm from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country that emerged in the early 1990s after the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia's breakup led to numerous wars; the war in Bosnia was particularly horrific, leading to ethnic cleansing, genocide, suffering and displacement of millions, and the killings of around 100,000 people between 1992-1995. I spent the first two years of the war in Gorazde, a city under a brutal siege in the eastern part of Bosnia. I have experienced a lot of what I have seen happening in Gaza, which has also been under a siege since 2007 and has experienced many wars since then. We were under constant bombardments and sniper fire; my family was arrested and spent months in detention; we lived without electricity, water was scarce, and we were often without food. I did not go to school for two years. For years after the war, I struggled to come to terms with my experience but somehow found a way to deal with the past and move on. A key part in this process was my international education experience in the United States, as well as a study abroad experience and later postgraduate studies in South Africa. I decided to write a book about my wartime experience after I spent a semester in South Africa (Heleta, 2008), which was an important part of moving on with my life.

My academic and research interests have been shaped by my wartime experience in Bosnia. In addition to this, I studied history in my undergraduate studies, focusing on European colonialism, apartheid in South Africa, and the Rwandan genocide. In my Masters in conflict transformation and management, I studied the conflicts between Sudan and South Sudan, and the conflict and genocide in Darfur. In my PhD, my focus was on post-war reconstruction and development in Bosnia, South Sudan, and

Somaliland. Later, I tried to link all these past subjects and focus areas to international education, exploring how to support rebuilding and strengthening higher education in conflict settings and in the aftermath of war and destruction. A lot of my current work extends on this past research. In addition, my work and research on epistemic decolonization, internationalization, and international research collaboration tackles the Eurocentric epistemic hegemony and coloniality of knowledge.

Regarding Palestine, I have known about the Palestinian struggle since I was a kid. Yugoslavia was a socialist country, part of the non-aligned movement. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, Yugoslavia supported the Palestinian struggle for liberation, and news about Palestine was often on our TV screens. For years after the war in Bosnia, I was dealing with my own challenges and displacement, and I did not have time to closely follow what was happening in other parts of the world. This changed when I went to study in the United States, and later in South Africa. I closely followed the first war in Gaza under siege in 2008-2009. The footage of bombardments and destruction, the suffering of Palestinian people, and particularly the murder of hundreds of kids in Gaza by Israeli bombs brought back the memories of my own wartime experience. I felt a responsibility to speak out. I wrote an open letter to Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and the author of *Night*, asking him how he could remain silent about the atrocities in Gaza, particularly since he has been very vocal about the importance of speaking out whenever and wherever we see the suffering of other people (Heleta, 2009). That piece went viral, but I never got a reply. Years later, we are witnessing even worse atrocities against the Palestinian people, as well as the same silence and indifference of many around the world. As a researcher in higher education and internationalization, the fact that many in the sector are either silent or indifferent to the livestreamed scholasticide and genocide in Gaza has had a profound impact on me and my views of higher education and the people working in it. While concepts such as social justice, inclusion, and equality are plastered everywhere, they are often undermined by the very institutions that claim to uphold them—through the actions and inactions of universities, academics, and administrators, and the persistent whitewashing and hypocrisy embedded within higher education. This is why this moment is important; we must tackle and call out this hypocrisy, immorality, and dehumanization.

## What This Moment Says about the World, Humanity, and Higher Education

**Hiba**

I cannot imagine the difficulties a child goes through in a war; the struggles, yet the early matureness it brings to one. Your description of the moment we are currently living in and observing is important. Our observation of what is happening around us always leaves an impact on our understanding of the world and the changes it goes through. The rapid development of technology enables us to witness numerous events captured in images and videos shared via social media. As much as learning about what is happening in Gaza has educated the world about the struggles in Palestine for almost

eight decades, we find ourselves in need to process what is currently happening and its impacts before initiating any action about the future. We are having this discussion after more than a year of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, and after many years of excessive Israeli violence against Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank. Between October 2023 and March 2025, more than 52,000 people have been killed in Gaza (Yussuf et al., 2025). Other researchers argue that the death toll in Gaza is at least 40% higher than the official figure (Jamaluddine et al., 2025). It is estimated that 10% of Gaza's population was either killed or injured during the current war, and 88% of the Strip's infrastructure has been fully destroyed (Quds News Network, 2025). As for higher education, the Israeli forces have completely destroyed all institutions in Gaza during this war, depriving around 90,000 students from completing their education. In a powerful letter to the world, academics and administrators from Gaza declared their commitment to resume teaching and research despite everything they are going through. This letter is an open invitation to us all to provide immediate support to Gaza's universities, and to stand against Israel's systematic destruction of the education system (Gaza Academics and Administrators, 2024). The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education announced the resumption of the academic year in Gaza in mid-2024, with much of it taking place online (Al-Mqadma et al., 2024). It is important to highlight this as it shows how much Palestinians value education, despite all the challenges they are going through.

**Savo**

As you note, Hiba, this moment is important as we are watching the genocide and scholasticide on our screens. We are also watching closely many people and colleagues who have been claiming to be all for diversity, inclusion, and equality—as well as the promotion of justice, human rights, and global citizenship in higher education—either remain silent or actively suppress solidarity with Palestine and the suffering people of Gaza. While we are focusing on this moment, and the systematic and widespread campaigns to shut down anti-genocide protests or any activity aimed at showing solidarity with the Palestinians, this has been the reality—both in Palestine and globally—for more than a century. In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said (1980) writes about systematic campaigns to shut down Palestinian narratives and deny the existence of Palestine and the Palestinian people since British colonial rule. This was done by the British colonizers and the Zionist lobby around the world in order to take over Palestine and prepare the ground for ethnic cleansing, settler colonialism, and the creation of Israel at the end of the 1940s. And it has been going on until today.

When we say we are focusing on this moment in Palestine, and specifically on the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza, we are looking at the world, the responses, the silences, and complicities with the genocide and scholasticide on one side, and the resistance to the occupation, genocide, and the normalization of the destruction of schools, universities and hospitals, and the murder and starvation of tens of thousands of Palestinians, on the other. Gaza and the rest of Palestine are, in many ways, a portal, to borrow from Arundhati Roy (2020). Baconi (2024) warns that through the "confinement, surveillance, mass torture, de-development, de-ecologizing, imprisonment, starvation, bombardment… Gaza offers a road map for confronting and managing populations that must be forgotten so that the civilized of the world can claim their humanity and

superiority" (para. 8). But, again, it is important to remember that this is not new; many formerly colonized and oppressed people around the world have seen in the oppression of Palestinian people their own struggles and experiences for many decades (Said, 1980). This is why the century-long plight of the Palestinians (Khalidi, 2020) has been and remains a global issue (Ayyash, 2025).

**Hiba**

I think you described it fairly, Savo. Such severe and violent attacks will never end with Gaza. The global history of oppression reminds us that moments of violence and conflict do not emerge in isolation—they are the result of long-standing historical, political, and structural conditions that often span decades or even centuries. As we consider the ongoing wars around the world, it is essential not only to reflect on how we might work toward ending them, but also to critically trace the underlying causes and decisions that allowed such horrific events to unfold in the first place. While the current genocide in Gaza—this horrific moment in Palestinian history—has been unthinkably brutal, harrowing and existential (El-Kurd, 2025), the oppression and subjugation of Palestinians has been going on for many decades in different forms (Albanese, 2024; Khalidi, 2020; Republic of South Africa, 2023). El Akkad (2025) writes that "it has always been this way—not just in this moment, this culmination of so many previous moments" (p. 95). The Israeli occupation and apartheid have fragmented Palestinian society, destroyed its economy, and led to underdevelopment (Amnesty International, 2022; Keelan & Browne, 2020; Knudsen & Tartir, 2017; Said, 1980). The silencing and erasure of Palestinian narratives has been going on for decades (Said, 1980); so has scholasticide (Ahmad & Vulliamy, 2009; Dader et al., 2024; Post, 2024). Education in Palestine is essential for the preservation of the Palestinian identity and has always served as a tool of resistance to the occupation and socio-economic and political mobilization against Israeli oppression and apartheid. This is why it has been a target of Israeli restrictions, repression, and military attacks for decades, with the universities in Gaza and the West Bank bearing the brunt of the oppression (Abu Lughod, 2000; Alfoqahaa, 2015; Dader et al., 2024; Erni, 2013; Jebril, 2023; Post, 2024; Qassrawi, 2024). During the first Intifada, for instance, Israel imposed closure of all universities in Gaza and the West Bank between 1987-1993. For decades, children and students in the West Bank have had to spend hours every day crossing checkpoints, humiliated and assaulted by Israeli soldiers, before reaching schools and universities (Dader et al., 2024). Similarly, the attacks on those challenging apartheid, military occupation, repression and settler colonialism in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and most parts of the Western world are nothing new (Hajir & Qato, 2025; Jackson et al., 2015; Said, 1980; Wind, 2024). Importantly, the silencing and brutality must be seen in broader and much longer historical processes of European imperialism, genocidal erasure, and settler colonialism, as well as ongoing Euro-American global coloniality, including in higher education (Fúnez-Flores, 2024; Hajir & Qato, 2025).

Although this moment in Gaza seems to be specific to Palestinians, it is, as you noted, a global issue. It has turned this moment into one of awareness and understanding that neocolonialism or coloniality still exist and are maintained by hegemonic powers around the world. Zionism mirrors the settler-colonial ideologies that dispossessed

Indigenous peoples in places like Canada, Australia, South Africa, and the United States—denying them their land, languages, faith, and humanity (Said, 1980). The genocide in Gaza has awakened vulnerable memories about suppression, murder, and the violation of basic human rights around the world. "Gaza is the abject of our time," as Tareq Baconi (2024, para. 2) argues. It makes us confront an "Other" hiding within us; an Other that longed to "disrupt the norms around us that we are socialized into and come to abide by" but was always "trampled on, marginalized, and suppressed in the anxious belief that its acknowledgement might destabilize the Self and bring it to ruin" (Baconi, 2024, para. 1). As I share in my other forthcoming piece (Ibrahim, forthcoming), this war symbolizes a moment of one's self-declaration in public: to be or not to be.

Not only is this genocide a prevailing moment in the history of the Palestinian cause, but also one of revelation when many governments in the West refrained from condemning Israel's brutal attacks on Gaza or supporting the calls for a ceasefire. It was then when young people in the West started realizing the levels of unconditional support their governments have provided Israel with. The United States, for instance, has provided Israel with almost 70% of its imported weapons between 2011-2020 and has approved around $17 billion in support of Israel in April 2024 alone. The United Kingdom and Germany exported £426 million and €326.5 million, respectively, in military equipment to Israel between October 2023 and October 2024 (Altun, 2024). We have seen many public figures, scholars, community leaders, journalists, and organizations educate their communities about this dark reality. Unfortunately, higher education institutions in most Western countries have not engaged critically with the many decades of brutal occupation in Palestine. On the contrary, they have actively suppressed pro-Palestinian voices among students and staff—punishing those who speak out, silencing calls for a ceasefire, and using institutional policies to eliminate critical discourse and meaningful action on Palestine. Student activists realized that their institutions were supporting this war by investing in partnerships and financial investments in the Israeli war machine. A few universities in Canada, for instance, invest in arms companies that sell weapons to Israel and others that invest in illegal settlements in the West Bank (Nerestant, 2024; Tanguay, 2024). I never thought such complicity would include contracts of millions of dollars from the Israeli Ministry of Defense to conduct research projects on missile systems or in companies developing technologies that end up being used to subjugate Palestinians at checkpoints in the West Bank (Dawn, 2024). This reality hit me personally just days into my doctoral studies in Canada, when I began to grasp how deeply normalized pro-Zionist narratives were even years before the current genocide (Eglin, 2024) and how difficult it was for students to speak out against them. On many campuses across Canada, an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) presence is common, and it never stopped during the genocide in Gaza (Cholakova, 2024; Singh, 2024). With such intense institutional complicity and support for the Israeli occupation and genocide, there was no question that the reaction of student activists would be as intense as we have witnessed since October 2023.

**Savo**

It is important to put what's happening in Gaza and the rest of Palestine currently in a historical perspective, as you have done above. It's also important to highlight Western support for the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza, whether in arms or joint research between European or North American universities and their counterparts in Israel to produce bombs, weapons, surveillance technologies, and other tools of oppression used on Palestinians and then exported for use on other marginalized peoples around the world (see Loewenstein, 2023; Wind, 2024). Particularly due to this last part, this moment is important for global higher education. For many years, we have seen the proliferation of rhetoric at universities around the world about social justice, racial justice, global citizenship, diversity, equity and inclusion, fair cooperation, and more. We have also seen the resurgence of the epistemic decolonization movement globally, including at European and North American universities, in the centers of the (neo)colonial power. The progress that we thought we were making turned out to be empty rhetoric and smokescreens. The genocide and scholasticide in Gaza have exposed the fallacies of much of this on institutional and structural levels globally. Of course, this is not the first time this is happening in the case of Palestine. Jackson et al. (2015) show this in their comprehensive report titled *The Palestine exception to free speech*, in which they outline in detail years of systematic attacks on pro-Palestine advocacy and activism in the United States, both on the societal level and at universities, long before this current moment. But this moment and the widespread and often brutal attacks and repression of pro-Palestine narratives and activism have exposed so much racism, Islamophobia, hatred, and dehumanization of Palestinian people (El-Kurd, 2025), as well as the willful blindness and hypocrisy of so many institutions and individuals.

This moment is perhaps the best example of the effects of neoliberalization of higher education globally. Universities have been run as corporations for decades, but it is in this moment that we can see how these corporate entities can turn violently on their students and staff as soon as they express solidarity with the "forbidden" people and campaign for a cause that the powerful and donors do not like. Noura Erakat (2024) highlights that, "because they are so concerned with revenue above anything else," many university leaders and administrators "want to appease establishment opinion and the mainstream status quo" (para. 24). That's why many of university administrations have been autocratic in shutting down student encampments, or in silencing anti-genocide and pro-Palestine narratives on campuses. But, again, this is not new; neoliberal universities have been undermining student activism against injustices for decades. South Africa is a case in point. In 2015-2016, when black students protested against racism, coloniality, exploitation of outsourced black workers by universities, and the commodification of higher education, most university leaders and administrators labelled students as unruly criminals and unleashed private security and the police to brutalize student activists (Heleta et al., 2018). It doesn't matter to the neoliberal university whether the cause is just; the protection of the oppressive status quo by any means necessary is often all that matters.

**Hiba**

For these particular reasons you illustrated, Savo, it is worth taking a moment to appreciate what students around the world did to organize encampments and maintain their activity for months during the genocide in Gaza. Students managed to list demands and attempted to negotiate with university administrations; they collected donations to secure the basic needs at the encampments; they reported updates and demands and communicated with the media; and they educated their wider communities about the genocide and why they were taking responsibility to protest. Similarly, they were concerned about the security and safety of members of their community, and those in the broader university community. In other words, these students demonstrated skills of communication, project and human management, digital literacy, conflict management, and global citizenship their higher education institutions have been claiming for years to have wanted them to learn in classes. Ironically, most universities responded with not permitting protests on campuses, with the expulsion of protesting students and faculty, court-order deadlines to leave campuses, and an injunction to tear down encampments while freezing negotiations regarding divestment demands (e.g., CBC News, 2024; Hatting & Squyres, 2024; Maruf, 2024). Most university administrations in North America sent letters and published damning reports concerning the encampments, enforcing descriptions of them as violations of freedom of speech policies, disruptions to learning, and a source of concern to other community members who claimed protesting students caused them distress (e.g. Cardiff University, 2024; Columbia University, 2024; University of Chicago, n.d.). This is not to say that protesting students never made mistakes or would not benefit from further mentorship and wise support from university associations, academics, or student union leadership, but this still should never be an excuse for university administrators not to engage constructively with these protests. Again, if we trace the history of student activism on campuses in the United States during the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the anti-apartheid protests, and even the more recent Black Lives Matter and climate change activism, we can see that each generation of university administrators acts as if they are facing student activism for the first time. And in most cases, they tend to be on the wrong side of history. As King (2024) explains,

> Activists have refined campus protest tactics over time, learning from what worked in the past and creating plans that can be easily transported across time and location. It's not coincidental that the tent cities of the anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s look similar in form and function to the encampments springing up recently. Activism from the past gets stored in collective memory, often through written records and routinized in social movement organizations and passed to the next generation (para. 4).

While students learn and build on past protest strategies and tactics, similar learning is not evident in the case of university administrations. Instead of responding more strategically and learning from the past, only a few institutions showed some flexibility to negotiate students' demands and review their investment policies during the recent anti-genocide and pro-Palestine protests (e.g. Canon, 2024; University of Oxford,

2024). The violent and authoritarian responses to any kind of pro-Palestinian discourse and activism have taken place in most Western countries (Khan, 2024) and even in some Arab countries, where classes were suspended to prohibit "unlicensed" pro-Palestine symposiums and demonstrations on campus (Sawahel, 2024a). I still remember a viral response to a video of a dean in an Arab university refusing to hand a distinguished student her certificate for wearing a Palestinian *kufiyyah* (Sawahel, 2024b). In many countries, students who organized protests on campuses either got arrested or suspended from their universities (Andoni, 2024). The repression of pro-Palestinian voices within academia in the Middle East and North Africa must also be understood within a broader regional and political context. As Andoni (2024) explains, when these dynamics are viewed against the backdrop of the Arab uprisings—which started in late 2010 and began to wane by 2015—and the subsequent normalization of relations with Israel by some countries in the region, their implications become clearer. In this context, "the restriction of freedoms and oppression" has "created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation of arrests and interference by security services, expulsion from universities, and the destruction of students' futures" (Andoni, 2024, para. 2). Such systemic repression not only stifles academic freedom but also silences dissent, making it increasingly difficult for students and scholars to engage critically with the Palestinian struggle or broader issues of justice and neocolonialism in the region.

My personal experience in Canada was not different. I was as active as any pro-Palestine activist who spoke out. Many friends and colleagues advised me to stop posting about the genocide on social media or speak openly about my work on Palestine. As an intercultural education specialist, I feel betrayed when there is no mention of the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza at events about decolonial approaches to language education or the power of critical voices in education. It is deeply ironic and disheartening that discussions about Gaza and Israeli apartheid in such events are often left solely to Palestinian scholars, as if their suffering is theirs alone to name, while others remain silent under the guise of discomfort or neutrality. I share these experiences not out of complaint, but from lived reality, motivated by both personal conviction and professional responsibility. Why are we interculturalists in the first place if we are not comfortable speaking with honesty and transcendency with one another? Why do we claim that we are dedicated to work with students and help them develop into individuals who are open-minded, empathetic, and ready to critically know themselves and others if we cannot practice all this openly among each other. I found myself asking the same questions Gorski (2008) was asking almost two decades ago:

> Do we advocate and practice intercultural education, as too often happens, so long as it does not disturb the existing sociopolitical order?; so long as it does not require us to problematize our own privilege?; so long as we can go on celebrating diversity, meanwhile excusing ourselves from the messy work of social reconstruction? And can we practice an intercultural education that does not insist first and foremost on social reconstruction for equity and justice without rendering ourselves complicit to existing inequity and injustice? In other words, if we are not battling explicitly against the prevailing social order, are we not, by inaction, supporting it? (p. 516)

If this reveals anything about the state of global higher education today, it is that institutions often vilify students for embodying the very ideals they claim to uphold—critical thinking, civic engagement, and global responsibility—and punish them for taking principled actions to create meaningful change. This is a moment when universities should respond with more responsibility regarding what they claim to be their principles of social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion. As global educators, academics, university officials—whatever role we play in higher education—we need to realize, today more than ever, that students' knowledge is an inevitable component of the curriculum design and academic processes. The organized student encampments against the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza have challenged the widely accepted "legitimate knowledge" about students' roles in shaping higher education practices and policies and have inspired some of us to rethink the principles and values that shape the internationalization of higher education and curricula.

**Savo**

I fully agree with everything you highlight above, particularly when it comes to the importance of student activism and encampments in many countries and on many campuses. Before I add a few points on this, I want to address the silence of many leaders, administrators, and academics in global higher education. I agree with Shoman et al. (2025) that this silence represents the profound ethical, moral, and intellectual failures of so many. The silence in academia is often due to ideological and material factors—from ideological beliefs in supremacy of some groups of people over others, to attempts to remain "neutral" and silent to preserve job security and benefits (Shoman et al., 2025). The notion of academic freedom, which is supposed to allow scholars to express their views without fear, does not seem to be adequate in many countries, particularly when it comes to the issue of Palestine (Fúnez-Flores, 2024; Shoman et al., 2025). Fúnez-Flores (2024) argues that we must see academic freedom and free speech that many Western universities claim to uphold as part of the "capitalist, colonial social reality of which they are an integral part" (p. 475). But like many things we noted before, the inadequacy of the notion of academic freedom in the case of Palestine is not the issue only in this moment; scholars have been attacked and have lost jobs in the past for pro-Palestine advocacy (Fúnez-Flores, 2024; Jackson et al., 2015); similarly, many scholars outspoken on social justice issues around the world have been silent in the past when it comes to the oppression of Palestinians by Israel (Said, 1994).

As you have highlighted, in many countries and at most institutions, amid the deafening silence of university leaders, administrators, and academics, and despite the draconian and violent responses by university administrations (El-Kurd, 2025), students "have been the ones with the ethical backbone to speak back to power, and [have] suffered intimidation from university management, campus security, and police violence for their actions" (Shoman et al., 2025, p. 5). These students are showing us what decolonial praxis is, or should be, all about (Fúnez-Flores, 2024). El Akkad (2025) notes that the students represent an alternative vision to the toxic neoliberal and capitalist framing of what should matter in life. That many students choose to be part of the protests and encampments, instead of sitting in classrooms to complete their studies so

they can get a job and contribute to increasing the profits of the shareholders of multinational corporations and weapons makers, all on a burning planet, must represent a betrayal of the capitalist and Euro-American values propagated by their own institutions. The fact that the students would "jettison such a privilege in favor of a people on the other side of the planet who are able to offer nothing in return—to an ideology fixated on self-interest, it must seem like an embrace of nihilism" (El Akkad, 2025, p. 116) to many of our university leaders and administrators.

**Hiba**

Added to all this is the alarming trend of university administrations yielding to governmental pressure—turning over protesting students and faculty as part of a performative collaboration with state authorities under the guise of combating "terrorism" and "extremism" on campuses. Take Mahmoud Khalil and Rümeysa Öztürk, for instance, who have faced detention and disciplinary actions for participating in pro-Palestinian protests (Helmore, 2025). Similarly, in Germany, authorities have ordered the deportation of pro-Palestinian activists over their involvement in protests, even though they don't have any previous criminal convictions (Al Jazeera, 2025). This collaboration risks subjecting higher education policies to even greater limitations, as universities become increasingly complicit in unjustified political agendas and the stifling of dissent (Helmore, 2025).

## Global Responsibility During a Genocide and Scholasticide: Higher Education Going Forward

**Hiba**

We must realize that after the genocide and scholasticide we have witnessed in Gaza, we cannot continue with global higher education as usual. On one hand, we need to process the damage the genocide in Gaza has left. By damage, I do not only refer to the destruction of infrastructure, murder of tens of thousands, suffering of millions, and the transformation of Palestinian lives in the Gaza Strip. I am also referring to the real dilemma of the neoliberal reality of higher education. Instead of questioning their role in contributing to equity and social justice in the world, universities in the Global North (and elsewhere) have for decades focused primarily on generating revenue from international students, study abroad programs, and international partnerships with other universities (Guo & Guo, 2023; Liu, 2023). The moral dilemma caused by discrepancies between students' encampment experiences and their priorities for change, and the assaulting reaction from most universities on a pro-Palestine discourse, should be faced by advocating for an immediate ethical shift in global higher education. First, we all must have a role in supporting the *sumud* of higher education institutions in Palestine in the upcoming years. For decades, knowledges and worldviews from Palestine were misrepresented by Zionism and settler colonial supremacism and perceived as savage and irrelevant (see Said, 1980; Wind, 2024). The establishment of strategic long-term

collaborations with scholars and students in Palestine would be an eye-opening experience for scholars, students, and institutions from other parts of the world to better understand and include unique perspectives about the Palestinian cause, generally, and the struggle for freedom and social justice, particularly. The different acts of *sumud* the world has witnessed are worthy of examining, and such collaborations are a golden opportunity for higher education institutions in the Global North and Global South to be part of.

On the other hand, we need to reevaluate how we conceptualize what we call "international dimensions" and "intercultural perspectives" that have shaped frameworks and evaluation models of international curricula and international education (Heleta & Chasi, 2023; Gorski, 2008). What everyone involved in global higher education needs is to think differently, or otherwise, away from Eurocentric, colonial, and neocolonial assumptions and frameworks that have overwhelmingly influenced how we design global learning experiences and how, and what, we learn about the world (Heleta & Chasi, 2023, 2024). I would argue that Gaza and all events surrounding it at this moment open new possibilities to think otherwise and construct a new critical consciousness about the moment we live in by forming a new understanding of the geopolitics of knowledge that maintain coloniality but also lead to resistance in many spaces. I have always believed that the goal of education is to empower students with skills that help them succeed and grow as human beings in all the roles they play in life. The genocide and scholasticide in Gaza remind us that this goal is hard to achieve if we, scholars and students alike, lose the compass of who we are and what shapes our knowledge and worldviews, what we stand for and how our stands and actions impact other social groups around us, and the legacy we want to leave behind.

**Savo**

In this section where we discuss global responsibility during the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza and the way forward for higher education, I want to start with your social media post on 11 January 2024, two weeks after South Africa's application to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accused Israel of committing a genocide in Gaza and asked the court to institute the provisional measures to stop the genocide, murder, and starvation of Palestinian people. You posted: "From now on, if you don't teach that South Africa is a pragmatic example of global citizenship, don't claim that you care for internationalization nor call yourself an international educator" (Ibrahim, 2024a). I fully agree with your statement that what the South African government has done is one of the most pragmatic examples of global citizenship. Many Palestinians (see Ayyash, 2025; El Akkad, 2025; Erakat, 2024) highlight that it is particularly important that South Africa—a country with a horrific experience of centuries of European settler colonialism, apartheid, and racist oppression against black people—brought this case against Israel, another settler colonial apartheid state that is committing genocide against Palestinian people. In addition, as a relatively small developing country with many domestic challenges, the South African government decided that, despite the potential diplomatic, economic, and geopolitical blowback and pressure that may come, it could not sit and watch the genocide in Gaza and the destruction of Palestinian people unfold.

I have done considerable work on global citizenship and global citizenship education. I have been critical of the mainstream concept and praxis, particularly as it is defined, conceptualized and practiced in the Global North and often replicated in the Global South (Heleta, 2025; Jooste & Heleta, 2015). The mainstream conceptualization sees global citizenship education contributing to learning about others, being committed to social justice, fostering global understanding, and volunteering (Oxfam, 2015). Across the world, global citizenship praxis in higher education has been largely superficial, promoting tokenistic and abstract engagement with the world and faraway places and people, often devoid of any critical interrogation of global power dynamics or roots of structural inequalities in the world (Heleta & Jooste, 2015; Stein & Andreotti, 2021). Koyama (2015) argues that superficial learning about the world and others, while ignoring systemic and structural inequalities and inequities, only contributes to the maintenance of the status quo. Critics such as Stein and Andreotti (2021) and Bosio and Waghid (2023), who look at global citizenship through a critical and decolonial lens, argue that the concept and praxis must be far more critical and politically aware, engaging with historical and contemporary inequalities and injustices in the world and providing education to students aimed at preparing them to challenge, interrupt, and dismantle coloniality, Eurocentric hegemony, and the global inequalities rooted in colonial and neocolonial projects.

To come back to your post and what the South African government has done, I see critical and decolonial aspects of the global citizenship concept in South Africa's ICJ application. I see the attempt to stop the genocide in Gaza, but also to show the roots of historical and contemporary injustices that the Palestinians have been facing for many decades under settler colonialism, occupation, and apartheid (see Republic of South Africa, 2023). I see South Africa standing up to powerful countries that are materially and diplomatically supporting the genocide in Gaza. I see South Africa supporting the oppressed and fighting for justice in the world. Finally, South Africa's ICJ application has contributed to the global mobilization of other states, organizations, and people who have either joined the case, or have contributed to further unearthing and publicizing of the injustices in Gaza and the rest of Palestine and calling for the end of the genocide and justice for Palestinian people. All this illustrates what a principled and critical global citizenship praxis should be about. I hope that critical and principled educators will use this example in their classrooms when they engage their students on the development of global citizenship, as you pointed out in your post.

The largely empty rhetoric about social justice and global citizenship in higher education in the Global North, but also in many parts of the Global South, has been evident in most institutional responses to the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza. As we highlighted before, many institutions choose to remain silent, and many actively suppressed and silenced their students and staff who organized and spoke out against the genocide. If we look at their websites, visions, and curricula, I guarantee we will find the promises of developing global citizens and critical thinkers at all these institutions. Yet, they have failed to be global citizens themselves and have suppressed their students and staff who acted as critical global citizens in time of genocide. Here, I'm not only talking about the institutions in the United States, Canada, and across Europe, but also countries such as South Africa. Despite South Africa's progressive stance and the ICJ

case, the country's higher education sector has been largely indifferent to the scholasticide and genocide in Gaza, particularly when it comes to historically white institutions. I have been disgusted by the silence and indifference of many South African universities and their leaders, administrators, and many academics, but I understand their stance. These are neoliberal institutions, many of them historically white beneficiaries of colonialism and apartheid that have failed to fundamentally transform and move away from white supremacist structures, institutional cultures, and the Eurocentric epistemic hegemony after apartheid ended in 1994 (Heleta & Dilraj, 2024). Why would these institutions care about some far away people, or apartheid in some other place? The students and staff, on the other hand, who have been protesting, organizing, and building encampments in many countries—be they Palestinian, Jewish, American, European, South African or any other—offer hope and an example of what critical global citizenship is all about, or should be, in this moment and the similar moments that are likely to come in the future.

**Hiba**

The point you raise about why we should care about this moment—and other similar moments that are likely to happen in the future—is very important. One of the ongoing traditions of learning globally is that many people start to care about an issue when events become a catastrophe. One important question global educators should be concerned about is: Why do we tend not to learn about global issues that do not seem to impact us directly? In collaborative online international learning and virtual exchange projects, for instance, many instructors aim to have students learn and collaborate on projects that address issues they have in common, or address issues with direct impact on their communities. Despite the critical awareness such projects bring to participants, they still do not provide a full picture of what the world is going through. Moving forward, I cannot imagine programs that include Gaza and Palestine but do not address the Israeli occupation and apartheid. We cannot deny that politics influence education heavily (Gorski, 2008), and that the geopolitical and general knowledges of students from different parts of the world are all valid. We need to encourage and support students to have difficult conversations that impact their lives and shape their hybrid identities. This genocide broke all taboos that hindered access to different perspectives and worldviews, and we need to acknowledge that. In a way, we need to radicalize the traditional relationship between educators, curriculum designers, and students.

As Freire (1973) explains, educators are usually the ones who own knowledge and power, while students do not. Today, more than at any other time, we need to admit that students of this generation have so much to teach us, the educators, about how to navigate the world. While access to technology and social media connects individuals to diverse cultures, global events, and the daily lives of others around the world, those without such access are not necessarily less informed. Their understanding of the world, shaped by lived experience, resilience, and resourcefulness in navigating challenges, is equally valuable and unique. Together, these knowledges can add so much to how we understand and frame curricula. Similarly, international students on any campus should be looked at as individuals who can contribute to their new communities. In an earlier article, I traced some examples of engaging students in internationalizing higher

education curricula (Ibrahim, 2024b). I believe that such engagements can prepare students to address more critical issues around them, but it all starts with providing them with learning opportunities for personal growth and critical thinking.

Researchers are always advised to practice reflexivity; a transparent examination of one's feelings, reactions, and motives and how they influence the researchers' actions or beliefs when conducting a certain research project. Educators do the same when they journal about their practices or special moments with students that make them revisit their instruction or motivate them to learn more about a context or an issue. This practice needs to be part of our daily routine as professionals. Whether working in global higher education or any other profession, the fact that we reflect on our biases and how we react towards a particular matter is key to professional improvement and a peace of mind. I have heard many of my colleagues arguing that this genocide in Gaza has changed them and the way they view life and the world around them. However, and as Freire (1973) points out, we should combine thoughts with concrete actions. If the values that we believe in changed during the genocide that created this historical moment we are living in, they are worth documenting and being acted upon in the classroom and beyond.

**Savo**

I agree with you about the possibilities that this moment brings that can assist us to challenge the status quo in and through higher education. However, it's difficult to be hopeful about most things at this moment in the world. Climate destruction; the rise of far right and fascism in Europe, United States, and elsewhere; horrific conflicts and suffering in Palestine, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and many other places; predatory capitalism ruining the lives of billions of people and destroying the planet; and the list can go on. Similarly, it's difficult to be hopeful about global higher education. We have unpacked the current anti-Palestinian racism and dehumanization in many higher education systems and institutions around the world; much of the sector globally remains Eurocentric, with structures, systems, institutional cultures, curricula, and knowledge propagated by these institutions rooted in colonial violence, racism, and white supremacy; there is also the toxic neoliberalization and commodification of the sector, and authoritarianism when students and staff challenge the status quo and try to speak out about the challenges and suffering they see in the world.

Many people working in higher education globally have a rather naïve view of the sector as a force for public good committed to social justice and livelihood improvements for all through education, research, and knowledge production. But as Robin Kelley (2018) points out, this is simply not true; universities, particularly the Eurocentric and neoliberal ones—basically the large majority in the world—are not interested in social justice and transformation beyond mere rhetoric. The silence of many in global higher education on Palestine and what is happening in Gaza, and the broader lack of genuine commitment to social justice, "is not an isolated disregard but a reflection of broader ideological and institutional complicity within Western academia" and the "systemic alignment [of universities and much of academia] with [neo]colonial power structures" (Shoman et al., 2025, p. 1). Silence is not just a mere absence of an opinion; it's a choice to remain silent, to selectively pretend not to see what is going on in the world. This should not come as a surprise. Universities have been and remain, by and large,

institutions deeply entangled with colonialism, neocolonialism, coloniality, capitalism, and neoliberalism (Shoman et al., 2025), with much of academia representing the white and upper-class academics in the Global North, or similarly privileged and often Western educated academics in many parts of the Global South (Demeter, 2021). All this is very important to consider as we call on our institutions—and other institutions—to be concerned with the scholasticide in Gaza and to show genuine solidarity with the Palestinian people, or any other struggling peoples around the globe. We must be clear about our neoliberal, neocolonial, and largely Euro-American-centric sector and institutions, what they represent, and what we can expect from them. At the same time, we should never accept this, or stop calling it out and trying to dismantle it. I still think the struggle to decolonize universities has the potential to dismantle the oppressive status quo. For that, we must organize more—and better—globally.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have employed duoethnography as a research method to draw on our personal and professional experiences as researchers and practitioners in higher education and internationalization to critically engage with this moment—the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza—and the responses and/or silences in the global higher education sector to the livestreamed mass destruction and horrors. We have also engaged with all this on a human level. As we noted in this paper, Gaza and Palestine are key issues in and for global higher education at this moment. Mohammed El-Kurd (2025) calls Palestine "a microcosm of the world: wretched, raging, fraught, and fragmented. On fire. Stubborn. Ineligible. Dignified" (p. 30). As a portal and a microcosm of the world, Gaza and Palestine are showing us what is likely to happen to many marginalized peoples around the globe in the future. The repression of solidarity with Palestinian people on university campuses is also a portal. Today, it is forbidden in many countries and higher education institutions to be against the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza, and against Israeli occupation and apartheid in Palestine. Tomorrow, it will be forbidden to campaign against racism and other social ills in neoliberal higher education, or show solidarity with migrants, indigenous communities, and other marginalized and oppressed peoples and communities, both at home and abroad.

Writing about the public role of scholars, writers and intellectuals, Said (2002) highlights the importance of bearing witness to the suffering of the oppressed and speaking out. He reminds us that the role of critical and progressive scholars and intellectuals is not only to theorize and/or describe the complexities and injustices they see in the world, but also to think critically about the possibilities for radical change. He calls on scholars and intellectuals to "challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power wherever and whenever possible" (p. 31), and to have the "courage to say that *that* is what is before us" (p. 39). In this paper, we have tried to do what Said thought our role should be in these times, calling out that *that* is in front and all around us, *that* which is used to dehumanize the entire people, destroy them and their knowledge system, and normalize all this as the way the world is. We are not

the only ones doing this. As we have discussed in the paper, students around the world have led the way and have shown what critical, ethical, and principled global citizenship should be all about. They have faced brutal attacks from their institutions and the police, yet they have stayed true to their principles. Similarly, some academics and staff at universities around the world have shown solidarity with Palestinian people, often facing repression and institutional subjugation, yet still speaking out against the horrific injustices (see, for example, Fúnez-Flores, 2024).

Going forward, we are likely to face more repression, authoritarianism, toxicity, and commodification in higher education across the globe. We will have to organize and challenge these and other ills, in higher education and in our broader societies, regions, and the world. Catherine Walsh (2023) argues that we must work together to "open fissures and cracks" in our authoritarian, neoliberal and Eurocentric higher education institutions and systems "in order to sow and cultivate an otherwise or something else" (p .526). Importantly, she points that,

> The cracks are not the solution. They are part of a decolonizing tactic, strategy, and actioning that open up and move toward other realities, other ways of learning, thinking, becoming, and doing; of living life anyway. They also activate other ways of theorizing, analyzing and perceiving the system-wall, not from its solidity and totality but from its fissures and cracks (p. 528).

Finally, Walsh (2023) concludes with this: "Maybe, if we persist in this cracking, the wall – that is the dominant system with its colonial matrices of power—will someday begin to crumble and fall" (p. 528). This applies to all of us, whether we are in Palestine, South Africa, Britain, United States, Canada, across Europe, and elsewhere in the world where the colonial matrices of power, coloniality, capitalism and neoliberalism continue to wreck the lives of billions.

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the journal editors for providing us a platform to write about the genocide and scholasticide in Gaza at the time of mass silencing of anti-genocide and pro-Palestine narratives in academia globally. We also thank the reviewers who provided valuable and constructive feedback which helped us improve the paper.

## AI Statement

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

## Funding

The authors have not shared any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 69-88
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org/
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.336

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Four Eras of International Student Mobility (1945-2025): Multipolar Securitization, Strategic Education Blocs, and the Rise of Middle Powers

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## Abstract

This article analyzes international student mobility across four historical eras from 1945-2025: Cold War (1945-1989), Market Liberalization (1990-2008), Strategic Competition (2009-2022), and Multipolar Securitization (2023-present). Using mixed methods combining mobility data and policy analysis, we identify the emergence of Strategic Education Blocs (Anglo-American, Sino-Russian, European) and demonstrate how middle powers like India, Turkey, and Brazil are asserting agency in this evolving landscape. International student mobility has transformed from primarily state-sponsored exchanges to hybrid physical-virtual forms, with education increasingly functioning as strategic statecraft rather than merely soft power. We show how stakeholders both influence and are shaped by structural contexts, highlighting implications for balancing geopolitical considerations with educational accessibility in an era of digital transformation and multipolar competition.

**Keywords**: international student mobility, digital internationalization, geopolitics, Strategic Education Blocs (SEBs), international students

# Introduction

International student mobility (ISM) has long been a defining feature of internationalization in higher education, expanding from fewer than a million mobile students in the late 1970s to about 6.9 million by 2022 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024). Traditionally, ISM has been concentrated in the "Big Five" English-speaking destinations – the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand – while China, India, and South Korea account for a quarter of outbound student flows (Glass & Cruz, 2022). However, the landscape of global student mobility is undergoing a profound transformation. Geopolitical shifts, economic realignments, and the acceleration of digital learning are reshaping how and where students pursue international education (Moscovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023).

While existing scholarship has documented various aspects of ISM's evolution, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these shifts fit into broader historical and geopolitical contexts. Previous frameworks, such as Choudaha's (2017) "three waves" model and de Wit's (2002) seminal historical analysis of internationalization, have provided valuable insights. However, de Wit's work primarily focuses on Western contexts up to the early 2000s, while our analysis extends both geographically to include emerging powers and temporally to address contemporary developments in digital internationalization and geopolitical realignment. Similarly, while Choudaha's (2017) three waves framework usefully identifies market-driven phases of student mobility from 1999-2020, it focuses primarily on demand-side economic factors and destination country dynamics. Our analysis builds on Choudaha's waves by extending the temporal scope backward to capture Cold War dynamics and forward to examine post-pandemic transformations, while also incorporating supply-side factors, geopolitical drivers, and the emergence of strategic education blocs that transcend simple market competition. By situating ISM within distinct historical eras and examining the interplay between structural forces and stakeholder agency across these periods, this study offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding the complex evolution of global student mobility.

The traditional push-pull models have framed ISM primarily as a linear, demand-driven phenomenon shaped by economic incentives and institutional prestige (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), but recent scholarship highlights a more dynamic interplay of actors, structures, and motivations. The conventional model of international student mobility—defined by physical relocation—has become increasingly intertwined with virtual and hybrid modes of learning, challenging traditional distinctions between studying "abroad" and "at home" (Mittelmeier et al., 2021). This shift has been further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced universities to pivot to online learning and prompted governments to recalibrate visa, funding, and accreditation policies (Gümüş et al., 2020).

Beyond digitalization, ISM is now shaped by regional and geopolitical alliances that are reconfiguring student flows, research collaboration, and visa policies. As multipolar geopolitics intensifies, middle powers are asserting greater agency in ISM, leveraging South-South partnerships, digital platforms, and hybrid education models to

expand their influence. These shifts necessitate a reassessment of how governance structures and national strategies mediate ISM in an era of geopolitical competition, economic security concerns, and knowledge diplomacy.

This study contributes to international higher education scholarship by examining how ISM has evolved across distinct historical and geopolitical contexts and how emerging Strategic Education Blocs and middle powers are reshaping global mobility patterns. Using a comparative, multi-era framework, we analyze four key dimensions that have undergone significant transformation over time: (1) the shifting nature of mobility (physical, virtual, and hybrid); (2) the evolving agency of diverse stakeholders (students, universities, governments, and private actors); (3) changing governance frameworks at national, regional, and global levels; and (4) the rise of geopolitical multipolarity and digital transformation in shaping ISM patterns. By interrogating these dimensions, this study advances a more nuanced understanding of ISM as a strategic and adaptive phenomenon—one that is not merely shaped by economic forces but is also deeply embedded in the geopolitics of knowledge production and global talent migration.

The following sections constitute our literature review, examining each of these four dimensions in depth and tracing their evolution across different historical periods. This review provides the foundation for our subsequent analysis of the four distinct eras of ISM.

## Literature Review: Four Key Dimensions of ISM

The following sections examine each of these four dimensions in depth and trace their evolution across different historical periods. This review provides the foundation for our subsequent analysis of the four distinct eras of ISM.

### The Shifting Nature of Mobility: From Physical to Hybrid Forms

The nature of international student mobility has evolved significantly over the past eight decades, from exclusively physical relocation to increasingly diverse and flexible forms of cross-border education. Historically, ISM required students to physically relocate to host countries for the duration of their studies (de Wit, 2002). However, the landscape has diversified considerably, particularly since the early 2000s, with the emergence of branch campuses, joint degree programs, and various forms of transnational education (Knight, 2004; Mittelmeier et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated this transformation, normalizing virtual mobility and hybrid learning models that combine online and in-person components (Gümüş et al., 2020; Woodman et al., 2023).

This evolution reflects broader technological and social changes, with digital platforms enabling new forms of international education that were previously impossible. Virtual exchange programs, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), and fully online international degrees have expanded access to cross-border education for students unable to relocate due to financial, personal, or political constraints (Woodman et al., 2023). These developments have permanently blurred the boundary between on-

site and online study, underscoring the need for frameworks that treat physical, virtual, and hybrid pathways as interacting modes of cross-border learning, rather than as discrete categories.

**The Evolving Agency of Diverse Stakeholders**

The distribution of agency among ISM stakeholders has shifted dramatically over time, reflecting changing power dynamics in global higher education. During the Cold War era, governments were the dominant actors, using scholarship programs and cultural exchanges as instruments of foreign policy and ideological competition (de Wit, 2002). The subsequent market liberalization period saw universities and students gain greater agency, with institutions actively recruiting international students for revenue and prestige, while students increasingly made strategic choices based on career prospects and educational quality (Chang et al., 2022; Marginson, 2006).

More recently, private actors have assumed increasingly influential roles in shaping ISM patterns. Education agents, ranking organizations, and edtech companies now significantly influence student decision-making and institutional strategies (Hazelkorn & Altbach, 2015; Nikula & Raimo, 2023; Tran & Vu, 2018). The rise of these non-state actors has created a more complex ecosystem where agency is distributed across multiple stakeholders, each with distinct motivations and capabilities.

This evolution challenges simplistic models that position students as passive responders to structural forces. Contemporary research emphasizes how students exercise agency through strategic decision-making, leveraging social networks and digital resources to navigate complex mobility pathways (Chang et al., 2022). Similarly, universities have become more sophisticated in their internationalization strategies, developing targeted recruitment approaches and transnational partnerships to attract diverse student populations (Gümüş et al., 2020; Nikula & Kivistö, 2020).

**Changing Governance Frameworks**

Governance structures for ISM have evolved from primarily bilateral arrangements during the Cold War to increasingly complex multilevel frameworks incorporating national, regional, and global mechanisms. National governance remains paramount, with visa policies, tuition structures, and post-study work rights significantly influencing mobility patterns (Moscovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023). However, regional frameworks have gained importance, particularly in Europe where the Bologna Process and Erasmus+ program have created standardized structures facilitating intra-regional mobility (Mittelmeier et al., 2021).

The governance landscape has become increasingly fragmented and contested, with tensions between economic, security, and diplomatic priorities shaping policy approaches. The growing securitization of ISM, particularly in STEM fields, reflects concerns about knowledge transfer and intellectual property protection in strategic sectors (Marginson, 2024; OECD, 2024). Meanwhile, the rise of digital and hybrid mobility has created governance gaps, as regulatory frameworks designed for physical mobility struggle to address the complexities of virtual and transnational education (IIE, 2021; Mittelmeier et al., 2021).

These governance challenges are further complicated by the massification of higher education globally, which has dramatically expanded the scale and diversity of international student populations (Marginson, 2016). As higher education systems worldwide have expanded access, ISM has grown from an elite phenomenon to a mass movement involving diverse socioeconomic groups and educational pathways (Gümüş et al., 2020). This massification has created new governance challenges related to quality assurance, credential recognition, and student support services.

**The Rise of Geopolitical Multipolarity and Digital Transformation**

The geopolitical context of ISM has shifted from Cold War bipolarity to post-Cold War American hegemony and, most recently, to an emerging multipolar order characterized by strategic competition between major powers and the rising influence of middle powers (Moscovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023). This evolution has profound implications for student mobility patterns, research collaboration, and knowledge diplomacy.

Digital transformation has further reshaped ISM by enabling new forms of cross-border education and creating virtual spaces for international collaboration (Chang et al., 2022). The rapid development of digital learning platforms, virtual exchange programs, and online credentials has expanded access to international education while challenging traditional notions of mobility (Woodman et al., 2023). These technological changes have coincided with geopolitical shifts, creating a complex landscape where digital and physical mobility pathways are increasingly shaped by strategic considerations and power dynamics.

The intersection of geopolitical multipolarity and digital transformation has created both opportunities and challenges for ISM. On one hand, digital platforms enable more inclusive and flexible approaches to international education, potentially democratizing access for students from diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, digital divides, data sovereignty concerns, and platform governance issues create new forms of inequality and exclusion (Mittelmeier et al., 2021).

## Methodology

This study examined the evolution of international student mobility (ISM) through a historical and analytical approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to explore the changing nature of mobility, governance structures, and geopolitical influences. While this study draws on multiple data sources and literature, it employs a historical analytical approach rather than a systematic review methodology, as our aim was to trace the evolution of ISM across different eras rather than to systematically identify and synthesize all available literature on a specific research question. Building on prior ISM frameworks—such as the "three waves" model proposed by Choudaha (2017)—the research extended the temporal scope to encompass earlier historical patterns and emerging trends in digital internationalization. To capture this breadth, the study employed a mixed methods framework, which Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) define as research that integrates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis within a

single study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Specifically, we adopted a convergent mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation to develop a comprehensive understanding of ISM's evolution. This design allowed us to merge statistical patterns with contextual insights, revealing how geopolitical shifts, policy changes, and technological innovations have transformed international student mobility over time.

This methodological stance reflects the belief that quantifiable data must be contextualized historically (Tosh, 2015) and theoretically situated within the broader study of internationalization (Knight, 2008) to reveal deeper patterns. In doing so, the study systematically investigated what constituted mobility, who governed it, and why it mattered in a world increasingly shaped by digital technologies and shifting alliances. Drawing on the foundations of education research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018) and qualitative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the project sought to blend rigorous data analysis with interpretive depth, thereby offering a holistic lens on the evolution of ISM. This mixed methods approach was necessary not only for triangulation but also for complementarity—using quantitative data to identify macro-level patterns and trends in student flows while employing qualitative analysis to understand the underlying mechanisms, policy motivations, and contextual factors that quantitative data alone cannot reveal.

**Data Sources**

The researchers drew on multiple data sources to triangulate findings and ensure comprehensive coverage of ISM trends across different historical periods: The analysis relied on high-quality international datasets and policy reports from UNESCO, the OECD, the World Bank, and IIE. These sources provided comprehensive insights into student mobility flows, national and regional policy frameworks, and the economic and political rationales behind ISM.

UNESCO's *Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students* database offered country-level enrollment figures, tracking outbound and inbound mobility trends over time. The OECD's *Education at a Glance* reports provided comparative indicators on higher education participation, tuition policies, and international student contributions to national economies. IIE's *Open Doors* and *Project Atlas* reports supplied detailed statistics on student migration, particularly within U.S. higher education. Additional reports from the World Bank illuminated economic and developmental drivers of ISM, especially in the Global South.

Beyond policy reports, the researchers drew on peer-reviewed journal articles that analyzed ISM from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including international higher education policy, mobility studies (Sheller & Urry, 2006), and geopolitical influences on student migration (Tran & Vu, 2018). This combination of statistical datasets and qualitative academic research provided a robust foundation for investigating ISM trends through both empirical measures and interpretive contextualization.

**Data Analysis**

A *mixed methods approach* guided the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). First, quantitative

trend analysis deployed descriptive statistics to examine shifts in enrollment patterns, destination choices, and financial flows over time. Comparative metrics, such as market share fluctuations and tuition revenue, offered insights into structural transformations in global higher education.

Second, a qualitative thematic analysis examined policy reports, institutional strategies, and academic literature to contextualize and interpret quantitative patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By examining government white papers, multilateral agreements, and historical policy shifts, the researchers identified pivotal drivers of ISM in different geopolitical eras. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during the identification of historical eras, where statistical shifts in enrollment patterns were interpreted alongside policy documents to establish era boundaries, as well as during the final interpretation phase, where quantitative trends were contextualized through qualitative insights to explain not just what changes occurred, but why and how different stakeholders responded to shifting geopolitical contexts.

From this combined analysis, the researchers detected four distinct eras of ISM. These eras emerged inductively, based on quantitative shifts in student flows and market dominance, alongside qualitative transformations in governance structures, geopolitical realignments, and digitalization trends. Instead of imposing arbitrary time frames, this historically grounded and methodologically rigorous framework (Tosh, 2015) allowed the research to tie policy decisions, economic incentives, and international mobility to broader geopolitical contexts. By triangulating data sources (Bray et al., 2014; Cohen et al., 2018), the researchers offer a robust, evidence-driven periodization of ISM's historical trajectory, underscoring how mobility is shaped by—and, in turn, shapes—global higher education.

**Limitations**

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study: First, historical mobility data, particularly from the Cold War era, is often incomplete or inconsistent. UNESCO data, while comprehensive in geographical coverage, has known limitations including reporting gaps, definitional inconsistencies across countries, and challenges in capturing short-term mobility (Wells, 2014). Similarly, OECD data primarily focuses on member countries, potentially underrepresenting Global South perspectives. Publication bias in the scholarly literature may overrepresent certain perspectives or findings.

Second, the selection of policy documents and scholarly literature inevitably reflects certain biases, despite efforts to ensure diverse representation. English-language sources predominate, potentially limiting perspectives from non-Anglophone contexts. Data from organizations like the OECD and UNESCO reflect these institutions' priorities and methodological choices. The OECD's focus on economic development and UNESCO's educational mandate shape what data is collected and how it is presented. Similarly, publication bias in the scholarly literature may overrepresent certain perspectives or findings.

Third, any attempt to segment historical developments into distinct eras involves simplification and boundary-drawing that may obscure continuities and overlaps. The era boundaries proposed in this study represent significant inflection points but should be

understood as permeable rather than absolute. Fourth, the researchers' positionality as scholars based in Western institutions may influence the interpretation of global trends. We have attempted to mitigate this through engagement with diverse literature and critical reflection on our analytical frameworks. Despite these limitations, the triangulation of multiple data sources and analytical approaches provides a robust foundation for examining ISM's historical evolution and contemporary dynamics.

## Results: Four Eras of International Student Mobility

Our analysis identified four distinct eras in the evolution of international student mobility since 1945, each characterized by unique geopolitical contexts, governance structures, and mobility patterns. These eras are not entirely discrete—elements of each period overlap and continue into subsequent eras—but they represent significant shifts in the dominant forces shaping global student flows. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of each era.

**Table 1**: **Four Eras of International Student Mobility (1945-2025***)*

| Era | Period | Geopolitical Context | Dominant Actors | Mobility Patterns | Governance Structures |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cold War | 1945-1989 | Bipolar competition | Nation-states | State-sponsored, ideologically driven | Bilateral agreements, cultural diplomacy |
| Market Liberalization | 1990-2008 | US hegemony, globalization | Universities, students | Market-driven, Anglo-American dominance | National policies, emerging regionalism |
| Strategic Competition | 2009-2022 | Rising multipolarity, economic nationalism | Universities, governments, private actors | Diversification, regional hubs | Securitization, regional frameworks |
| Multipolar Securitization | 2023-present | Fragmented blocs, technological competition | Strategic Education Blocs, middle powers | Hybrid mobility, strategic alignment | Bloc-based governance, digital regulation |

**Cold War Era (1945-1989): Ideological Competition and State-Sponsored Mobility**

The Cold War era was characterized by state-directed international student mobility serving ideological and diplomatic objectives. Both the United States and the Soviet Union established extensive scholarship programs to attract students from strategically important regions, particularly newly independent states in Africa, Asia, and

Latin America (de Wit, 2002). The Fulbright Program (established 1946) and Soviet scholarship initiatives became instruments of soft power, designed to cultivate political allies, and promote competing visions of modernity (Altbach & de Wit, 2015).

Mobility during this period was predominantly unidirectional, flowing from the developing world to the industrialized nations of the East and West blocs. Our analysis of historical UNESCO data shows that, by the 1970s, the bulk of international students originated from developing countries, and the United States, France, and USSR were the top three receiving nations (UNESCO, 1979). This pattern reflected both the educational capacity gaps between Global North and South and the strategic priorities of Cold War powers seeking to expand their spheres of influence.

Governance structures during this era were primarily bilateral, with government-to-government agreements establishing scholarship quotas, exchange programs, and academic partnerships. Universities had limited autonomy in international recruitment, functioning largely as instruments of national foreign policy (Altbach & de Wit, 2015). Student agency was similarly constrained, with mobility opportunities often tied to political considerations and state priorities rather than individual preferences.

The Cold War era established enduring patterns in global student mobility, including the predominance of North-South flows and the use of educational exchange as a diplomatic tool. However, the era also created ideological divisions in knowledge production and academic collaboration that would persist long after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

**Market Liberalization Era (1990-2008): Commercialization and Anglo-American Dominance**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the acceleration of economic globalization ushered in a new era of market-driven international student mobility. With the retreat of state-directed scholarship programs, universities—particularly in Anglophone countries—began actively recruiting international students as revenue sources (Marginson, 2006). This shift coincided with the massification of higher education globally, as expanding middle classes in emerging economies sought educational opportunities abroad (Gümüş et al., 2020).

In 2008, there were 3.3 million tertiary students enrolled outside their country of citizenship, of whom 2.7 million were studying in OECD countries—an increase of 67 percent in OECD-area enrollments since 2000. The “Big Five” destinations—the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and France—collectively hosted 49 percent of all internationally mobile tertiary students (OECD, 2010). The United Kingdom and Australia, in particular, developed explicit national strategies positioning international education as an export industry (Marginson, 2006).

This era saw a significant shift in agency from governments to universities and students. Institutions gained greater autonomy in international recruitment, developing sophisticated marketing strategies and establishing offshore operations to attract global applicants. Students increasingly approached mobility as consumers, weighing educational quality, career prospects, and lifestyle factors in their decision-making (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

Governance structures evolved to accommodate this market-oriented approach, with national policies focusing on visa facilitation, quality assurance, and brand promotion rather than diplomatic objectives. Regional frameworks also emerged, most notably the Bologna Process in Europe (launched 1999), which standardized degree structures and credit transfer systems to enhance intra-European mobility (Mittelmeier et al., 2021).

While the market liberalization era democratized access to international education for certain populations, it also reinforced existing inequalities. The commercialization of international education privileged students with financial resources, while the dominance of English-language instruction created advantages for students from Anglophone backgrounds and/or elite educational institutions (Marginson, 2006).

**Strategic Competition Era (2009-2022): Diversification and Regional Hubs**

The 2008 global financial crisis marked a turning point in international student mobility, initiating an era characterized by greater strategic competition and the emergence of new destination countries. Economic pressures intensified universities' recruitment efforts, while rising nationalism and security concerns prompted governments to reassert control over mobility patterns (Marginson, 2024).

Our analysis of UNESCO data shows significant diversification in destination countries during this period. While the "Big Five" English-speaking countries maintained their prominence, their collective share of global enrollments declined from about 41% in 2009 to roughly 33% by 2019 (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, 2024). Meanwhile, countries such as Russia, UAE, Malaysia, and Turkey emerged as significant regional education hubs, investing in internationalization as part of broader economic development and soft power strategies.

This era saw the rise of government-university partnerships in shaping international student recruitment. National strategies, such as Malaysia's Education Blueprint 2015-2025 and Russia's 5-100 Project, explicitly positioned international education as a tool for economic development and geopolitical influence (Gümüş et al., 2020). Universities aligned their internationalization efforts with these national priorities, developing targeted recruitment strategies for strategically important regions.

Governance structures became increasingly complex, with regional frameworks gaining prominence alongside national policies. The ASEAN International Mobility for Students program and similar initiatives in Africa and Latin America sought to promote intra-regional mobility, though with limited success compared to the European model (OECD, 2024). Meanwhile, bilateral agreements proliferated, often linking educational cooperation with broader economic and diplomatic partnerships.

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) accelerated several trends that had been developing throughout this era, particularly the adoption of digital and hybrid mobility models. As border closures disrupted traditional mobility patterns, over 60% of universities worldwide introduced virtual or hybrid mobility programs—a shift that normalized "mobility without movement" (Marinoni, Van't Land, & Jensen, 2020; Mittelmeier et al., 2021). These developments challenged conventional definitions of international education and created new opportunities for students unable to relocate physically.

**Multipolar Securitization Era (2023-present): Strategic Education Blocs and Middle Power Agency**

The current era of international student mobility is characterized by increasing geopolitical fragmentation and the emergence of what we term Strategic Education Blocs (SEBs). These blocs represent aligned groups of countries that coordinate policies related to student mobility, research collaboration, and knowledge production in response to perceived security threats and strategic competition. Unlike previous regional frameworks focused primarily on educational harmonization, SEBs explicitly link international education to broader geopolitical and economic security objectives.

We propose a conceptual framework of Strategic Education Blocs (SEBs) defined by three key features: (1) explicit policy coordination across multiple domains affecting international education; (2) preferential treatment for students and researchers from aligned countries; and (3) restrictions on mobility and collaboration with countries perceived as strategic competitors. Based on this framework, we identify three potential alignments emerging, though at varying stages of formalization and with different characteristics:

The Anglo-American bloc, encompassing the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, has intensified coordination through mechanisms such as the Atlantic Declaration Action Plan on a 21st-Century U.S.–U.K. Partnership (June 2023), a new International Education Strategy Forum launched later the same year, and the Five Eyes "trusted research" security protocols. This bloc emphasizes "trusted research" frameworks that facilitate collaboration among allies while restricting engagement with strategic competitors, particularly in sensitive technological fields.

The Sino-Russian bloc is deepened through a series of agreements, including a cooperation accord between their national higher education quality assurance agencies, aiming to align standards and facilitate joint program recognition. The Sino-Russian University Alliance, now comprising over 60 leading institutions, has expanded joint degree offerings and collaborative research. Russia has significantly increased scholarship quotas for African students and is expanding higher education cooperation with both Africa and Central Asia, while China and Russia have taken steps to facilitate student exchanges and academic mobility.

The European bloc, building on the foundation of the European Higher Education Area, has developed more assertive approaches to "strategic autonomy" in research and education through initiatives such as the European Universities Initiative and Horizon Europe's international cooperation framework. While maintaining openness to global collaboration, this bloc increasingly emphasizes European values and interests in its approach to internationalization.

Potential evidence for these blocs' strategic coordination can be found in policy documents. For instance, the US-UK Science and Technology Agreement (2017), renewed in 2023, explicitly links research collaboration to shared security interests. The Sino-Russian Joint Statement on Educational Cooperation (2023) frames educational partnership as part of a broader challenge to "Western hegemony" in knowledge production.

The emergence of these blocs has significant implications for student mobility patterns. Our analysis of recent UNESCO data (2022-2023) shows an increasing

concentration of student flows within bloc boundaries, with growth in intra-bloc mobility outpacing overall ISM growth. Chinese student enrollments in Russian universities continued to rise into 2022–2023, contributing to Russia's record-high international student population. Meanwhile, the number of Chinese students in the United States fell by 4 percent in 2023–2024, and overall international student numbers in the United Kingdom also declined during the same period (UNESCO, 2024).

Middle powers—such as India, Brazil, South Africa, and Turkey—leverage multi-alignment and South–South cooperation to diversify higher education ties. The IBSA Dialogue Forum provides an institutional platform for academic exchanges among India, Brazil, and South Africa. In parallel, Ethiopia's industrial parks—financed by China, India, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—embed vocational training into regional development (Tran, 2025). India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly foregrounds internationalization through research partnerships and student/faculty exchanges. On the continental level, the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Services legally opens space for cross-border education, while the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016–2025) establishes a ten-year roadmap to strengthen intra-African mobility and capacity building (African Union, 2023).

The multipolar securitization era is also characterized by the normalization of hybrid mobility models combining physical and virtual elements. Universities and governments are developing regulatory frameworks for these new mobility patterns, addressing challenges related to quality assurance, credential recognition, and digital infrastructure (Woodman et al., 2023). These developments are creating more flexible pathways for international education but are also raising concerns about digital divides and the potential stratification of mobility opportunities.

## Discussion

This study's comparative analysis of four eras of international student mobility reveals several significant trends with important implications for theory, policy, and practice in international higher education. Three key findings emerge from our analysis: the increasing complexity of mobility forms, the shifting dynamics of agency and structure, and the growing entanglement of ISM with geopolitical competition.

### From Linear to Complex Mobility: Reconceptualizing ISM

Our findings challenge conventional understandings of international student mobility as primarily a physical, unidirectional phenomenon. The evolution from state-sponsored exchanges during the Cold War to today's hybrid mobility models reflects a fundamental transformation in what constitutes "mobility" in international education. This transformation necessitates more nuanced theoretical frameworks that can account for virtual, hybrid, and circular mobility patterns alongside traditional degree-seeking relocation.

The concept of "mobility" itself has expanded beyond physical movement to encompass various forms of cross-border educational engagement. Contemporary

students may experience internationalization through short-term exchanges, virtual collaborations, offshore campuses, or hybrid programs combining online and in-person elements (Mittelmeier et al., 2021; Woodman et al., 2023). This diversification reflects both technological advancements and changing student preferences, with many learners seeking more flexible and accessible pathways to international education.

This evolution suggests that ISM should be conceptualized not as a single phenomenon but as a spectrum of mobility practices shaped by technological affordances, institutional structures, and individual agency. Future research should explore how different mobility forms interact and complement each other, potentially creating more inclusive and sustainable approaches to internationalization.

**Agency and Structure in ISM: Towards a Structuration Perspective**

Our historical analysis reveals complex interactions between structural forces and stakeholder agency across different eras of ISM. While early scholarship often emphasized either structural determinants (through push-pull models) or individual agency (through student choice frameworks), our findings suggest that a structuration perspective better captures the dynamic interplay between these elements.

Drawing on Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, we argue that ISM patterns reflect the mutual constitution of structure and agency, with stakeholders both shaped by and shaping the structural contexts in which they operate. Students exercise agency within constraints imposed by visa policies, financial resources, and geopolitical tensions, while their collective choices gradually reshape institutional practices and policy frameworks. Similarly, universities develop internationalization strategies in response to national policies and market conditions, while simultaneously influencing these structures through advocacy and innovation.

This perspective helps explain the observed variations in how similar structural changes—such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the rise of digital platforms—have affected different regions and student populations. The agency of students, institutions, and governments in responding to these changes has produced diverse outcomes rather than uniform effects, highlighting the importance of contextual factors and stakeholder capabilities.

It is important to note that our data on student flows and policy developments provides indirect, rather than direct, evidence of student agency. While we can observe the outcomes of student decisions in aggregate mobility patterns, individual decision-making processes and experiences remain underexplored in our analysis. Future research employing qualitative methods could provide valuable insights into how students navigate and potentially reshape the structural conditions of international education.

**ISM as Strategic Statecraft: Beyond Soft Power**

Our analysis of the multipolar securitization era suggests that ISM is increasingly functioning as a form of strategic statecraft rather than merely as a market phenomenon or soft power tool. The emergence of Strategic Education Blocs represents a qualitative shift in how governments approach international education, moving beyond traditional soft power concepts to more explicitly instrumental approaches linking educational exchange to economic security, technological competition, and geopolitical alignment.

This conceptualization differs from previous literature on soft power (Nye, 2004) in several important ways. While soft power frameworks emphasize attraction and persuasion through cultural and educational exchange, the strategic statecraft approach we observe incorporates elements of both soft and hard power, using educational policies as tools for alliance-building, talent acquisition, and technological advancement. International education is increasingly embedded in broader national security strategies rather than treated as a separate domain of cultural diplomacy.

Evidence for this shift can be found in policy documents such as the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act (2021), which explicitly links international student recruitment to technological competition with China, and the European Commission's Global Approach to Research and Innovation (2021), which introduces the concept of "open strategic autonomy" in knowledge production. These approaches reflect a more instrumental view of ISM as a mechanism for advancing national interests in an era of intensified geopolitical competition.

While the evolution from state-directed to market-oriented and now to strategically coordinated mobility suggests increasing diversification of power, critical examination reveals persistent inequities. Throughout these eras, international students have consistently been positioned as subjects rather than as agents of mobility governance, caught between competing national interests and geopolitical tensions.

The Strategic Education Blocs, while ostensibly representing a more distributed power structure, may actually reinforce systemic advantages for dominant knowledge economies while limiting opportunities for students from regions outside these emerging blocs. This reframes ISM not merely as a beneficial exchange or market transaction, but as a contested space where geopolitical interests and knowledge hierarchies continue to shape who moves, where they move, and under what conditions this movement occurs.

This strategic turn raises important questions about the future of international education as a space for cross-cultural understanding and global cooperation. As mobility patterns increasingly align with bloc boundaries, there is a risk of knowledge fragmentation and reduced opportunities for collaboration across geopolitical divides. Universities and scholars committed to global engagement must navigate these tensions, balancing national security considerations with the cosmopolitan values traditionally associated with internationalization.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

Our findings have several implications for policymakers, institutional leaders, and practitioners in international education:

Governments and regional bodies should develop comprehensive regulatory frameworks for hybrid and virtual mobility, addressing issues such as credential recognition, quality assurance, and student support services. These frameworks should be flexible enough to accommodate technological innovation while ensuring educational quality and student protections.

Universities should pursue strategic diversification in their internationalization efforts, reducing dependence on single markets and developing partnerships across different education blocs. This approach can mitigate geopolitical risks while creating more resilient and inclusive mobility pathways. Despite the growing strategic importance

of ISM, policies and programs should remain centered on student needs and experiences. This includes addressing barriers to mobility related to financial resources, visa restrictions, and digital divides, as well as providing comprehensive support services for international students.

As ISM becomes increasingly entangled with geopolitical competition, stakeholders should develop ethical frameworks for internationalization that balance strategic interests with commitments to academic freedom, cross-cultural dialogue, and global cooperation on shared challenges. Middle powers and Global South countries should leverage their unique positions to develop distinctive approaches to internationalization that serve their specific development needs while maintaining strategic flexibility in an era of bloc competition.

## Conclusion

This study has traced the evolution of international student mobility across four distinct eras, from the ideological competition of the Cold War to today's multipolar securitization landscape. Our analysis reveals how ISM has been transformed by shifting geopolitical contexts, technological developments, and changing power dynamics among stakeholders. The emergence of Strategic Education Blocs and the growing agency of middle powers represent significant developments that are reshaping global mobility patterns and governance structures.

These findings contribute to international higher education scholarship by providing a comprehensive historical framework for understanding ISM's evolution, introducing the concept of Strategic Education Blocs as an analytical tool and advancing a structuration perspective on the interplay between agency and structure in mobility processes. By situating contemporary developments within their historical context, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how ISM functions as both an educational phenomenon and a form of strategic statecraft.

As international education navigates the tensions of the multipolar securitization era, stakeholders must balance competing priorities: maintaining openness and collaboration across geopolitical divides while addressing legitimate security concerns; leveraging digital technologies to expand access while ensuring quality and inclusion; and pursuing strategic objectives while remaining centered on student needs and experiences. Navigating these tensions will require thoughtful policy approaches, institutional innovation, and continued scholarly attention to the complex dynamics shaping international student mobility in the 21st century.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors have made no acknowledgements regarding this publication.

## AI Statement

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

## Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

# Appendix A

This appendix provides a non-exhaustive list of significant policy documents, agreements, and strategies relevant to the evolution of international student mobility (ISM) across the four eras discussed in the article. Documents are organized chronologically within each era and include brief annotations highlighting their relevance.

**Era 1: Cold War (1945-1989)**

This era was characterized by state-sponsored mobility driven by ideological competition and diplomatic objectives.

- Fulbright Act of 1946 (United States)
- Soviet Scholarship Programs (e.g., Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University established 1960) (Soviet Union)
- Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) (Established 1959) (Commonwealth Nations)
- Bilateral Cultural Exchange Agreements (Various Countries)

**Era 2: Market Liberalization (1990-2008)**

Following the Cold War, this era saw the rise of globalization, market principles in higher education, and dominance by Anglo-American destinations.

- General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (Effective 1995) (World Trade Organization)
- Australian Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 (Australia)
- UK Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) for International Education (Launched 1999, expanded 2006) (United Kingdom)
- Bologna Declaration (1999) and Subsequent Bologna Process Communiqués (European Higher Education Area)
- OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education (2005)

**Era 3: Strategic Competition (2009-2022)**

Marked by rising multipolarity, economic nationalism, diversification of destinations, and increasing securitization of ISM.

- UK Tier 4 Student Visa System Changes (Implemented 2012) (United Kingdom)
- Canadian Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP) Reforms (Ongoing, significant changes around 2008-2014) (Canada)
- China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Scholarship Program (Launched ~2013) (China)

- Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) (Malaysia)
- Russian Academic Excellence Project 5-100 (2013-2020) (Russia)
- US Presidential Proclamation 10043 (Effective 2020) (United States)
- UK Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) (Ongoing, scope expanded over time) (United Kingdom)
- ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme (Ongoing)

**Era 4: Multipolar Securitization (2023-Present)**

Characterized by the formation of strategic blocs, intensified technological competition, and the normalization of hybrid mobility.

- US CHIPS and Science Act (2022) (United States)
- European Commission's Global Approach to Research and Innovation (2021) (European Union)
- US-UK Statement on Science and Technology Cooperation (2023)
- Sino-Russian Joint Statement on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era (Including Education Cooperation Agreements, e.g., 2023) (China & Russia)
- India National Education Policy 2020 (India)
- African Union's Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25, successor planned) & Protocol to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement relating to Trade in Services (Including Education)
- National Research Security Policies (Various Countries, e.g., Canada's Policy on Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations of Concern, 2024

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 89-110
*Journal of Global Higher Education*
https://www.jghe.org
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.7

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# "*Am I a Scholar?*": Time, Knowledge, and Decoloniality

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## Abstract

In this article, the author interrogates the question—"*Am I a scholar*?"— by examining how colonial legacies and the standardized colonial concept of clock time shape who is deemed a scholar within universities and colleges across the Global North and South. While existing studies offer valuable insights into the struggles of marginalized scholars in specific national contexts, they often overlook the transnational temporal dimensions of academic labor and the decolonial implications of these time structures. Drawing on personal experiences and decolonial theory, the author explores how colonial histories of clock time intersect with the geopolitics of knowledge, particularly in relation to marginalized scholars and institutions. It expands the conversation beyond psychological and social dynamics to address the broader transnational temporal forces shaping academic recognition. A key focus is the critical role of care as a scholarly practice, emphasizing radical self-care and collective wellbeing as pathways for healing and transformation. The article concludes by urging readers to reimagine a more inclusive academic environment challenging dominant temporal paradigms and honoring diverse ways of knowing and being.

**Keywords**: Coloniality of time; clock time; Academic labor; Marginalized scholars; Radical self-care; global higher education

## Introduction

*"Am I a scholar?"*

Let me share a pivotal moment from my early academic journey prompting this question. As a first-year doctoral student, I submitted my first piece for peer review, eager for feedback. Instead, I received a stark critique: "This paper addresses potentially significant matters, but it has numerous problems. It is at times, incoherently written.

There are many grammatical errors. Paragraphs do not flow easily. Acronyms are used without elaboration. *Overall, the writing is primitive*" (emphasis added).

As someone whose first language was not English, the word "primitive" struck a painful chord, evoking shame, and stirring narratives of not belonging. It sparked a recurring question— "*Am I a scholar*?"—that pushed me to delve into the colonial histories embedded in academic spaces. As I would later learn in an anticolonial thought course, the term primitive is more than a label. Rooted in the European Enlightenment, primitive was a temporal label marking the Other as backward and needing intervention (Mignolo, 2011).

This personal experience morphed into a broader exploration of colonial legacies in academia. I explored how these legacies shape who is recognized as a scholar and whose knowledge is seen as valid. I am not the first to raise the question, "*Am I a scholar?*" Indeed, many explored this question through concepts such as impostor syndrome, academic unwellness, and the marginalization of particular knowledges (Dillard, 2012; Kuzhabekova, 2020; Morris et al., 2022; Muhs et al., 2012; Rendon, 2000; Shahjahan, 2020; Smith & Ulus, 2020; Tran, 2023). Their work highlighted the systemic barriers—related to race, gender, sexuality, ability, and institutional expectations—contributing to feelings of exclusion within academic communities. Such barriers manifest as a lack of mentorship, exclusion from decision-making, and pressure to conform to hegemonic academic standards, causing feelings of inadequacy, stress, and the need to overperform for validation (Menzies & Newson, 2007; Muller, 2014; O'Neill, 2014; Rotenberg & Carlos, 2018; Ylijoki, 2013; Ylijoki & Mantyla, 2003).

While existing studies offer valuable insights into the struggles of marginalized scholars within specific national contexts, they often overlook the temporal dimensions of academic labor and the decolonial implications of these time structures in global higher education. While many scholars have recently explored the intersections of neoliberalism, time, and academic work (e.g., Bosanquet et al., 2020; Poutanen, 2023; Shahjahan, 2020; Valovirta & Mannevuo, 2022; Vostal, 2016; Zembylas, 2024), they often do not address the colonial legacies embedded in clock time. My analysis highlights how colonial histories of clock time shape the validation of knowledge and the legitimacy of scholars, expanding the conversation beyond psychological and social dynamics to consider the broader transnational temporal forces at play.

I aim to address this gap by combining decolonial theory—specifically the geopolitics of knowledge[5]—and coloniality of time—with temporal analysis to explore how colonial legacies of clock time shape who is deemed a scholar. By unpacking the entanglement of clock time with colonial and neoliberal logics, I challenge the

[5] Here, by "geopolitics of knowledge," I am referring to the power dynamics and knowledge structures shaped by colonial histories, which establish a hierarchical global higher education system. This system elevates certain knowledge traditions, particularly those from Anglo-Euro American regions, as central to academia, while relegating other knowledge systems to the margins (Alatas, 2006; Connell, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; Shahjahan, 2016; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2016). As a result of these unequal knowledge-power relationships, scholars and students in metropolitan regions do not face the same challenges regarding the global mobility of their research, learning, or credentials. In contrast, their counterparts in peripheral regions are often hindered by limited material resources and a lack of symbolic capital (Fahey & Kenway, 2010; Schöpf, 2020).

assumption that clock time in academia is objective. By bridging insights from critical time studies, decolonial thought, and higher education research, I aim to speak to scholars across disciplines and global contexts who are invested in care justice, and onto-epistemic transformation.

I offer an alternative perspective that reimagines the temporal fabric of academia and invites contemplation of who gets to produce knowledge and be considered a scholar. Through exploring the question—"*Am I a scholar?*"—I reveal the systemic forces shaping scholarly ways of being and propose pathways for healing and transformation. This exploration invites marginalized scholars to embrace self-compassion, reclaim their place in the academy, and reconnect with the needs of their bodies and communities. I suggest moving beyond shame, stress, and anxiety defining academic life, and reimagining a more inclusive and ontologically just future for scholarship. By "scholar," I am referring to faculty, graduate students, and academic staff working/learning in higher education institutions.

When I refer to clock time, I mean the tradition rooted in the Western[6] mechanical clock, developed in medieval and early modern Europe. Unlike timekeeping systems grounded in ecological or celestial rhythms—such as Jewish zmanim, Christian canonical hours, Edo-period Japanese clocks, or Hindu and Chinese cosmologies—mechanical clock time introduced a standardized, linear, and secular framework (Birth, 2016). It emphasized precision and abstraction, operating independently from social or natural cycles (Birth, 2016; Landes, 2000). As I elaborate later, this system became dominant not through universality, but through colonial and capitalist imposition.

This standardized time infrastructure underpins global higher education today. The idea of the "global" is directly tied to the establishment of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) in the 19th century (Nanni, 2012). GMT enabled the precise coordination of railway schedules, telegraph systems, and British imperial administration across multiple territories. Nanni (2012, p. 221) describes GMT as functioning like a "global language, currency, and government all wrapped into one." GMT evolved into Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), a mathematical standard based on the SI second, now used to define the 24-hour day and the Gregorian calendar (Birth, 2012). This shift means our daily timekeeping no longer reflects Earth's rotation, but a hyper-precise, abstract standard. Although diverse cultural temporal logics persist, mechanical clock time still structures academic and bureaucratic systems through control and uniformity. My goal here is to critique these hegemonic structures of academic time, not to flatten the diversity of academic experience in either the Global North or South.[7]

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[6] When I use the term "West" or "Western," I am referring not merely to a geographical location, but to a historical and ideological concept. As Stuart Hall explains, "the West" denotes a type of society that is industrialized, capitalist, secular, and modern—characteristics that first developed in Western Europe but are no longer confined to it (Hall, 1992).

[7] I use the terms "Global South" and "Global North" as geopolitical heuristics, not as geographical or cultural absolutes. The Global South refers to nations, communities, and institutions historically impacted by colonialism and uneven development, leading to disparities in resources and knowledge production (Dados & Connell, 2012)—including minoritized groups and underfunded institutions within wealthy countries. Likewise, Global North elites may reside in the geographic South, complicating traditional

I organize this article into three parts to explore the question—"*Am I a scholar?*"—a question shaped not only by personal reflection but by dominant academic temporalities rooted in Western mechanical clock time. First, I trace how this standardized, colonial conception of time, which was developed to serve industrialization and empire, structures contemporary ideas of productivity and legitimacy in higher education. These temporal logics produce pressures that lead many, especially those whose practices fall outside normative academic rhythms, to question their scholarly belonging. My critique focuses on how clock time informs global academic structures and intersects with power, marginalization, and the need for radical self-care as a response. Rather than relying on a rigid East/West or North/South binary, I target the hegemonic temporal framework itself.

In the second section, I draw on scholarship and my experiences across Global North and South contexts to examine how the colonial legacies of clock time continue to shape academic value and productivity, thus moving beyond abstract critique. Following Sidhu (2006), I situate myself within this discourse by reflecting on my complex academic positionality and identity. As a racially minoritized scholar in the Global North and a tenured, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied academic, my position both constrains and enables my relationship to academic time.

Finally, in the concluding section, I propose radical self-care as both a personal and political antidote to colonial temporalities. This approach offers a different rhythm for academic life, grounded in care, refusal, and the reclamation of time. I raise speculative questions about how reimagining our relationship with time, especially through radical self-care practices, might disrupt the productivity-driven culture based on clock time. By challenging these entrenched temporal frameworks, I suggest cultivating more inclusive, compassionate, and ontologically just scholarly environments.

## The Colonial Legacy of Clock Time

First, we need to address the broader temporal landscape shaping our academic lives across global contexts. As a global force, clock time binds us together (Aveni, 2002; Nanni, 2012)—regulating meetings, deadlines, productivity metrics, and scholarly expectations. But how did this come to be? Whose time maps are guiding our academic work? And is this the only way to understand time?

What we now take for granted as "clock time" has a deep, entangled history rooted in industrialization, capitalism, and colonial expansion. Far from being a neutral or universal standard, it is a socially constructed system that has come to dominate the rhythms of academic life worldwide. Understanding how this happened is key to rethinking not only how we work, but what it means to be a scholar today.

distinctions. These terms reflect positions within global power and knowledge systems, rather than fixed locations.

**Mechanical Clocks and Perceptions of Time**

Many forms of man-made clocks were used throughout human history and across cultures, such as sundials, water clocks, astrolabes, hourglasses, and candle clocks; thus, there were many "clock times" (see Mondschein, 2020; Rooney, 2021). However, the use of mechanical clocks profoundly transformed our understanding of time. For instance, the term "clock" comes from the Flemish word clokke and the German Glocke, meaning "bell timer" (Mondschein, 2020). Early clock towers were used to regulate the lives of monastic communities, marking the start and end of prayer, work, and rest (West-Pavlov, 2013).

With the growing use of mechanical clocks in the 17th and 18th centuries, time began to be measured more precisely and became standardized. The coiled spring and escapement system allowed mechanical clocks to shrink in size, shifting time measurement from hours to minutes and seconds. Pendulum-based mechanical clocks detached time from natural processes, creating a context-independent concept central to European subjectivity as clocks shrank in size, shifting from public spaces like cathedrals to private homes and even personal clothing (Mondschein, 2020; West-Pavlov, 2013). For instance, the small pockets in jeans, originally designed for personal pocket watches, demonstrate how time became increasingly personal. This shift in reckoning time reshaped how we understood time. Time was no longer seen as something flowing naturally, governed by sunrise and sunset, or the lunar cycle, or the changing seasons. Mechanical clocks transformed time from something cyclical and fluid—as understood in many pre-industrial societies—into a linear and precise entity. Instead of being measured by natural rhythms, time became uniform units irrespective of context: hours, minutes, and seconds (i.e., mean time).

Time was now regulated to meet the demands of industrialization and capitalism, as it was standardized, divided, and controlled, much like labor or land. Time could now be "spent" or "wasted," with efficiency becoming the ideal (Adam, 2004). This temporal shift was crucial to the Industrial Revolution, which required coordinating labor. Urbanization, driven by the Industrial Revolution, saw European cities and towns experience population growth and land enclosure (where landlords took over agricultural land for personal profit). Factory and city life assimilated rural dwellers into new temporal regimes, exposing them to industrial timekeeping and a time-work discipline dictated by the clock. Rural laborers could no longer work at their own pace; instead, they were constantly monitored and under time surveillance (Mondschein, 2020; Nanni, 2012).

The rise of Christian faiths, such as Calvinism and Methodism, further linked the "wastage of time" to sin, framing productivity as a moral imperative. The proliferation of mechanical clocks reinforced this connection by intertwining Christian moral codes with time management. Christianity's temporal message—life on earth is brief while heaven's eternity is infinite—tied worldly success to salvation (Mondschein, 2020). As Mondschein (2020) put it, "Christianity has an inherent temporal message: your time on earth is short, but the kingdom of heaven is eternal… Using one's time wisely and productively, on the contrary, became a sign of industry and therefore of godliness" (p. 128). As Nanni (2012) noted, Evangelical Christians shaped notions of civility and time discipline to demarcate the "other" (e.g., the working classes) and incorporate them into a structured, time-oriented framework.

**The Colonial Dimension of Clock Time**

Clock time was not a neutral measure; it became a central tool in the expansion of European colonial powers. Colonization not only extracted land and resources, but it also imposed a specific time worldview (Nanni, 2012). According to Thu Nguyen, the "conquest of space" was closely linked to the "mastery of time" (cited in Nanni, 2012, p. 29), a process facilitated by the clock. This included imposing a standardized, mechanistic view of time. As certain European imperial powers—such as the British, French, Dutch, Portuguese, and German—expanded their empires, they worked to standardize time across colonies, often displacing or subordinating diverse local temporalities, to extract labor, resources, and land (Ogle, 2015). Many cultures, including those within Europe, organized time around natural, seasonal, or spiritual rhythms—such as the movement of the sun, the phases of the moon, agricultural cycles, or communal ceremonies (i.e., event-based) (Aveni, 2002; Birth, 2016; Nanni, 2012). These practices were deeply tied to the land and community. However, under colonial rule, these systems were often portrayed by colonizers as irregular, inefficient, or unintelligible.

The Aboriginal "walkabout" provides a clear example of how colonial time mischaracterized Indigenous peoples' relationships with time. The walkabout, a rite of passage for young Aboriginal men, was traditionally a spiritual journey connecting the individual to the land. In Australia, British colonial discourse mischaracterized the walkabout as a "waste of time" or aimless wandering. The term "walkabout" was introduced in 1828 by British colonizers to describe Aboriginal people's movements outside the rigid structures of European clock time, implying aimlessness and irregularity (Perkins, cited in Nanni, 2012). The term evoked the colonial belief that Indigenous life lacked the order dictated by Western time systems, reinforcing the idea that Aboriginal culture was "untimed." This misrepresentation reveals a deeper colonial anxiety about non-linear, nomadic, and relational approaches to time, which were seen as incompatible with the industrial and administrative logics of empire (Nanni, 2012).

European colonizers used precise clocks as a symbol of their civilization, rationality, and control, facilitating their domination and conquest. Clocks were symbolic and psychological instruments of colonialism, helping mark the inferior Other, while attempting to reform the latter according to their European temporal standards. Colonizers saw societies without mechanical clocks as "clock-less," believing they followed unpredictable, nature-based time rhythms (Nanni, 2012, p. 30). For colonizers, accurate timekeeping symbolized not only technological superiority but also moral superiority. As Nanni (2012) noted, "Even more influential than the clock, however, was the idea of time that accompanied Europeans to distant lands: the concept of how time ought to be 'kept, counted, and accounted for'—both in a moral and mathematical sense" (p. 30, emphasis in original).

Colonizers sought to impose their mechanical, clock-driven time concepts on the colonized, extending beyond the seven-day week or Christian calendar to facilitate land and labor extraction (Nanni, 2012). In places like sugar plantations in Natal and the Caribbean, rubber plantations in Southeast Asia, and African mines, harsh time regimes were enforced (Ogle, 2015). Resistance was often labeled as "laziness" and punished (Ogle, 2015, p. 93). Missionary outposts and schools, such as Lovedale in South Africa, were key in imposing time-discipline. At Lovedale, the Xhosa were forced to abandon

their flexible, seasonal work rhythms, or "irregularity of African work rhythms," in favor of a continuous, year-round schedule (Nanni, 2012, p. 202).

However, as I mentioned before, the imposition of clock time was not uniform, even within Europe, where industrial time regimes were imposed on the working class through coercive labor and schooling systems. In colonial and settler contexts, clock time took on an explicitly racialized dimension. Colonizers used clock time as a technology of governance to regulate colonized and enslaved bodies. This system justified exploitation and upheld hierarchies of personhood under the guise of civilizing progress. In the U.S. white settler context, similar logics governed antebellum slavery. Slaveholders imposed rigid time structures on plantations. Clocks monitored work from dawn until dusk with little rest. Like in the colonies, any departure from plantation schedules was cast as deviant or lazy (Phillips, 2025; Smith, 1997). In short, colonizers and their white-settler counterparts viewed time as valuable only when spent on labor, trade, or empire expansion, dismissing other temporal practices as unproductive.

Colonial clock time was further reinforced during the 19th century, when European powers, especially the British, Dutch, Germans, French, and Portuguese, established time signaling stations (Rooney, 2021). For instance, the British set up over 200 time signal stations across their colonies. These stations not only measured time—they helped control time, ensuring that global trade, military activity, and colonial exploitation operated according to similar European standards (Rooney, 2021). These projects involved legal land acquisitions, labor recruitment, maintenance, record-keeping, and astronomical observations (Rooney, 2021). The tradition of the "time ball," used in these stations, symbolized by the New Year's Eve ball drop in Times Square, dates back to 1833 when the first "time ball" was installed at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, England. The ball dropped every afternoon at 1:00 PM, helping nearby ship captains set their chronometers accurately for navigation (Rooney, 2021).

**Greenwich Mean Time and the Colonial Legacy**

The establishment of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) was a powerful symbol of colonial clock time imposition. In 1884, the International Meridian Conference declared GMT the global standard, with the Greenwich Observatory in England as the prime meridian (Nanni, 2012; Rooney, 2021). The establishment of GMT was driven by U.S. white settlers—such as scientists, railway officials, and government actors—who recognized the need for national and international coordination (Ogle, 2015). Their efforts were instrumental in shaping global time standards, culminating in the 1884 Prime Meridian Conference in Washington, D.C., where delegates from 26 countries, invited by President Chester Arthur, voted to adopt Greenwich as the prime meridian and to implement a 24-hour time zone system (Ogle, 2015).

GMT became the temporal center for global trade, navigation, and communication, centralizing time around Western Europe, particularly Britain, and positioning London as the hub of global economic activity (Rooney, 2021).The emergence of GMT facilitated an ontological shift, as the planet could be now reconceptualized as "a giant man-made clock" divided into twenty-four time zones, each spanning fifteen degrees of longitude, starting from the Prime Meridian (Nanni, 2012, p. 221). This global standardization of time perpetuated the colonial project, facilitating trade and resource

extraction while marginalizing local, often Indigenous, time systems. By imposing GMT as the global standard, colonial powers reinforced their dominance by creating a single, linear framework of time reflecting the economic and political interests of the colonizers. It was not just about synchronization—it was about control (Nanni, 2012).

Aligned with clock time, the concept of zone-based mean time (i.e., regional standard time) spread across nation-states during the 19th and 20th centuries (Ogle, 2015), though its adoption was uneven. As many nation-states asserted their national identities, clock time became as symbolic as flags and national anthems in defining their uniqueness. Furthermore, middle-class and academic societies, especially scientific associations, sought to synchronize with GMT to signal their modernity, aspiring to be seen as contemporary and global. Elites, fascinated by watches, also internalized the notion that owning clocks and watches was a marker of modernity. Thus, clock time, beyond simply being a tool of coercion during the colonial era, became something more. In colonized and non-Western contexts, clock time was adopted and adapted to assert national, modern, or middle-class identities, ultimately transforming it into a universally hegemonic concept of time (Ogle, 2015).

Today, we continue to live within the legacy of this colonial framework. Clock time—rooted in Western, colonial experiences—governs almost every aspect of our lives. We are governed by a digital regime of time, regulated by atomic clocks and computers synchronizing everything from global financial markets to personal work schedules (Rooney, 2021; Mondschein, 2020). Modern systems like GPS, the internet, and satellite communications rely on atomic time, ensuring everything operates according to the same global temporal grid (Rooney, 2021). This system, designed centuries ago, continues to shape not just how we organize our work and labor but also how we live our daily lives, all within a structure designed for efficiency and control.

So, whose time maps are guiding our academic work? Western European colonial powers, and later U.S. imperial forces, imposed clock time, making it central to global daily life. This imposition shaped historical development and continues to structure how people experience time in everyday routines. From the efficiency-driven logic of industrialization to the digital synchronization of modern society, time is no longer experienced as something organic, rooted in the rhythms of nature, community, or our bodies. Instead, it has become a standardized global system, dictating how we work, when we work, and how we measure even the most intimate aspects of our lives.

The time map we inherited, though not shaped by all of Europe equally, is rooted in a Western European and U.S. imperial legacy that embeds specific ideas and philosophies of time in three key ways. First, time became something that could be measured precisely, abstracted from its context, and applied universally. This logic was not only exported to colonized regions but also imposed on industrial laborers within Europe itself. Over time, it became tied to notions of moral worth and productivity, justifying the imposition of time-discipline both in and outside of Europe. Second, the view of time as a finite economic resource, something that can be bought, sold, or optimized, led to its commodification. Time was reduced to a transactional asset, such as labor, wages, or efficiency, which helped shape societies around economic output and profitability. Third, time also became a tool for othering, used to mark communities or

bodies still tied to ecological cycles as backward or inferior. This temporal hierarchy marginalized those who did not conform to dominant norms, reinforcing colonial and capitalist structures. Not all European societies were colonizers. Many, including parts of Eastern and Southern Europe and post-Soviet regions, experienced colonization or internal marginalization. Despite this diversity, the dominance of Western clock time remains historically tied to European imperial expansion and control. The colonial legacy embedded in clock time continues to shape our world today, influencing not only labor and economics but also how we relate to time through our bodies, communities, and institutions.

## Colonial Legacies of Time and Academic Work

Clock time continues to govern our lives, shaping not only labor but also our most intimate daily experiences. This prompts a crucial question: "*Am I a scholar?*" operating within this rigid framework, or do I resist its legacy? Perhaps we must begin to question the very rhythms that define our work, our productivity, and our understanding of time itself. Such questions become more pressing when we consider how colonial legacies of time have infiltrated academic spaces, shaping how we perceive productivity and precariousness in the global dynamics of scholarly work.

### Temporal Diversity and the Colonial Legacy of Time

In academia, the phrase "I am busy" has become both a common refrain and a moral imperative, reflecting a culture where productivity signals legitimacy. When we are not busy, we may even question our worth, a pressure fueled by institutional demands and neoliberal ideals that prioritize constant output and efficiency (Shahjahan, 2020). For many, the concept of being "busy" is deeply connected to a shared experience of workload and stress—often revolving around rigid deadlines and timelines, tied to an arbitrary, universal time measure: clock time. Clock time became increasingly salient for me, when I coached faculty across disciplines for the National Center of Faculty Diversity and Development (NCFDD), particularly early career and mid-level scholars—cisgender women, queer individuals, and people of color. In the conversations I facilitated, the doubts scholars faced about their work and their worth as beings within academia were largely tied to the pressures of clock time—how it structured their work, dictated productivity, and intersected with their social positionalities, shaping their sense of legitimacy within academic spaces.

But what does it mean to be busy? And why is being "busy" so often tied to productivity? The answer, when we take a closer look, lies in how we structure and understand time itself. As I have demonstrated earlier, the concept of time in academia is shaped not only by individual circumstances but also by broader social and institutional structures—temporal frameworks reflecting deeper historical processes, including colonialism. The role of clock time was especially significant in European medieval universities, where the clock was central to daily life. As Mondschien (2020) noted,

> Much as today, running a medieval university required a great deal of coordination. Scheduling faculty meetings, examinations, and lectures was as necessary then as now… Thus, by the nature of their daily routines, the members of the university tended to be more conscious of time—and at an earlier date—than other segments of society (pp. 65-66).

In other words, medieval universities, compared to many other segments of European society, pioneered the fostering of clock time consciousness. The academic institutions we inherited today embody this clock time legacy. The imposition and acceptance of clock time—emphasizing linearity, productivity, and control—has become deeply ingrained in academic life. But is this the only way to understand and experience time?

Varying temporal experiences delineate our academic life today. The "busy" academic is often someone struggling to meet external demands. But these temporal experiences vary greatly depending on the disciplines we work in, institutional contexts, academic rank, and our social identities like race, ability, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality (Shahjahan, 2020; Vostal, 2016). For example, consider the difference in temporal experiences between myself, a tenured professor at a research university in the Global North, where my time is relatively self-directed, and a contingent faculty member, whose job security is precarious and whose workday is shaped by contract renewals and the constant pressure to maintain research or teaching performance (Shahjahan, 2020). That said, some faculty, especially those in privileged positions across disciplines, experience benefits from academic acceleration, such as personal enjoyment of a faster pace, competitive advantages, quick task execution and decision-making, and a preference for rapid, electronically mediated communication (see Vostal, 2016). Is it any wonder, then, that minoritized faculty often experience shame when they fail to meet externally imposed deadlines or expectations (Shahjahan, 2020)? This sense of failure is not personal, but rather a reflection of societal pressure to conform to a rigid, linear understanding of time—one prioritizing efficiency and productivity over holistic wellbeing, a status quo reinforced by established academics, whose security might come at the expense of other academics' insecurity.

This rigid view of time, prioritizing future-oriented goals, is deeply embedded in capitalist logics and the colonial experience. The push to "achieve" and meet deadlines forces individuals to shape their identities around future success, often at the expense of present wellbeing (see Shahjahan, 2015). What does it mean to be "productive"? And why do we constantly defer our sense of worthiness to some future self, as if time today were a finite resource to be spent wisely? The pressure to meet deadlines and anticipate future success creates an environment where minoritized scholars are forced to view themselves through a lens of inadequacy, engaging in anticipatory acceleration as they constantly strive to "earn" their place within academic systems prioritizing speed and output over holistic engagement (Shahjahan, 2020). While the forces of neoliberal higher education, power dynamics, academic hierarchies, and insecurity certainly shape these struggles, they are all facilitated and mediated by the concept of clock time, which creates the illusion of time as universal and equally available. This idea of time suggests that our problems with time stem from how we manage it (Bennett & Burke, 2018).

However, this view ignores that clock time, an arbitrary construct shaped by larger transnational processes, has entrenched itself as the hegemonic framework that underpins and perpetuates these very forces, shaping our everyday academic lives.

This clock time framing is significant when we examine the intersection of productivity and precarity in academia. The relentless pressure to be productive, albeit felt differently depending on our social positionality—driven by tight timelines, grant deadlines, and publication cycles—forces academics into a perpetual race against time (Muller, 2014; O'Neill, 2014; Ylijoki, 2013). This linear view of time clashes with other temporal logics and frameworks, particularly in contexts marked by precarity and structural inequality. In our recent research, we observed how academic work in the Bangladeshi context is shaped by a complex set of temporal experiences, which we have termed *shomoyscapes* (Shahjahan et al., 2022). This concept underscores the relational and precarious nature of time: it is not merely about individual control or managing schedules, but about how social hierarchies and cultural logics shape our engagement with the world. A *shomoyscape* also represents a landscape of multiple temporalities—where institutional, modern, and often linear clock time interacts with context-specific, relational, or cyclical temporalities. It reflects how individuals navigate constraints, exert agency, and move through hybrid rhythms of life and labor across academic and cultural settings. This intersection complicates our understanding of productivity and, more fundamentally, raises the question: *"Am I a scholar? Do I truly belong in academia?"*

In many global contexts, academic work is shaped by growing precarity, including job insecurity, low wages, and limited resources. In regions affected by war or conflict, navigating these conditions becomes a creative and urgent struggle over time and survival. The colonial imposition of linear clock time exacerbates these challenges and results in temporal agencies. While precarity is increasingly experienced across global higher education systems, its intensity and consequences vary depending on social infrastructure, economic stability, and one's positionality within these systems. For example, scholars navigating structurally under-resourced systems find themselves working within a global knowledge economy that devalues their time and forces them to adapt to linear clock time academic schedules driven by fast-paced production cycles (Marchais et al., 2020; Tilley & Kalina, 2021). This dynamic is particularly acute in contexts marked by conflict, economic austerity, or institutional breakdown. How can scholars from regions marked by socio-political instability and precarity compete on a global scale when their perceptions and experiences of time are shaped by rhythms that differ from the linear, clock-driven model—rhythms that are relational, cyclical, or influenced by the non-linear, conflict-ridden realities of their communities, such as those in Myanmar, Palestine, or Ukraine, to name just a few (Htut et al, 2022; Jebril, 2024; Oleksiyenko & Terepyshchyi, 2024)?

At the same time, regions like the UK and the USA are also facing political and financial instability in higher education systems. In the UK, neoliberal restructuring, austerity policies, and university closures have significantly disrupted academic institutions (Adams, 2025). In the USA, rising right-wing populism has led to funding cuts, attacks on DEI programs, book bans, and legislative interference (Conroy, 2025). These shifts reveal how uneven development and political pressures are actively reshaping academic temporalities across different global contexts.

The reality is today's clock time is a historically colonial construct, shaped by global power dynamics, that has a long history of marginalizing local ways of knowing and being (Nanni, 2012; Ogle, 2015). Hence, the question "*Am I a scholar?"* is intertwined with rigid, colonial, and capitalist time structures in academia shaping who is considered a "real scholar" by linking productivity and busyness to moral worth. Such temporal frameworks, rooted in clock time, influence our scholarly ways of being, often marginalizing those from minoritized backgrounds or contexts where alternative temporal experiences and ways of knowing—such as relational or cyclical understandings of time—may not align with dominant, linear models. Furthermore, the pressure to conform to externally imposed deadlines and expectations raises the question, "*Am I a scholar?*" by highlighting how academic worth is tied to one's ability to meet these time structures, regardless of one's geographic or institutional location. While the dominance of clock time is unevenly felt, it shapes academic legitimacy in ways that can exclude those whose rhythms or conditions of life challenge its assumptions.

**The Global Dynamics of Time and Its Colonial Legacies**

We must consider the role that global policies play in shaping academic temporalities. When global policies—such as the push for internationalization, improving one's institution in university rankings, or academic mobility (Marginson, 2023)—create new temporal pressures, how do scholars from such regions adjust their rhythms without losing sight of local priorities? Rankings, internationalization efforts, and the drive to publish in high-impact journals, to name a few, have created a global academic system where local temporal rhythms are increasingly dictated by external forces. Across global higher education, national and transnational policies aimed at internationalization and accumulating global knowledge capital place academic labor at the forefront of implementation. These policies have a tremendous impact on the temporal rhythms of scholars' lives. For instance, policies requiring universities to adopt standardized systems for measuring research output and teaching effectiveness have led to the imposition of clock-oriented timelines on academic work. The pressure to be globally competitive can lead institutions to adopt practices—such as reformed degree cycles and rapid research mobilization—that often misalign with the local rhythms of teaching, learning, or research (see Rotenberg & Carlos, 2018; Tilak, 2023; Vostal, 2016).

Many of my personal encounters with colleagues around the world highlight these temporal tensions. For instance, during a recent visit to colleagues in India, I spoke with faculty at a minority-serving institution (an Islamic-majority university). They shared how many of their colleagues were caught in endless meetings to realign their curriculum cycles with government mandates tied to the new National Education Policies (NEP), which are instituting four-year degree programs. I also met and encountered colleagues from Kazakhstan and Hong Kong who highlighted the external pressure to publish in Scopus-indexed or Social Science Citation Indexed journals while also striving to improve enrollment and retention rates. My visits took up a significant amount of their time, as they generously hosted me and my students despite their busy schedules. However, to some extent, this hospitality was also expected as part of their efforts to assert their global or internationalization goals. As a result, scholars in these regions face competing expectations from both local and global systems, creating a kind of temporal dissonance.

How can scholars be expected to succeed in an academic world demanding universal alignment when their clock time, or ideas of time (i.e., temporality), are not even recognized as valuable? This imposition of global policies raises the question of who gets to decide what "scholarship" looks like. Minoritized scholars from the Global North or South are expected to adapt to Western clock time structures, leading them to question if their own ways of knowing and working are valued in the global academic system. The question "*Am I a scholar?*" becomes entangled with whether one's scholarly practices fit within these externally imposed temporal frameworks.

The tension between academic time, mobility, and the geopolitics of knowledge underscores the colonial dynamics shaping global higher education. Due to the geopolitics of knowledge, credentials, knowledge, and/or experiences from the Global North are privileged in the global labor market (e.g., Mignolo, 2011; Schöpf, 2020). Scholars from the Global South must invest considerable time and resources to gain recognition in the Global North, often navigating cultural and linguistic borders to validate their work (Schöpf, 2020). Due to the geopolitics of knowledge, many seek Global North degrees to improve their future career opportunities, prestige, and/or skills (Schöpf, 2020; Yamin & Luna, 2016). This academic mobility reflects deeper colonial logics, where metropolitan centers, primarily Anglo-Euro American contexts, dominate knowledge production and validate academic credentials, leaving peripheral scholars to adapt to the temporal rhythms of the Global North (Schöpf, 2020; Shahjahan, 2023). These scholars face embodied consequences as they shift their schedules and compromise local engagements, further deepening the inequities in academic mobility (Schöpf, 2020).

In Bangladesh, for instance, aspirations for study abroad reflect both career and personal motivations, with scholars seeking better opportunities but also navigating systemic challenges, such as low salaries and lack of institutional transparency (Shahjahan, 2023). Significant inequalities shape who can access the resources needed for academic travel, including funding, visas, time off, and accommodations. For example, a Bangladeshi researcher must navigate not only the academic schedules and expectations of their university but also the time-consuming processes of visa applications, which involve dealing with local passport offices, notary centers, and legal organizations, ultimately consuming valuable time from both personal and professional spheres. Our research on Bangladeshi academic mobility highlights how family responsibilities and dynamics can further limit the ability to travel abroad, influencing the timing and feasibility of international academic opportunities (Shahjahan, 2023; Shahjahan et al., 2023). Academic mobility thus intertwines with relational goals, precarity, and aspirations for the future, highlighting how colonial temporalities shape whose time and knowledge are valued in academia. This raises the question: "*Am I a scholar?"* as scholars from marginalized contexts wrestle with the pressures of conforming to the global academic time frame.

The geopolitics of knowledge, clock time, and academic collaborations are intricately linked, with scholars from the Global South often facing exploitation due to rigid timelines imposed by Global North counterparts (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019; Tilley and Kalina, 2021; Walker & Martinez-Vargas, 2022) which disregard local conceptions of time and marginalize non-Western knowledge systems (Shahjahan et al., 2023; Schöpf,

2020). Academic collaborations are marked by unequal expectations, as Global South scholars often lack the resources to meet externally imposed deadlines, and institutional responsibilities influence time allocation (Canché et al., 2024; Marchais et al., 2020). For example, in my collaboration with Indian colleagues on a U.S. grant, synchronizing workloads and schedules was critical to submitting the proposal on time to our funders. Additionally, digital infrastructures exacerbate inequalities, with uneven access to reliable internet, electricity, and data centers disrupting collaborations (Ali et al., 2023; Marchais et al., 2020). In my own experience, virtual meetings with colleagues in Bangladesh were hindered by slow internet traffic, and power outages in India and South Africa interrupted our work. Countries like Bangladesh, with only 19 data centers (Corner, 2022), face significant infrastructure challenges. Finally, digital collaborations are shaped by racial, gender, and class-based temporal constraints, highlighting the unequal distribution of digital and temporal resources influencing the pace of academic work and raise important questions about whose time matters in global academic spaces (Canché et al., 2024; Marchais et al., 2020; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019; Tilley & Kalina, 2021).

In sum, the concept of time in academia is not neutral. It is shaped by colonial legacies, where linear, standardized time has become the norm, marginalizing non-linear temporalities and imposing rigid expectations of productivity, efficiency, and future-oriented achievement. These colonial constructs burden marginalized scholars, raising the question not just of how we experience time, but who gets to decide whose time matters.

Global academic structures, shaped by colonial histories and strict time regimes, force marginalized scholars—especially those whose ways of knowing or working differ from dominant norms—to confront a painful question: "*Am I a scholar?*" While this question may be especially acute in Global South contexts due to institutional, economic, and geopolitical inequalities, it is not exclusive to them; even scholars in economically wealthy nations like the U.K. are experiencing growing precarity through institutional shutdowns and job losses (Adams, 2025), while well-resourced U.S. institutions now face visa revocations, job insecurity, lack of academic freedom, and structural marginalization amid the rise of right-wing populism (Conroy, 2025). This tension exists within a system demanding conformity to externally imposed time frames, undermining scholars' local knowledge systems and life/embodied rhythms. The central question—"*Am I a scholar*?"—is not merely a local, everyday concern but a transnational one, emerging wherever temporal and structural conditions make scholars feel devalued, invisible, or unrecognized. At its core, it questions the legitimacy of scholars whose experiences and practices fall outside the hegemonic, colonial time structures imposed by global academia. Until we challenge and redefine our understanding of time, one rooted in colonial histories, issues of productivity, precarity, and worthiness will remain unresolved, continuously prompting the question, *"Am I a scholar?"*

## Radical Self-Care as a Scholarly Practice

The question "*Am I a scholar?*" is deeply connected to the notion of radical self-care as both a scholarly practice and a political act. Radical self-care is a transformative

practice that challenges oppressive hierarchies and promotes wellbeing for minoritized bodies by engaging in the everyday, often difficult work of caring for oneself and others (Badr, 2022). This notion of care ultimately asserts that "I matter, we matter" (Ahmed, 2014, last para). Radical self-care, as a scholarly practice, challenges the neoliberal and colonial frameworks dominating academia by reimagining the relationship between productivity, wellbeing, and knowledge creation. Scholars are often measured by their output—publications, grants, teaching evaluations, and job security—dictated by linear, colonial time structures prioritizing constant productivity over holistic wellbeing. In contrast, I would suggest radical self-care calls for a redefinition of scholarship incorporating care for oneself, community, and the larger ecosystems of knowledge.

Radical self-care redefines scholarship by prompting the question, "Can I be a scholar if I am constantly sacrificing my health, my community, and my personal wellbeing?" Rather than just taking breaks or indulging in self-care, radical self-care challenges a system demanding scholars sacrifice their bodies, minds, and spirits for productivity, all facilitated by clock time. Influential thinkers like Audre Lorde, who asserts, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (Lorde, 1988, p. 205), Gloria Anzaldúa, particularly in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro* (2015), and Vandana Shiva (2005), who introduces the concept of Earth Democracy, offer valuable perspectives framing care as a political act necessary for survival in oppressive environments. Their work highlights the importance of community care, spiritual activism, and interconnected wellbeing. Radical self-care challenges grind culture's harmful view of bodies as disposable and productivity as worth (Hersey, 2022), emphasizing individual care and collective wellbeing while urging scholars to resist the pressure to equate value with constant output. This is especially crucial for marginalized scholars, facing heightened emotional labor in navigating academic systems, devaluing their contributions. Many scholars expand on this notion of self-care, emphasizing how collective care practices rooted in cultural and indigenous knowledge systems can transform academic spaces (Chilisa, 2019). However, as noted earlier, due to the temporal diversity in academia, radical self-care will look different depending on context—such as discipline, institutional environment, academic rank, and social positionalities like race, ability, ethnicity, class, gender, and nationality. In short, radical self-care acknowledges that unequal time structures can negatively impact wellbeing, especially for scholars facing multiple pressures and intersecting conditions.

Radical self-care also calls for reconceptualizing time itself. Rather than viewing time as a finite resource to be maximized, it encourages scholars to honor rest, pause, and pleasure as vital components of scholarly work (Shahjahan, in press). Such self-care would recognize and honor the time cycles marginalized during colonial histories—those tied to the natural rhythms of the world, such as our bodies, the seasons, and our communities. This shift in understanding time disrupts the colonial legacy of clock time and challenges the idea that scholarly worth is tied to measurable output, fostering environments prioritizing care, reflection, and renewal. Integrating rest and care into academic life is essential in counteracting the exhaustion of grind culture (Hersey, 2022), allowing scholars to reclaim their time as something to be honored rather than spent.

Across global academic contexts, scholars experience pressures tied to clock time, but the ability to resist or reimagine these temporal demands is shaped by uneven access

to institutional protections, social welfare policies, and economic security. While some countries with greater power and economic hegemony have shaped the dominant frameworks of clock time, it is important to recognize that not all scholars conform to or are satisfied with these imposed temporal structures. In fact, scholars across contexts actively negotiate, challenge, and reimagine the demands of clock time. In many Global South contexts, where support structures may be more limited, scholars navigate these temporal pressures while simultaneously finding ways to prioritize local needs and care practices within their own systems of knowledge and engagement. Furthermore, academic environments often fail to provide the necessary resources for radical self-care practices, particularly for scholars in precarious conditions who must balance local and global demands while maintaining their wellbeing (see Shahjahan et al., 2023).

Finally, radical self-care promotes an ontological shift in how scholars understand their existence within academia. By rejecting productivity-driven models that prioritize external markers of success, scholars can reclaim their worth through self-compassion, collective wellbeing, and respect for diverse epistemologies. This shift is particularly significant for scholars in Global South contexts, who navigate the complexities of colonial and neoliberal systems within academia while maintaining and enriching their cultural and intellectual traditions. For these scholars, radical self-care becomes a powerful act of resistance, challenging academic structures that marginalize their ways of knowing. At the same time, this call for care takes on new urgency amid the rise of right-wing populism across the globe, which has intensified the precarity faced by many scholars—especially those from marginalized, racialized, and politically dissident communities. As academic freedoms erode and critical inquiry is increasingly surveilled or suppressed, radical self-care is not just a personal practice but a political stance: a refusal to allow fear, censorship, or hyper-productivity to dictate the terms of scholarly life. Dismantling colonial logics in academia and embracing frameworks centered on care, empathy, and collaboration is essential. As I noted elsewhere (Shahjahan, 2020), neoliberal time reinforces a transactional view of knowledge, where productivity becomes the measure of worth, perpetuating cycles of inadequacy. Radical self-care calls for frameworks that celebrate holistic engagement with our bodies, minds, and spirits, honoring the process of knowledge production.

Process-oriented reflection in academia invites us to value the intellectual journey, relational dynamics, and non-linear paths of knowledge, rather than focusing solely on polished outcomes. This shift from product to process can foster a more inclusive, humane, and equitable scholarly environment. Process-oriented reflection in academia can be applied beyond dissertation defenses, peer review, teaching, publishing, conferences, and mentorship by valuing the intellectual journey, relational dynamics, and non-linear paths of knowledge. For example, at a collegial talk or dissertation defense, rather than focusing solely on findings and theories, can we also take time to celebrate the triumphs and struggles of the journey during the defense or talk itself, not just afterward? Embracing this approach allows scholars to nurture diverse ways of knowing and relating. Moreover, diverse cultural understandings of time, often found across various communities, foreground relationality and collective wellbeing in ways that offer valuable lessons for rethinking academic structures globally (see Shahjahan et al., 2022; Shahjahan et al., 2023).

As we consider these ideas, I offer the following questions for reflection, recognizing there is no universal solution, as that would simply reproduce colonial logics of modernity: What does it mean to be a scholar in a global context where diverse ways of being intersect? How do colonial and neoliberal temporalities shape our understanding of productivity and success? In what ways can we decolonize our practices, revaluing knowledge produced outside traditional academic frameworks? How can we foster a culture of care, embracing diverse scholarly ways of knowing and being? How can our digital practices reflect or challenge colonial temporalities in academic discourse?

By integrating radical self-care into scholarship, the question "*Am I a scholar*?" is transformed from a query based on external validation to a personal and collective exploration of identity, wellbeing, and knowledge production. Through this lens, being a scholar becomes an act of self-preservation, communal care, and resistance to oppressive academic systems—redefining what it means to truly engage with the world of ideas, our bodies, and communities. I hope this article reinforces the idea that our scholarly ways of being can be multifaceted and that diverse contributions should be valued, helping to ease anxieties about legitimacy. Peace.

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## Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this paper were presented as a keynote at the CIHE Pre-Conference Forum of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and shared with colleagues at the College of Education, University of Nebraska–Lincoln. I am deeply grateful for the thoughtful questions and feedback offered by those audiences, which helped reshape and strengthen the paper. I also wish to thank Sahana Rajan, Kirsten T. Edwards, and Aik Seinn for their insightful comments on earlier drafts. Finally, I am indebted to the editors of the *Journal of Global Higher Education* for their kind invitation to contribute to this inaugural issue, and to the anonymous reviewers and copy editors for their thoughtful and valuable feedback.

## AI Statement

This article used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with paraphrasing and language refinement, including improving clarity, grammar, and coherence. All ideas, arguments, and interpretations are the author's own.

## Funding

The author has not shared any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 111-127
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.11

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Reimagining International Students in Public Discourses: Can Media Facilitate the Inclusion of International Students in Society?

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## Abstract

The inclusion of international students in campuses and societies is an objective of many countries. While such policies are often accompanied by well-intentioned supportive practices and discourses, these activities may actually produce paradoxes where immigrant groups are excluded as "others" (e.g., Kangas-Müller et al., 2024). Hence, in this paper, by investigating articles published by two primary newspaper outlets from 2010 to 2023, we analyse the media framings and agencies of international students in Finland, a country that is considered a latecomer in both recruiting international students and welcoming immigrants to society. Through these analyses, we identify four main framings to represent international students: as numbers, as labour, as economic resources, and as social others. Three agency categories position international students as predetermined, active, and constrained. We conclude with a discussion of what is not present in Finnish media and the possible implications of public discourses as mediators of inclusive (or exclusive) language and practices.

**Keywords**: content analysis, Finland, international students, media, student agency

# Introduction

International students not only enter educational institutions, but they also become part of the complex social, economic, and political dynamics of their host countries. For host countries, this education-based immigration often serves different purposes, including revenue generation and demands for skilled labour (e.g., Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015). At times, the realities that international students encounter are somewhat contradictory. For instance, the receiving country may recruit international students for their eventual entry into local labour markets, yet students face significant barriers when they wish to stay (Paltridge et al., 2014). Many countries and institutions have policies and practices to foster inclusivity, yet, at times, these well-intended policies and practices may contribute to counter-effects which "other" international students (see Kangas-Müller et al., 2024). One example may be the "international talent" narrative attached to preferred skilled labour in policy discourses.

National governments have drafted internationalisation policies to operate on a global scale, including major objectives to recruit international students (Elken et al., 2023; Ledger & Kawalilak, 2020; Lomer, 2018). While many rationales for recruiting international students are mentioned in these policies, the financial value and labour significance of this student group seem especially important to national governments and their interests (Jokila, 2020; Lomer, 2018; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). A growing body of research also indicates that despite proactive policies on recruiting international students, their stay in host destinations has not been without problems, including experiences related to racism and discrimination (Lee, 2007). These issues became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed differentiated policies, racist rhetoric, and violence targeting international students, especially those from China (Koo et al., 2023; Ramia, 2021).

Finland, the national context for this study, has been a proponent of internationalisation policies, especially since the beginning of the 2000s. Through the establishment of separate bachelor's and master's programmes taught in English, Finland has facilitated an influx of international students. Given that the number of international students arriving in Finland has quadrupled over the last twenty years (Vipunen, 2023), it can be argued that the Finnish government has succeeded in its aims. However, the integration of international students into campuses, society, and labour markets seems to have become an issue (see Jokila, 2020). Although much attention has been paid to increasing the number of international students, such as by executing marketing campaigns, it is less clear how responsive and ready Finnish society is for the transformations resulting from diversified student and citizen populations.

Media can be perceived as playing the role of a mediator in the inclusion of international students as it shapes and disseminates public discourses. Previous studies have analysed various representations of international students in national media spaces (e.g., Brooks, 2017), as well as in social media globally (Mittelmeier & Cockayne, 2022). We aim to contribute to this body of literature by investigating Finnish news outlets as examples. First, we analyse in which kinds of frames the international students are positioned and, second, the agency in which these students are

constructed. Drawing on these framing and agency conceptualisations, we explore the representations of international students in Finnish media outlets as mechanisms to communicate specific meanings to Finnish society. This matter is relevant for any society hosting international students, especially for those sectors facing difficulties in including newcomers in society and labour markets. The data consist of 107 news articles from two major media sites, *Yleisradio Oy (Yle)*, the national broadcasting company of Finland, and *Helsingin Sanomat* (*HS)*, a major newspaper in Finland. Each of the articles were published after a national emphasis on internationalisation policies, generally, and on international student recruitment, specifically, from the 2010s onwards. In analysing these news pieces, we explore the framings and agency in which international students are situated.

## Media as a Mediator in Society

Different media outlets disseminate representations and ideas about international students. Earlier studies on the representations of international students have examined both legacy (e.g., Brooks, 2017; Collins, 2006) and social media (e.g., Mittelmeier & Cockayne, 2022). Studies have mainly focused on major Anglophone country contexts and demonstrated evidence of racialised and other controversial narratives about international students. For example, Paltridge et al. (2014) identified three separate and contradictory themes in the Australian media: economic policies denoting the significance of international students to the Australian economy, victims of racist and violent acts, and exploiters of the immigration system. The third theme presented contradictory views. On the one hand, international students were welcomed; on the other hand, the government made the transition from student to permanent resident more difficult. In Canada, international students were presented in the media in dual terms, either through positive language or negative language, such as threats to or users of the system (Anderson, 2019). Similarly, Lee et al. (2019) found that despite the important role of international students in Canada, local media portrayed them as voiceless. Bodis's (2021) study analysed a TV discussion show, pointing out the "double deficit" of international students' English language skills, as constructed in the media. Instead of recognising the many languages spoken by international students, the media highlighted their English language deficits in the Australian context.

A few studies have specifically focused on Asian international students. Collins (2006) analysed New Zealand's media content and identified three overlapping categories which represented media portrayals of Asian international students: economic objects, exotic others, and social problems. The first category was perceived as predominant, yet connected to the other two categories. Brooks's (2017) study in the UK context linked the discourses on international students to neoliberal and neocolonial narratives. According to her study, UK newspapers emphasised the pressure stemming from the Chinese education system, competitiveness, and some pedagogical stereotypes ascribed to Chinese students. The main framing of the Asian

students in the UK media was connected to economic interests and depicted in a positive tone. In their analysis of Chinese international students' representations in the U.S. media, Suspitsyna and Shalka (2019) argued that media portrayals had negative effects, for instance, on campus culture. Kim's (2020) study in the Korean context also showed "othering" in the depictions of international students. Globally, Mittelmeier and Cochoyne Cockayne (2022) examined international students' representations on Twitter (now X) during the COVID-19 pandemic and found two contrasting and mutable ways to discuss this student group. Initially, the students were presented as transmitters of the virus; eventually, the tone shifted to a more compassionate direction. Mittelmeier and Cockayne (2022) also noted that the narratives on international students were racially motivated, with Asian—and particularly Chinese—students discussed in a discriminatory tone.

These studies demonstrate different and contradictory ways of presenting international students in the media; a dominant frame is the economic sphere. As Yi and Jung (2015) pointed out, studies on public discourses about international students have mainly analysed the discursive marginalisation of non-Western students in Western countries. Previous research on media coverage of international students has focused on major Anglophone country contexts, concentrating on Asian student representations (e.g., Brooks, 2017). Despite the introduction of tuition fees in some Nordic countries, the discourses attached to international students may be attached to broader discussions concerning the welfare state.

Media can also be examined as a mediator in society. Jokila and Mathies (2024) showed that Finnish national practices in crisis communication during the pandemic were not fully inclusive, while international students' approaches to media usage varied. Access to information in host countries is important to enact the fullest possible mobile "citizenship" in the given context. As argued by Georgiou (2013), media use among minority groups is complex and provides a lens through which their sense of cultural and political belonging can be studied. Besides being an information disseminator, media can influence whether society chooses to employ inclusive or exclusive discourse practices.

We perceive the media as focal actors in creating meanings regarding different groups of people, including international students. This investigation consists of frame analysis (Entman, 1993), leading to an understanding of the purposeful frames to which the students are attached in the media content. News articles can be defined as performing a purposeful act of selecting one representation of international students over another to depict a theme, person, or event. Entman (1993) explains this process: "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52). This strategy calls for approaching media outlets through the frames in which they situate people, such as international students.

In this study, besides framing, we also focus on international students' agency that is constructed in the media and has drawn increasing interest in the field studying international students (Inouye et al., 2023). Lipura and Collins (2020) observed some researchers' tendency to depict international students in narratives that focus on

academic, financial, and agency deficiencies. Other researchers also pointed out the problematic framing of international students as a vulnerable group since such a framing might undermine their agency (e.g., Deuchar, 2022).

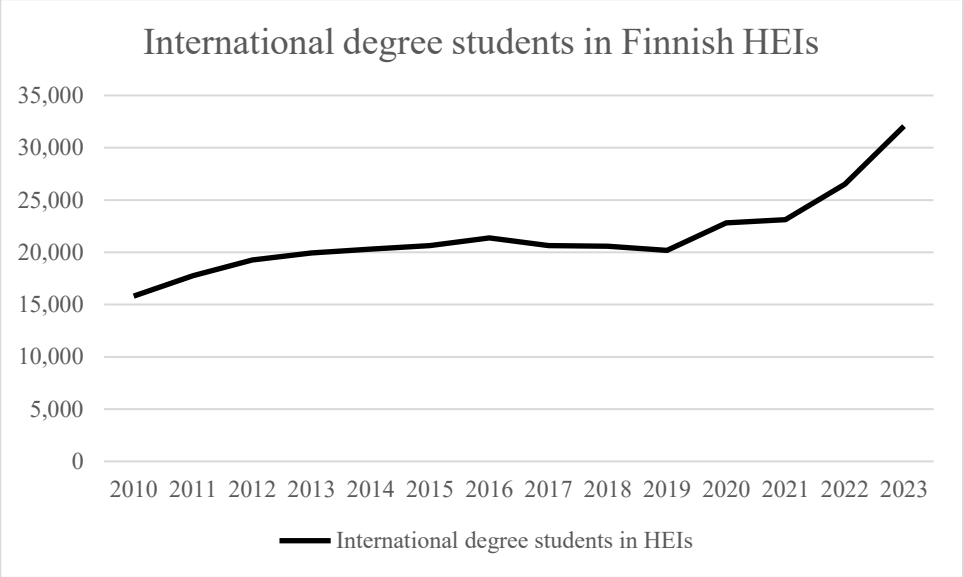
Kettle (2005) studied agency as a discursive practice that highlighted the agentic (rather than passive) position taken by international students when navigating an Australian university. Tran and Vu (2017) identified four forms of agency. First, agency in mobility refers to students' activities in building their own lives. Second, through needs-response agency, students identify their needs for additional support (e.g., in learning processes). Third, agency as struggle and resistance involves how students navigate situations where they exercise agency (e.g., informing others about their difficult experiences). Lastly, collective agency for contestation denotes students' joint actions in responding to a situation, such as the closure of an educational institution.

We consider news outlets to have two kinds of agencies: (1) the agency of media houses and journalists writing news articles and (2) agency as an output constructed in news outlets. The latter is of interest in our study. To understand how agency is constructed, we refer to discursive agency (Leipold & Winkel, 2017). Leipold and Winkel (2017) used discursive agency to understand how actors became politically relevant in discursive practices. We change this setting by focusing on international students' discursive agency that is constructed in news articles. This agency is then produced from word choices, ideas, and contextualisations. An understanding of agency constructions can reflect the space where international students are expected to take their positions in society and how they do so.

## Finland as the Context of this Study

Internationalisation policies in higher education came to prominence in the 1990s after Finland joined the European Union (EU). The country's policy objectives were communicated in its internationalisation strategies in 2001, 2009, and 2017, as well as its internationalisation vision in 2022. At the beginning, the focus was on sending Finnish students abroad and receiving international students from other countries in an exchange (Ministry of Education, 2009). Alongside this initiative, especially from 2009 onwards, Finland has shifted its policy attention to recruiting international students. The expansion objectives were initially rationalised based on the need to internationalise campuses and attract skilled labour; later, expansion was rationalised through the pursuit of financial interests as the country introduced tuition fees for students outside the EU and EEA countries in 2017 (see, e.g., Jokila, 2020). Figure 1 shows the increases in the numbers of international students pursuing degrees offered in higher education institutions.

**Figure 1: International Degree Students Pursuing Degrees in Finnish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)[8]**




Despite this demonstrated success in welcoming more international students, there is an ongoing discussion regarding how international students integrate into Finnish campuses, society, and labour markets (Jokila, 2020). A core discussion concerns the limited Finnish language skills that are perceived to be an obstacle to employment (Korhonen, 2014). The government has initiated the Talent Boost programme that, among other goals, aims to "retain international talent" in Finland, stating that "it is important for international students, researchers, and workers to find jobs that correspond to their skills, make progress in their careers and feel that they are part of Finnish society" (Talent Boost, 2023). Finland's visa and residence permit procedures have also been under scrutiny due to slow visa handling processes, among other problems. In summary, the state has focused on providing international students with structural ease in staying in Finland, although the newly elected government has diminished their opportunities to stay in the country after graduation. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected international students' mobility and life in Finland in many ways (e.g., their social lives) (Filippou & Jokila, 2024; Jokila & Filippou, 2023).

## Empirical Approach

In this paper, we examine how international students are framed in the public discourse in Finland and what kind of agency is constructed within these frames. An understanding of how international students are discussed in media coverage is critical when the national policy objective is to recruit more international students to Finnish

[8] Includes students from bachelor to doctoral level.

campuses. We analyse news pieces from two legacy media companies, *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Yle*, both of which publish their news online. *Helsingin Sanomat* is the largest newspaper in Finland by number of subscriptions, while *Yle* is Finland's national media company for public broadcasting. These companies reach a significant percentage of the Finnish population online, and *HS* is also available in print. Finnish people also trust media sources, in general, and *Yle* is especially well-trusted (EVA, 2025).

To collect data, an article search was conducted in the electronic database of *HS* (2010–2021) and the web page of *Yle* (2010–March 2023). First, we collected articles from these databases using the search terms "foreign student" and "international student" in Finnish to ensure that the target audience consisted of Finnish-speaking citizens. Second, we reviewed all articles and excluded the opinion pieces, editorials, columns, articles about exchange students, and articles that were not about international students. Both authors participated in this process; to ensure similar exclusion criteria, we discussed this process along the way. The final data comprised 63 *HS* and 44 *Yle* articles. We excluded pictures from the analysis. Most of the articles were published under a section regarding domestic news; very few came from sections devoted to the economy or politics. We translated the quotations from Finnish to English.

We used content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) to identify the framing through which international students were presented in the Finnish news media. First, both authors individually made raw observations about what was made salient in relation to international students in each article. We then identified the kinds of information about international students that were made evident in the news pieces by analysing the repetitions and placements of the information in the texts (Entman, 1993). Second, we discussed our observations together and formulated seven framings. We repeated this process of individual analyses and joint discussions several times. We continued individually coding the articles into the framings and developed the latter during our discussions in light of the findings from previous conceptualisations and our individual analyses. Finally, we distilled four framings and coded the articles into those that they predominantly represented. It is important to note that these framings overlap. After conducting the frame analysis, we continued to analyse the agency in which the media content portrayed the international students. This analysis helped us to go beyond mere content representation and understand how international students were perceived as actors in society. In this part, we conducted inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and identified three agentic positions: predetermined, active, and constrained. There is also overlap in these agency constructions. The authors established credibility through data triangulation by using two news outlets and researcher triangulation in comparing analyses and developing findings.

We, the researchers and authors of this paper, are Finnish citizens who have studied and worked in Finland for most of our careers. This insider position makes it possible for us to understand the news pieces in the broader societal context. However, it may also hinder interpretations that a researcher outside the country's context may produce. To mitigate this risk, we have developed our study and analysis together by critically reflecting on our ideas and understandings.

# Findings

Here, we discuss the four main framings identified in our analysis: international students as numbers, as labour, as economic resources, and as social others. One-third of the articles framed international students as economic resources (Table 1). The tuition fees were implemented during the period we examined; it was the most reported single topic. Also, the Covid-19 pandemic occurred during the analysed timeline and, hence, was impactful since 2020.

**Table 1: Frequencies of the Frames**

| Frame | Total | % |
|---|---|---|
| Students as numbers | 26 | 24 |
| Students as labour | 24 | 22 |
| Students as economic resources | 39 | 36 |
| Students as social others | 18 | 17 |
| Total | 107 | 100 |

**Frames in News Outlets**

Students as Numbers

*Numbers* constituted the first frame through which international students were presented in the media. This form was very plain and often showed increasing (and at times decreasing) numbers of international students or applicants in a particular higher education institution, accompanied with comparisons to the figures in previous years. Occasionally, this knowledge was also combined with information regarding the countries that were represented in the statistics. The increase in the number of educational programmes was discussed as well. This increase may demonstrate the recent phenomenon of welcoming a larger international student body into the campuses, especially in some of the regional higher education institutions: "International education attracts students from abroad to [town in Finland]. Only in the [one of the universities of applied sciences], there are just under 300 international students" (*Yle*, 2010). Publishing this kind of news article reveals the significance of this particular student group to Finnish society.

In the following news excerpt, such an increase has resulted in pressures to accommodate the growing student body:

> Every year in higher education institutions in [city in Finland], 5000 new students start their studies. It is a harsh competition over free apartments, and most international students are left behind Finnish students. Many international

> students have been forced to leave their studies in [city in Finland] when it has been impossible to find an apartment (*Yle*, 2013).

This extract pointed out infrastructural shortages while positioning Finnish and international students against each other in a growing competition over housing while pointing out solutions for the issue. Another article discussed issues related to entering Finland and the slowness of its administrative processes. International student numbers were discussed in terms of lost opportunity, which especially related to the slowness of the visa procedures and residence permit application processes. Slow visa procedures were perceived as hindrances to students' entry to Finland from outside the EU and EEA countries: "[One of the universities of applied sciences] accepted over sixty students from outside the European economic area, but over one-third of those accepted could not receive residence permit decisions on time to start their studies" (*Yle*, 2019). International student enrolment figures were also discussed in terms of numbers as these were expected to drop after the introduction of tuition fees (in 2017).

Students as Labour

*Labour* was the second framing of international students discussed in the articles. International students were connected to the broader societal changes that Finland was experiencing. The recruitment of international experts was offered as a solution: "In Finland, the population is getting older and the share of the working-age population is decreasing, so international experts are also needed from abroad" (*Yle*, 2021). This case is similar to those of many other Western countries experiencing declining population trends. While news pieces pointed out this need for labour, they also highlighted the problems that international students were facing in their attempts to enter labour markets in Finland. For instance, the labour market situation is presented in this extract: "Less than half of the international students who are awarded a Finnish degree find employment in Finland, states CIMO's[9] statistics" (*HS*, 2014). These kinds of articles were often accompanied by interviews with international students who either experienced difficulties or succeeded in finding employment in Finland. Although the news articles recognised the need for changes in the labour markets, they offered limited solutions on how to prepare markets for this transition. Students' challenges were portrayed as language barriers (fluency in Finnish is often a requirement) to obtaining a job, cultural misunderstandings, Finland's isolated location, lower salary levels, the residence permit policy, spousal employment, and better employment prospects elsewhere. Despite these challenges, the news articles also highlighted the international students' frequent interest in staying.

Students as Economic Resources

Third, international students were also framed as making an economic contribution to Finland, which closely followed the Finnish government's national discourse on international students (Jokila, 2020): "Students from outside the EU mean income for [one of the universities of applied sciences], as the student pays nearly

[9] CIMO is a former agency dedicated to solving issues of international education. It has been merged with the Finnish National Agency for Education.

10,000 euros per year for one's studies" (*Yle*, 2021). Tuition fees were discussed in this framing in two ways: as lost opportunities where they were not implemented and as problems that were expected to follow from the implementation. Higher education institutions in Finland have been able to collect tuition fees since 2017 (see Jokila, 2020); hence, discussions regarding the experimentation and implementation of tuition fees were common during the period that we analysed. The news articles on tuition fees generally portrayed international students as those who chose their education based on its cost or reputation: "Opponents of the tuition fees also estimated that a remote Finland would not be able to attract newcomers with anything other than free education" (*HS*, 2010), and, according to a representative of trade and industry, "the good brand of Finnish education is not utilized at all" (*HS*, 2014).

Student associations were also worried about tuition fees' possible effects on access to higher education: "According to [one student association], fees will not support the economy or the attractiveness of higher education institutions. According to the association, fees cause inequalities among higher education institutions and their students. Additionally, they would increase competition" (*Yle*, 2014). Here, fees were perceived as posing a threat to equality, and it was acknowledged that the fee liability for some students constructed social differences among them (Plamper, Siivonen & Haltia, 2023). The articles discussed pricing, changes in the numbers of students, and other difficulties in implementing the policies. Visa procedures are connected to tuition fees since prolonging these processes has resulted in losses in fee payments. These news pieces often utilised politicians, the Ministry of Education and Culture, higher education institutions, and student unions as the main voices.

Students as Social Others

Fourth, the news articles also represented international students as social others. This framing was less frequent compared to the three earlier categories, although some elements in this framing were also present in the previous ones. This framing addressed social relations and the integration of international students into Finnish society. For instance, the following news piece stated:

> During the first weeks, foreign students study, for example, knowledge about Finland and local study practices. According to the international affairs secretary [name], one of the issues mostly causing helplessness is academic freedom in Finnish universities. "Many of the students are not accustomed to organizing their own studies," [name] says. (*Yle*, 2011)

This framing bundled international students as one group that was targeted, for instance, by integration services. In discussing international students, one cited example was responsiveness to the Finnish culture and habits through activities with friends and families. This framing focused more on international students learning Finnish culture, although cultural exchange was also mentioned: "[One] university of applied sciences is looking for families or individuals in [town in Finland] as friends for international students. The most important thing is to take international students as part of your everyday practices outside study contexts" (*Yle*, 2012). To a limited extent, these practices exemplified a cosmopolitan orientation through cultural exchange, yet the preponderance focused on international students adapting to the Finnish culture.

**Agency in News Outlets**

As presented earlier, our study showed that international students were depicted by media content through four different framings. Similar to many other countries, Finland also aims to integrate international students into Finnish society and working life. Hence, we were also interested in what kinds of agency are constructed for international students to act in Finnish society. We identified three agencies in which the news articles constructed the students.

Predetermined Agency

The prevailing type of agency attached to international students in the media outlets was *predetermined agency*. This type of agency placed international students in the roles—as skilled labour and as economic resources—for which they were aimed to be recruited. In other words, some news articles presented international students as "unused resources" to fill gaps in the national system. Some of the news pieces were also critical about whether international students desired to occupy these predetermined positions and/or what kinds of possibilities were offered. Other articles seemed to target the employers. For instance, when asked about recruiting international students, an interviewed employer responded: "It is an opportunity to internationalise. They have studied in Finland; they have a perception of Finnish society, and they have studied the same courses as Finnish students [have taken]" (*Yle*, 2021). This kind of predetermined agency failed to recognise the comprehensiveness of international students' lives that might include caring responsibilities, illnesses, among other things. Similarly, Waters et al. (2024) noted how the prevailing focus was on the minds of the skilled students, but the comprehensive needs and situations of students were not considered.

Active Agency

Second, in *active* agency, international students were depicted as actors, rather than as passive receivers of certain policy measures. For instance, this kind of agency was present when discussing international students' and graduates' efforts to find jobs in Finland. By highlighting the considerable effort needed to obtain employment, the media showed empathy towards international students. In fact, in these news pieces, the media presented international students' success stories in almost heroic terms. To cite an example, "[Name] made a lot of effort and tried different channels, from job placement advertisement to direct contacting and open application. It only produced temporary work. In the end, it worked out" (*Yle*, 2021). The discussion suggested that the state and other actors could potentially support international students' transitions to the labour markets. The Finnish labour markets and employers' attitudes were regarded as barriers to international graduate employment: "The problem must be at least partly in [the companies'] unawareness and attitudes" (*HS*, 2021). This situation portrayed a narrative of an exceptional international student - or an account that emphasised the persistence and talents of a student who overcame difficulties. For instance, an interview with an international student pointed out that the latter's "study speed has been vertiginous compared to the Finnish average" (*Yle*, 2021).

Constrained Agency

Third, in *constrained agency*, international students were portrayed as victims. This was the least used form of agency pertaining to international students. In these articles, international students were led to their positions due to their respective regional actors' mishandling in sending them to study in Finland, as well as structural issues in the receiving country. These news pieces elaborated on the individual situations. One widely discussed incident in Finland involved the commissioned education of a student group from an African country and the associated potential challenges and instabilities, with their possible repercussions for international students as the alleged victims:

> In addition to the termination of their study rights, the students are at risk of losing their housing and being forced to leave Finland. They have become the party suffering from a mess caused by a [sending] county. (*Yle*, 2023.)

Within a narrative of constrained agency, a story depicted a capable student who ended up in a desperate situation, lacking the means or power to resolve it:

> As a last resort, David went around shops in Helsinki offering to work. Only a young hairdresser took him in to rake the yard of her house. David could never have imagined that things would turn out this way. In [home country], he was a university-educated chemistry teacher. He had a six-room house and a housekeeper. Now, he was unemployed and penniless. (*HS*, 2010.)

This reflection shows the difficult situation the student got into and how he had very limited possibilities to act. He reflects back to his stance in society prior mobility.

## Discussion

In this study, we have analysed Finnish news articles (published from 2010 to 2021/2023) as examples of public representations of international students. An understanding of media portrayals is increasingly important in societies that aim to recruit ever larger international student bodies. It can be argued that international student mobility is not merely an issue of education but also shapes the host societies and environments in many ways. Furthermore, the public discourse may influence society's responsiveness to this mobile group of students.

Overall, international students were discussed in Finnish news articles from different perspectives. Possible national, institutional, and individual repercussions of different political decisions—such as the introduction of tuition fees, pandemic control measures, and employment opportunities—were also considered. In this paper, we have identified four different, yet overlapping, framings in which international students were discussed in the Finnish media: as numbers, as labour, as economic resources, and as social others. These framings have similarities with those tackled in earlier studies (e.g. Brooks, 2017; Paltridge et al., 2014). However, the framings were not solely perceived from one perspective. For instance, in labour force framing, our

analysis shows that media discussions focused on narrow portrayals of international students and their meanings in Finnish society. The framings were developed from a national perspective, that is, how international students could contribute to Finnish society. Some of the news pieces also called for Finnish society and the labour market to be more welcoming towards international students. The coverage was limited to the acceptance of international students in workplaces and as part of the education system, rather than a more profound explanation about the meanings of internationalisation and the mobility of people. These framings seemed to have limited understanding of all the ways that students' mobility would have repercussions not only for them but also for Finnish society (beyond the set rationalities). Hence, the representations of international students were created in response to national policy objectives, but not to the more profound ideas and significant implications of a cosmopolitan society. Nevertheless, the media outlets did not stigmatize racially diversified international student groups, such as Asian students, in the same sense as in earlier studies (e.g., Brooks, 2017). Similar to the framings, the agency positions depicted in the media pieces emphasised the types of individual agency that promoted the achievement of national policy objectives, while discussing structures that hindered an individual's attainment of such goals.

We have identified three agencies where international students were situated in the media pieces: predetermined, active, and constrained. Primarily, international students were presented with a predefined agency that followed national and institutional expectations. This partial agency left little room for a comprehensive discussion of international students' lives. The second position was active agency, referring to international students as often actively pursuing their life goals within a challenging environment. This was particularly relevant in employment-related issues. Lastly, in a few news pieces, we identified constrained agency, where students were perceived as victims of others' actions.

Our study is limited to two main media outlets. Future work would benefit from a more comprehensive analysis of other regional media outlets to develop an understanding of what is discussed in regional contexts. Additionally, our study raises questions about societies' preparedness to welcoming increasing numbers of international students. The discussion in the news articles predominantly remained in the welcoming stage and justified the need for international students.

## Conclusion

Media space can have a profound impact on how the public thinks and approaches societal phenomena and groups of people. The public discourses attached to international students may shape how they are approached in everyday life and practices, for instance, as potential employees. Given that international student populations are expected to increase in Finland, it should be a focal point to analyse media representations and interpretations of people and events.

This study has conceptual and practical implications. We suggest examining media texts with the agentic positions in which they place international students and other immigrant groups. An understanding of these kinds of agency formations may assist in reflexively identifying potential biases in representations. In this way, the discussion may advance from deficit narratives (see Lipura & Collins, 2020; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023) and nationally framed meanings to a more sustainable method of perceiving mobile people and developing their relationships with host countries. Conceptually, we propose extending the analysis of international students' individualised agency to public agencies provided by actors such as national media spaces. In this way, we can approach structures with the agencies that they produce.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors have made no acknowledgements regarding this publication.

## AI Statement

This article used Copilot for the minor linguistic refinement of the text. All substantive content and interpretations remain with the responsibility of the authors.

## Funding

The authors have not shared any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 128-158
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.8

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Practices, Purposes, Ideologies: A Quantitative Study of Language Use in English Language Teacher Education

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## Abstract

Higher education programs in the Global South are increasingly adopting English-medium instruction in a variety of multilingual contexts, where language use practices often diverge from language of instruction policy. Language use practices are particularly relevant in Latin American English language teacher education, where programs may struggle to develop teachers' English proficiency and other learning outcomes simultaneously. This quantitative study conducted in Ecuador examines teacher educators' use of English, Spanish, or multilingual approaches in teaching content courses (e.g., pedagogical methods, research methods, teaching practicums, linguistics). Survey data from 115 teacher educators at 21 universities and OLS regression were used to examine the relationship of language use practices to valued purposes of teacher education, prevalent language ideologies, and teacher educator characteristics. Findings show that English predominated, but an English-only approach was not the norm. How much teacher educators incorporated Spanish in English-medium instruction was significantly related to prioritizing teacher empowerment, to beliefs about language, and to their own English proficiency. This study of English-language teacher educators may help educators across English-medium instruction higher education critically (re)examine how they use language, justify their approaches, and advocate for appropriate administrative and pedagogical support.

**Keywords**: English-medium instruction, English-only, multilingual, language ideologies, teacher education

# Introduction

English-medium instruction (EMI) in education systems where English is not the home language of most students arose in some contexts as a direct legacy of British colonization and expanded in others as vehicle for the internationalization of higher education (Richards & Pun, 2021; Tikly, 2016). Especially in strict English-only forms, EMI has been critiqued for its roots in colonial hegemonies and dominant ideologies rather than evidence of academic effectiveness (Block, 2022; Kedzierski, 2016; Sah & Fang, 2024). Nonetheless, higher education programs in various Global South contexts are increasingly adopting EMI with the aim of helping local students gain access to a powerful international language (Macaro et al., 2018; Griffiths, 2023). The expansion of EMI in such contexts reflects a complex interplay of sociocultural, political, and economic factors and responds to the varied motivations of students, institutions, and policymakers (Gabriels & Wilkinson, 2024).

In a systematic review of research on such programs, Macaro et al. (2018) found that professors in many EMI higher education programs were "deeply concerned about their students' inability to survive, or better still thrive, when taught through English" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 52), particularly in contexts with significant structural challenges and inequities in secondary education. The challenges associated with English proficiency, as well as the use of local languages within EMI, remain salient themes across global contexts today (Kök, 2023). Burgeoning research on EMI and multilingualism highlights translanguaging—a fluid rather than strictly separated approach—as an emerging trend in global contexts where students' and instructors' English proficiency levels and learning goals vary across and within EMI programs (Sahan & Rose, 2021; Zhu & Wang, 2024). Actual language use often diverges from institutional policy on language of instruction.

This expanding EMI literature has been largely descriptive and sometimes critical (Mirhosseini & De la Costa, 2024). Some authors frame multilingual practices as problem-solving, as in an overview of global EMI research that calls for study of "how effective [is] translanguaging or 'parallel language use' in counteracting the difficulties students and/or teachers experience" (Kök, 2023, p. 242). Others take social justice standpoints, as in a call to decolonize EMI in the Global South that recommends "translanguaging pedagogy… for increased participation and belongingness as well as to counter the perception that local/Indigenous languages and multilingualism are the cause of the problem" (Sah & Fang, 2024, p. 573). From a critical perspective, language use in EMI is never simply a practical issue. Mirhosseini and De la Costa (2024) argue that critical EMI praxis should address ideology, policy, identity, justice, and the sociopolitics of English in "the problematisation of human practices as social acts" (p. 5). To help educators, administrators, and policymakers decide which language use practices are effective, just, or otherwise desirable, scholarship needs to interrogate the purposes, ideologies, and other contextual factors involved.

In Latin America, EMI has expanded through top-down and bottom-up initiatives justified by both instrumentalist aims (e.g., developing workforce competitiveness) and social justice aims (e.g., expanding access for underserved populations) (Aliaga Salas &

Pérez Andrade, 2023). While English-medium higher education is not as widespread in South America as in other regions, EMI is common and widely accepted in English language teacher education (ELTE) there, including in Ecuador (Barahona & Darwin, 2021; Cajas et al., 2023; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2021). Ecuadorian ELTE has experienced reforms and challenges common to the region (Díaz Maggioli, 2017; Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017) that evidence broader trends in EMI policy and practice. A series of reforms between 2009 and 2016 sought to expand access to both English learning and higher education, while also adopting international standards of quality and accountability (Díaz Maggioli, 2017; Schneider et al., 2019). The official use of EMI varies by ELTE program and both responds to—and is constrained by—top-down reforms that have set English proficiency standards for teachers, required certain content courses, and standardized program hours (Cajas et al., 2023). Teacher educators in Ecuador and the region face tensions between developing language proficiency and meeting other instructional goals, given limited time and the often beginning English levels of entering teachers-in-formation (Abad et al., 2019; Banegas & Martínez Argudo, 2019). While the English language is especially relevant to the field of study, these tensions in ELTE content courses are a microcosm of tensions in EMI in Latin America more broadly, where language learning is a major concern within ostensibly content-focused classes (Aliaga Salas & Pérez Andrade, 2023).

ELTE programs therefore offer a revealing context to examine language use in Latin American EMI. Since graduates may teach in traditional English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classrooms or in the expanding content-based English-medium educational sector, ELTE also serves as a model for language use in those spaces. Yet, few studies have explored language use within ELTE in contexts where most teachers-in-formation are also multilingual learners of English, though such contexts are the norm globally. Existing studies have analyzed the practices of small numbers of participants in specific sites qualitatively (Morales et al., 2020; Ubaque-Casallas, 2023; Yüzlü & Dikilitaş, 2024).

This paper examines language use in ELTE based on quantitative data from a closed-question survey of 115 teacher educators at 21 universities in Ecuador. By offering a broad view of teacher educators' practices and how they relate to both pragmatic and ideological considerations, the paper seeks to illuminate and question the status quo surrounding language use in this context. EMI educators, administrators, and scholars across contexts may find inspiration here to work towards practices, policies, and supports that align with what they value.

## Literature Review

### Language Use Practices

EMI is common in ELTE world-wide, reflecting broader trends in higher education and in English language teaching (ELT) (Dang et al., 2013). Instruction in English is thought to increase English proficiency because language development occurs when learners engage extensively with meaningful language input, output, and interaction (de

Jong, 2011; Rabbidge, 2019). Meaningful and extensive use of English does not, however, preclude the use of students' and teachers' own language(s) (de Jong, 2011; Galante et al., 2023). Mainstream cognitive and linguistic scholarship informing ELT has historically taken a subtractive view, where one's own language "interferes" with learning the target language and monolingual "native" speakers are uncritically made the model for language acquisition (de Jong, 2011; May, 2014). However, scholars with sociocultural and critical perspectives on language have long critiqued such views, centering multilinguals' experiences and arguing that pedagogies that leverage rather than suppress learners' full linguistic repertoires are more just *and* more effective (García et al., 2017; Lau & Van Viegan, 2020). Pedagogies that leverage own language and center actual language use practices, rather than idealized standard language, have become more widely accepted since the "multilingual turn" (May, 2014).

ELT research has increasingly pointed to the value of multilingual approaches for creating inclusive environments that support both content and language learning, including in global EFL contexts and in South America specifically (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Galante et al., 2023; Ortega, 2019; Rabbidge, 2019). Even in contexts where English-only norms dominate, many multilingual teachers employ some multilingual strategies (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Hall & Cook, 2013; Zhu & Wang, 2024). These strategies may be locally devised pedagogies that teachers do not necessarily connect with global ELT trends (Cruz Arcila, 2018; Sahan & Rose, 2021). However, some teachers' sense of guilt about own-language use, even when they believe it beneficial, is a common theme in EFL literature (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Galante et al., 2020; Rabbidge, 2019; Yüzlü & Dikilitaş, 2024). Many EFL teachers have received the message from ELTE that English-only approaches are best (Hall & Cook, 2013; Rabbidge, 2019).

Language use is particularly relevant in Latin American ELTE where programs struggle to develop teachers' English proficiency and broader teacher knowledge simultaneously through instruction in English (Argudo et al., 2018; Barahona & Darwin, 2021). Especially in public higher education, many teachers-in-formation enter ELTE programs without much prior English learning and have limited time to develop proficiency (Abad et al., 2019; Banegas & Martínez Argudo, 2019; Cajas et al., 2023). However, several scholars observe that multilingual approaches are "still treated as a taboo in second language teacher education in Latin America" (Barahona 2020, p. 5), where an English-only norm prevails (Zaidan, 2020). Much of this prior scholarship addresses language use practices as they relate to the purposes of ELTE or to prevalent language ideologies.

**Purposes of English Language Teacher Education**

Studies related to language use in Latin American ELTE often describe language of instruction in connection to teacher-learning outcomes (Argudo et al., 2018; Banegas, 2020; Barahona, 2015; Dávila, 2020; Martin, 2016; Morales et al., 2020). Research from one program in Ecuador suggests that attempts to develop both language and content learning through EMI may not be successful (Abad et al., 2019; Argudo et al., 2018). In other contexts where teachers-in-formation have had little prior English learning, Morales et al. (2020) recommend translanguaging to develop language proficiency, while Banegas (2020) recommends a content-and-language-integrated English-medium

approach to develop both proficiency and a theoretical knowledge of linguistics. While Banegas (2020) emphasizes English use as building confidence, Ubaque-Casallas (2023) argues that translanguaging can foster legitimate teacher identities in resistance to "native-speaker" norms. No clear consensus appears as to which language use practices align with what outcomes.

Broadly recognized teacher-learning outcomes of ELTE fall in general areas of *English proficiency* and *ELT content knowledge* (see Richards, 2017), *pedagogical knowledge* (see Barahona, 2015), and *teacher identity and cognition* (see Johnson, 2016). While tension between English language development and other outcomes is a central concern in Latin American ELTE, English proficiency is often prioritized (Banegas & Martínez Argudo, 2019). Critical scholars in the region lament that decontextualized pedagogical skill and language proficiency tend to be prioritized over the development of teacher identity and cognition (Castañeda-Londoño, 2021; Mendes & Finardi, 2018).

Programs and teacher educators differ not only in the teacher-learning outcomes they prioritize, but also in the overarching purposes of ELTE they emphasize. ELTE may serve to improve education quality through *accountability to standards*, often externally and universally prescribed (Freeman et al., 2015; Sierra Ospina, 2016), or through *teacher empowerment* to define, enact, and differentiate quality teaching (Castañeda-Londoño, 2021; Kuchah et al., 2019). A focus on language proficiency outcomes is often associated with accountability (Sierra Ospina, 2016) but may be refocused on teacher empowerment and confidence (Faez et al., 2021; Freeman, 2020). ELTE may also serve purposes related to *prestige and income* for individuals and institutions (Sadeghi & Richards, 2021). While the nature of the relationship between ELTE purposes and language use practices is not clearly established, prior literature explicitly links language use practices and ideologies.

**Language Ideologies**

Language policy guiding university-based ELTE has been deficit- and accountability-driven (Sierra Ospina, 2016), often emphasizing language proficiency standards that some see as reinforcing dominant language ideologies (Bonilla Medina & Finardi, 2022; González Moncada, 2021). Language ideologies are "morally and politically loaded representations of the nature, structure, and use of languages in a social world" (Woolard, 2020, p. 1). Language ideologies of linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism are prevalent in Latin American ELT and ELTE (González Moncada, 2021; Perez Andrade, 2019), for instance in unsubstantiated suggestions that recruitment of "native speakers" will improve quality (González Moncada & Llurda, 2016). Zaidan (2020) describes the exclusive use of English in South American ELT and ELTE spaces, when access to learning English is unequal and speakers share another language, as a manifestation of these ideologies.

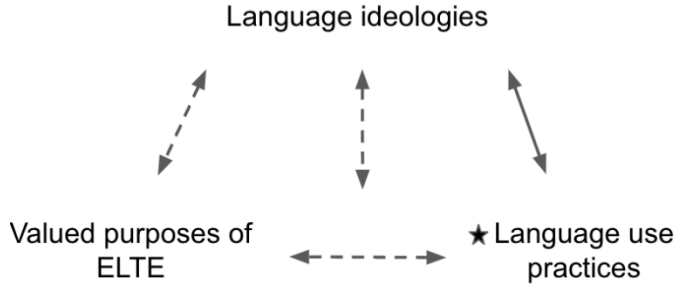
Linguistic imperialism represents English as inherently preferable to other languages (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Phillipson, 1992), while native-speakerism represents those perceived as "native speakers" of English as an idealized standard to which others are compared (Holliday, 2006). Phillipson (1992) described five fallacious "tenets" of mainstream ELT that evidence linguistic imperialism: the "monolingual fallacy," the "native speaker fallacy," the "early start fallacy," the "maximum exposure fallacy," and the

"subtractive fallacy." Language use is revealed as ideological rather than pragmatic when "a monolingual approach appears to be a common-sense concentration on the target language only, but is invalid cognitively, linguistically, and pedagogically" (Phillipson, 2016, p. 86). Phillipson's concept of linguistic imperialism aligns with Latin American decolonial scholars' critiques of coloniality as applied to ELT (Barrantes-Montero, 2017).

English-only practices are thought to manifest and perpetuate ideologies of linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006; Jakubiak, 2020). The way "knowledge and use of local language(s) were made irrelevant for learning and teaching English" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 12) exemplifies how imperialism reifies knowledge from the English-speaking Global North as "universal" and marginalizes local knowledge, including the knowledge and practices of multilingual learners and educators globally (Cruz Arcila, 2018; Sahan & Rose, 2021). Alternatively, multilingualism represents multilingual speakers and practices as desirable and preferable to monolingual norms (Deroo & Ponzio, 2019). Deroo and Ponzio (2019) draw on the work of García et al. (2017) to explain that multilingualism "question[s] the monolingual bias inherent in school-based language practices and position[s] students' language practices as fundamental resources, rather than as deficits" (p. 216). While these ideologies evoke recognizable representations of language in society, individuals' beliefs related to ideologies are complex, changeable, and sometimes incongruous (Bettney Heidt & Olson-Wyman, 2025).

The literature briefly summarized above suggests links between language use practices, valued purposes, and language ideologies in ELTE. To explore those links, I put forward the framework represented in Figure 1. It conceptualizes practices, purposes, and ideologies as bidirectionally interrelated, such that each influences—and is influenced by—the others.

**Figure 1: Links Between Language Use Practices, Valued Purposes, and Language Ideologies in English Language Teacher Education**




*Note:* Dotted lines indicate the nature of the relationship is not clearly established by existing literature, while the solid line indicates an established theoretical link. The star indicates the primary focus of this study. ELTE refers to English language teacher education.

## Methodology

This paper presents the quantitative component of a larger mixed-methods study. That component was exploratory and descriptive, responding to the research question: *How much do English language teacher educators use English, Spanish, or a multilingual*

*approach when teaching content courses and what factors (valued ELTE purposes, language ideologies, and/or educator characteristics) are associated with reported use of these approaches?* The methods were grounded in the above literature and my own positionality.

**Researcher Positionality**

This study was shaped by my experiences living and working in Ecuador for over a decade, including leading teacher professional development as a full-time employee of a local non-profit and teaching part-time in ELTE graduate programs at three universities. I tended to adopt a multilingual approach and saw myself as prioritizing critical thinking and pedagogical skill. I sometimes encountered resistance, which I associated with linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism based on my reading of decolonial critiques of ELT. I recognized my approach and perspective as situated in my privilege in the Ecuadorian context as a U.S.-born, White, "native" English-speaking multilingual educator, and, throughout this study, I sought to be vigilant for evidence that did not align with my expectations.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected during spring 2023 after an ethics committee review and with appropriate permissions. Instructors of content courses (those not dedicated to English language learning) in undergraduate and graduate ELTE programs at 22 of 24 Ecuadorian universities offering such programs were invited to respond to an online survey. English-Spanish bilingual invitations were distributed by program coordinators at each university via their habitual channels of communication with program instructors (e.g., email list-serves or WhatsApp groups). One-hundred-and-nineteen teacher educators from 21 institutions responded (response rate = 34% [119/354]), for a total of 115 participants with valid responses. Seventy-four percent of respondents chose the English version of the survey, and 26% chose the Spanish version.

Most participants identified as female (63%), mestizo[10] (77%), and Ecuadorian (90%), with a first language of Spanish (89%). A small number reported first languages of English (5%), both English and Spanish (3%), or another language (3%). Most described their English proficiency as high intermediate or B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (36%) or as advanced or CEFR C1 (36%). Participants mainly taught at public universities (84%) and in undergraduate programs (with only 8% teaching graduate courses exclusively). Eight-six percent taught at least one "core" ELTE subject, that is, subjects in which almost all ELTE programs in Ecuador offer multiple courses: pedagogical methods, research methods, teaching practicums, or linguistics. The remaining 16% exclusively taught less common ELTE courses or general education courses, like policy or psychology. Table 1 presents a summary of participant characteristics.

Survey questions addressed three topics: language use, valued purposes of ELTE, and language ideologies. In the absence of a relevant existing survey, I developed the

[10] 'Mestizo' is the majority ethnic self-identification in Ecuador according to the census (see the Censo Ecuador website) and refers to identifying with both indigenous and European ancestry.

questions based on previous surveys on own-language use in ELT (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Hall & Cook, 2013), exploratory focus-group interviews with teacher educators, and prior literature. The survey was reviewed by an Ecuadorian ELT professional and piloted with nine teacher educators. The pilot respondents confirmed the questions were relevant to the context and suggested minor edits, while I checked responses for consistency by individual and variety across individuals. When the full study's mixed-methods data collection was complete, 37 of the 115 respondents had also taken part in focus group interviews on parallel topics, and I checked the consistency of their comments with the survey responses. Those steps supported the validity of the survey for the exploratory aims of this study, especially regarding practices and valued purposes, which were directly reported experiences and opinions. However, readers should note that the survey was not formally validated or previously used at scale and the results—especially regarding language ideologies, which are abstract constructs—should be interpreted with caution.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Participating Teacher Educators (n = 115)**

| Characteristic | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| *Gender identity* | | |
| Female | 73 | 63% |
| Male | 42 | 37% |
| *Race or ethnicity* | | |
| Mestizo | 89 | 77% |
| White | 12 | 10% |
| Montubio | 10 | 9% |
| Afro-Ecuadorian or Black | 2 | 2% |
| Other | 2 | 2% |
| *Origin* | | |
| Ecuador | 104 | 90% |
| Other | 11 | 10% |
| *First language* | | |
| Spanish | 102 | 89% |
| English | 6 | 5% |
| Other | 4 | 3% |
| Both Spanish and English | 3 | 3% |
| *English proficiency* | | |
| Academic (CEFR C2) | 21 | 18% |
| Advanced (CEFR C1) | 42 | 36% |
| High Intermediate (CEFR B2) | 42 | 36% |
| Low Intermediate (CEFR B1) or below | 10 | 9% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Spanish proficiency* | | |
| Academic (CEFR C2) | 57 | 50% |
| Advanced (CEFR C1) | 42 | 36% |
| High Intermediate (CEFR B2) | 14 | 12% |
| Low Intermediate (CEFR B1) or below | 2 | 2% |
| *Highest degree* | | |
| Masters degree | 85 | 74% |
| Doctoral degree | 30 | 26% |
| *Years of teaching experience* | | |
| 30+ years | 12 | 11% |
| 20-29 years | 59 | 51% |
| 10-19 years | 33 | 28% |
| <10 years | 11 | 10% |
| *Type of university employer* | | |
| Public | 97 | 84% |
| Private | 18 | 16% |
| *Region of university employer* | | |
| Highlands | 62 | 54% |
| Coast | 53 | 46% |
| *Level of program taught* | | |
| Undergraduate only | 76 | 66% |
| Both undergraduate and graduate | 30 | 26% |
| Graduate only | 9 | 8% |
| *Type of position at university* | | |
| Full time | 94 | 82% |
| Half time or less | 21 | 18% |
| *Content courses taught (some teach various)* | | |
| Core ELTE program courses | | |
| Pedagogical methods | 55 | 48% |
| Research methods | 47 | 41% |
| Teaching practicum | 41 | 36% |
| Linguistics | 38 | 33% |
| Other courses | | |
| Educational policy or philosophy | 13 | 11% |
| Educational psychology | 11 | 10% |
| Sociology or history of education | 10 | 9% |
| Other | 35 | 30% |
| At least one core ELTE program course | 99 | 86% |
| Only other courses | 16 | 14% |

**Variables**

Survey responses were used to create three continuous dependent variables describing language use and two sets of independent variables describing valued purposes and ideologies respectively (see Table 2 for a list and descriptions). The language use variables represented the approximate amount of time during a typical class for English use, Spanish use, or multilingual use, respectively. Valued purposes were operationalized as binary variables indicating whether each of six specific teacher-learning outcomes and three broad purposes respondents ranked first in order of importance. While first-choice rankings cannot fully represent purposes teacher educators value, they suggest what a respondent prioritizes when time and resources are finite. The three language ideologies were operationalized as continuous variables indicating perceived prevalence, based on level of agreement that statements represented respondents' personal beliefs, their colleagues' beliefs, and their students' beliefs. Participants also selected the most influential reasons for their language use practices. Readers should note that participants were teacher educators, while their "students" were teachers-in-formation.

**Analysis**

A series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models explored the relationship between each language use dependent variable (English, Spanish, and multilingual use) and independent variables representing valued purposes, ideologies, and teacher educator characteristics. I used effect coding to include all the valued purpose variables in the regression models. Dummy coding would be a more typical approach, but it requires leaving a category out of the model as a reference group. Effect coding made it possible to compare each possible value of these categorical variables to the group as a whole, rather than comparing to a reference group, and to calculate coefficients and significance values for each (Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015).

I considered two ways of accounting for linguistic imperialism and multilingualism in separate models, due to inconsistencies between items representing each ideology that had not appeared in the survey pilot. The majority of participants (83%) personally agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "in spaces related to English language teaching, it is best to use English only"—the "monolingual fallacy" (Phillipson, 1992) that is often theorized as evidence of linguistic imperialism in ELT (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Zaidan, 2020). However, only 37% agreed or strongly agreed that "the best methods… come from English-speaking countries." Similarly, only 40% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that "in spaces related to English language teaching, it is best to use Spanish… as a resource," a key component of a multilingual stance (Deroo & Ponzio, 2019); yet, 84% agreed that "knowing other languages… is valuable to students and teachers of English." These inconsistencies suggested mean values for each ideology might be misleading. I therefore calculated "broad" and "narrow" versions of the prevalence variables for these two ideologies: the "broad" variables considered both statements as originally intended, while the "narrow" variables set aside the statements pertaining to language use.

**Table 2: Summary of Variables**

| Variable | Description of Survey Item(s) | Construction of Variable |
|---|---|---|
| *Dependent Variables* | | |
| English use<br>Spanish use<br>Multilingual use | 5-point scale indicating during how much time of a typical class teacher educators use English, Spanish, or both English and Spanish together, and how much they encourage students to use these languages: 'never', 'little (less than half), 'some (about half)', 'a lot (more than half)', or 'always (the whole time)' | Responses for each language converted to values from 1 to 5, where 1 represents 'never' and 5 represents 'always'; teacher educators' own use and encouragement of students' use averaged for each language |
| *Independent Variables* | | |
| *Valued purposes*<br>Critical thinking<br>English proficiency<br>Pedagogical skill<br>Professional identity<br>Theoretical knowledge<br>Research skill<br><br>Accountability<br>Empowerment<br>Prestige & Income | 5-point Likert scale indicating agreement with statements on 6 teacher learning outcomes (e.g., "EFL teacher education must ensure that EFL teachers become critical thinkers about English Language Teaching") and 3 broader purposes (e.g., "EFL teacher education should hold teachers accountable to standards for language competency and pedagogical practice")<br><br>Ranking of teacher-learning outcomes and of broader purposes | Ranking of teacher-learning outcomes converted to binary variables indicating whether each teacher learning outcome and broad purposes was ranked first |
| *Language ideologies*<br>Imperialism<br>Native-speakerism<br>Multilingualism | 5-point Likert scale indicating personal agreement and perception of colleagues' and students' agreement with 2 statements for each ideology: linguistic imperialism ("The best methods and resources for English language teaching come from English-speaking countries" & "In spaces related to English language teaching, it is best to use English only"), native-speakerism ("Native speakers are the ideal model in English language teaching" & "The goal of learning English is to become as similar as possible to a native-speaker"), multilingualism ("In spaces related to English language teaching, it is best to use… other languages participants know, as a resource" & "Knowing other languages… is valuable to students and teachers of English") | Responses for each statement converted to values from 1 to 5, where 1 represents 'strongly disagree' and 5 represents 'strongly agree'<br><br>Six responses (2 personal, 2 for colleagues, and 2 for students) averaged for each ideology to indicate its perceived prevalence |

Only the five control variables with a significant relationship to at least one language use variable were included in OLS models. Teacher educators' *English level* was significantly correlated to English use ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$), Spanish use ($r = -0.58$, $p < 0.001$), and multilingual use ($r = -0.29$, $p < 0.01$) and *Spanish level* was significantly correlated to English use ($r = -0.21$, $p < 0.05$). There were also significant differences in language use between those whose chose English as a *response language* and those who chose Spanish, *t*-tests indicated (English use: $t = 4.20$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.001$; Spanish use: $t = 5.81$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.001$; multilingual use: $t = 3.96$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.01$). *T*-tests also indicated significant differences in mean English use ($t = 1.99$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.05$) and mean Spanish use ($t = 2.91$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.01$) between those *teaching any core ELTE courses* and those only teaching other courses. *T*-tests indicated significant differences in multilingual use between those self-identifying as mestizo and those self-identifying with another race or ethnicity ($t = 2.35$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.05$) and significant differences in English use between those teaching in the Coast and Highlands regions ($t = 1.83$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.05$). Those regions have distinct geographic and sociocultural characteristics. In this study, non-mestizo participants most often identified as White or as Montubio, an ethnicity specific to part of the Coast region. A chi square test showed race/ethnicity and region were significantly related ($\chi^2 = 5.04$, $df = 1$, $n = 115$, $p < 0.05$); therefore, only *race or ethnicity* was included among the control variables.

I calculated the regression models in five steps, with A, B and C versions for English, Spanish, and multilingual use as dependent variables. Initially, I included only valued purpose independent variables (models 1A, 1B and 1C). The next models added language ideologies as independent variables, first using the 'narrow' linguistic imperialism and multilingualism variables (models 2A, 2B, and 2C) and then with the 'broad' versions instead (models 3A, 3B, and 3C). The final models added teacher educator characteristics as control variables, together with the narrowly defined ideology variables (models 4A, 4B and 4C) and, alternatively, with the "broad" versions (models 5A, 5B and 5C). These models appeared to meet the assumptions for OLS regression of linearity, non-collinearity, and homoscedasticity (Whatley, 2022).

# Findings

## Descriptive Statistics

### Language Use Practices

The findings quantify how much teacher educators used and encouraged their students to use English, Spanish, and a multilingual approach during content courses on a scale where 1 represented "never" using the language(s), 2 represented using it "a little" (less than half of a typical class), 3 represented using it "some" (approximately half of a typical class), 4 represented using it "a lot" (more than half of a typical class), and 5 represented "always" using it. Mean use of English was 4.35, mean use of Spanish was 2.04, and mean use of a combination of English and Spanish was 2.09. Reported English use varied the least, with a standard deviation of 0.84 compared to a wider variety of Spanish ($sd = 1.13$) and multilingual use practices ($sd = 1.12$).

Some participants' reported language use across the three scales did not logically add up to the entirety of a typical class, perhaps because they understood the English, Spanish, and multilingual use scales as overlapping rather than as representing discrete amounts of class time. Responses suggested some of the reported Spanish and multilingual use overlapped with English use, which might indicate primary, but not exclusive, use of English during some class time. However, it is also possible some participants were not attentive to the scale or that desirability bias influenced reported English use.

Considering the three language use indicators together, the data showed 23% of participants using only English and 43% primarily using English. Seventeen percent reported a mainly multilingual approach with more English than Spanish use, and seven percent reported a mainly multilingual approach with approximately the same amounts of each. Another seven percent reported a mainly multilingual approach with more Spanish than English, and just three percent reported primarily using Spanish.

On the survey, teacher educators also selected the three most important reasons for their language use practices. Table 3 presents those reasons and, for each: the percentage of respondents selecting the reason; the mean English, Spanish and multilingual use for those selecting it; and the statistical significance of any differences in average language use between those who did and did not select it, based on two-sample t-tests. Most teacher educators reported that their desire to help students meet linguistic and pedagogical goals drove their language use (72% and 66%, respectively), though other reasons motivated a minority of these instructors (14% to 39%). Teacher educators selecting linguistic goals, policies or expectations, or professional credibility as a primary reasons reported significantly more English use than respondents who did not select those reasons, t-tests showed (linguistic goals: $t = 2.60$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.01$; policies or expectations: $t = 2.11$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.05$; credibility: $t = 2.06$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.05$). Conversely, t-tests showed that teacher educators with primary motivations of ensuring student understanding, making students comfortable, or expressing themselves clearly reported significantly less English on average than respondents who did not select those reasons (student understanding: $t = 4.04$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.001$; student comfort: $t = 1.78$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.05$; clarity of expression: $t = 1.85$, $df = 113$, $p < 0.05$). Notably, the lower means still suggest use of English during more than half of a typical class, on average. Teacher educators who were motivated by student understanding also reported greater use of Spanish than those who were not ($t = 3.15$, $df = 113$, $p = 0.001$).

**Table 3: Teacher Educators' Language Use Reasons and Mean English, Spanish and Multilingual Use by Reasons, for All Participants (n = 115)**

| Language Use Reason | Mean Language Use by Reasons | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Language | Selected | Not Selected |
| Linguistic goals<br>*Selected by 72%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.48** (0.67)<br>1.98 (1.07)<br>2.02 (1.11) | 4.03** (1.13)<br>2.19 (1.29)<br>2.28 (1.16) |
| Pedagogical goals<br>*Selected by 66%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.34 (0.79)<br>2.05 (1.14)<br>2.03 (1.04) | 4.38 (0.94)<br>2.02 (1.13)<br>2.20 (1.28) |
| Policies or expectations<br>*Selected by 39%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.56* (0.69)<br>1.83 (0.90)<br>1.96 (1.13) | 4.22* (0.91)<br>2.17 (1.25)<br>2.18 (1.12) |
| Student understanding<br>*Selected by 34%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 3.94*** (1.06)<br>2.49** (1.28)<br>2.27 (1.00) | 4.57*** (0.61)<br>1.81** (0.98)<br>2.00 (1.18) |
| Student comfort<br>*Selected by 30%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.14* (0.96)<br>2.09 (1.19)<br>2.09 (1.11) | 4.44* (0.77)<br>2.02 (1.11)<br>2.09 (1.14) |
| Clarity of expression<br>*Selected by 18%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.05* (1.31)<br>2.29 (1.46)<br>2.26 (1.18) | 4.42* (0.69)<br>1.98 (1.05)<br>2.05 (1.11) |
| Credibility<br>*Selected by 14%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.75* (0.41)<br>1.75 (0.87)<br>2.16 (1.31) | 4.29* (0.88)<br>2.08 (1.17)<br>2.08 (1.10) |

*Note: Participants selected up to three reasons for their language use choices. Language use is reported on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always). Standard deviations of mean language use appear in parentheses. Two-sample t-tests indicate that differences in mean language use between those who selected the reason and those who did not are significant at *p<0.05 **p<0.01.*

Valued Purposes

Teacher educators broadly agreed ELTE should ensure the teacher-learning outcomes and broad purposes mentioned in the survey, with mean agreement ranging from 4.08 to 4.65 on a scale of 1 to 5. Rankings distinguished which outcomes teacher educators valued most highly and showed more variety, as summarized in Table 4. The specific outcome prioritized by the largest percentage of respondents was English proficiency (30%), and the broad purpose prioritized by the largest percentage was teacher empowerment (48%). Table 4 also presents the mean use of English, Spanish, and a multilingual approach among teacher educators who prioritized each purpose, as compared to those who did not.

**Table 4: Teacher Educators' Mean English, Spanish, and Multilingual Use by First-ranked Purpose, for All Participants (n = 115)**

| Purposes | Mean Language Use by First-ranked Purpose | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Language | First-ranked | Not First-ranked |
| *Teacher-learning outcomes* | | | |
| English proficiency<br>*Ranked first by 30%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.38 (0.76)<br>2.11 (1.32)<br>2.18 (1.20) | 4.34 (0.88)<br>2.01 (1.05)<br>2.05 (1.09) |
| Critical thinking<br>*Ranked first by 26%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.30 (1.07)<br>2.05 (1.19)<br>2.17 (1.16) | 4.37 (0.75)<br>2.03 (1.12)<br>2.06 (1.12) |
| Pedagogical skill<br>*Ranked first by 17%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.52 (0.75)<br>1.60* (0.53)<br>1.67* (0.81) | 4.31 (0.86)<br>2.13* (1.20)<br>2.18* (1.16) |
| Professional identity<br>*Ranked first by 17%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.47 (0.51)<br>1.95 (0.74)<br>2.16 (1.15) | 4.33 (0.89)<br>2.06 (1.20)<br>2.08 (1.12) |
| Theoretical knowledge<br>*Ranked first by 5%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 3.92 (1.11)<br>3.25** (1.57)<br>2.42 (1.56) | 4.38 (0.82)<br>1.97** (1.07)<br>2.07 (1.10) |
| Research skill<br>*Ranked first by 4%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 3.80 (0.84)<br>2.10 (1.14)<br>2.00 (0.79) | 4.38 (0.84)<br>2.04 (1.14)<br>2.09 (1.14) |
| *Broad purposes* | | | |
| Empowerment<br>*Ranked first by 48%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.24 (0.94)<br>2.19 (1.17)<br>2.26 (1.16) | 4.46 (0.74)<br>1.90 (1.09)<br>1.93 (1.07) |
| Accountability<br>*Ranked first by 43%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.41 (0.79)<br>1.97 (1.16)<br>1.97 (1.13) | 4.31 (0.89)<br>2.09 (1.12)<br>2.18 (1.12) |
| Prestige and income<br>*Ranked first by 9%* | English Use<br>Spanish Use<br>Multilingual Use | 4.70 (0.35)<br>1.55 (0.50)<br>1.75 (0.79) | 4.32 (0.87)<br>2.08 (1.17)<br>2.12 (1.15) |

*Note: Language use is reported on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always). Standard deviations in parentheses. Two-sample t-tests indicate differences in mean language use between those who ranked this purpose first and those who did not are significant at *p<0.05 **p<0.01.*

Two-sample *t*-tests indicated that whether teacher educators first prioritized English proficiency, critical thinking, or professional identity did not appear to be significantly related to language use. Those who most highly valued pedagogical skill appeared to

have significantly lower Spanish use ($t$ = 1.93, $df$ = 113, $p$ < 0.05) and multilingual use ($t$ = 1.84, $df$ = 113, $p$ < 0.05) compared to those for whom pedagogical skill was a lower priority. Ranking theoretical knowledge as the most important ELTE outcome—a rare opinion—was significantly associated with greater Spanish use ($t$ = 2.76, $df$ = 113, $p$ < 0.01). Language use practices did not appear to vary significantly by the broad purposes teacher educators most valued, though some non-significant differences were observed.

Language Ideologies

The values representing language ideologies should be interpreted in light of the inconsistencies among items described previously. Table 5 presents mean values representing the prevalence of each ideology, including broad and narrow operationalizations of linguistic imperialism and multilingualism. All three ideologies appeared somewhat prevalent, as one-sample $t$-tests indicated means for linguistic imperialism (broad: $t$ = 10.51; narrow: $t$ = 4.07), multilingualism (broad: $t$ = 8.00, narrow: $t$ = 13.34), and native-speakerism ($t$ = 4.31) were significantly higher than the neutral position of 3 ($df$ = 113, $p$ < 0.001). Considering the broad definitions as originally intended, linguistic imperialism was the most prevalent ideology; among the narrow constructions, multilingualism was most prevalent. Unsurprisingly, broadly defined linguistic imperialism was significantly positively correlated with English use ($r$ = 0.24, $p$ < 0.05) and negatively correlated with Spanish ($r$ = -0.24, $p$ < 0.05) and multilingual use ($r$ = -0.28, $p$ < 0.01), while broadly defined multilingualism was significantly negatively correlated with English use ($r$ = -0.22, $p$ < 0.05) and positively correlated with Spanish ($r$ = 0.24, $p$ < 0.01) and multilingual use ($r$ = 0.24, $p$ < 0.01). However, only linguistic imperialism retained a significant correlation in the narrow operationalization, negatively associated with multilingual use ($r$ = -0.20, $p$ < 0.05).

**Table 5: Prevalence of Language Ideologies and Correlation with English, Spanish and Multilingual Use**

| | Mean Prevalence (1-5) | Correlations | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | English Use | Spanish Use | Multilingual Use |
| *Language ideologies* | | | | |
| Linguistic imperialism (broad) | 3.69 (0.70) | 0.24* | -0.24* | -0.28** |
| Linguistic imperialism (narrow) | 3.37 (0.96) | 0.13 | -0.12 | -0.20* |
| Multilingualism (broad) | 3.52 (0.70) | -0.22* | 0.26** | 0.24** |
| Multilingualism (narrow) | 3.96 (0.77) | -0.06 | 0.07 | 0.09 |
| Native-speakerism | 3.36 (0.88) | 0.04 | 0.00 | -0.09 |

*Note: * p<0.05 **p<0.01. Standard deviations in parentheses. Broad operationalizations of linguistic imperialism and multilingualism include values for both statements representing these ideologies while the narrow operationalizations exclude the first statement for each ideology, which pertains to language use specifically.*

**Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results**

Variables Associated with English Use

The regression analyses for English use found no significant relationships to specific teacher-learning outcomes (see Table 6). However, valuing empowerment as the

first broad purpose of ELTE was significantly negatively associated with English use (4A: $\beta$ = -0.27, $p$ < 0.05) in four of the five models (all but 3A). Linguistic imperialism was positively associated with English use only when broadly operationalized (5A: $\beta$ = 0.33, $p$ < 0.05). Across models, teacher educators' English level had a significant positive relationship to English use (4A: $\beta$ = 0.39; $p$ < 0.001).

**Table 6: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results Depicting the Relationship Between English Use and Valued Purposes, Ideologies and Teacher Educator Characteristics**

| | Model 1A | Model 2A | Model 3A | Model 4A | Model 5A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.028 | 0.042 | 0.125 | 0.367 | 0.406 |
| *Purposes* | | | | | |
| English proficiency | 0.211 | 0.250 | 0.139 | 0.253 | 0.199 |
| Critical thinking | 0.147 | 0.099 | 0.095 | 0.016 | 0.005 |
| Pedagogical skill | 0.330 | 0.331 | 0.335 | 0.130 | 0.131 |
| Professional identity | 0.259 | 0.288 | 0.278 | 0.111 | 0.120 |
| Theoretical knowledge | -0.446 | -0.480 | -0.429 | -0.192 | -0.169 |
| Research skill | -0.502 | -0.488 | -0.419 | -0.318 | -0.287 |
| Empowerment | -0.284* | -0.270* | -0.194 | -0.273* | -0.217* |
| Accountability | -0.056 | -0.072 | -0.113 | 0.014 | -0.020 |
| Prestige and income | 0.340 | 0.342 | 0.307 | 0.259 | 0.237 |
| *Ideologies* | | | | | |
| Linguistic imperialism | - | 0.238 | 0.430* | 0.113 | 0.335* |
| Native-speakerism | - | -0.168 | -0.187 | -0.059 | -0.139 |
| Multilingualism | - | -0.072 | -0.280* | -0.000 | -0.113 |
| *Teacher educator characteristics* | | | | | |
| English level | - | - | - | 0.389*** | 0.368*** |
| Spanish level | - | - | - | 0.150 | 0.166 |
| Race or ethnicity | - | - | - | 0.087 | 0.107 |
| Response Language | - | - | - | -0.249 | -0.203 |
| Course type | - | - | - | 0.151 | 0.136 |

*Note: Model 1 includes only valued purposes. Model 2 includes valued purposes plus 'narrow' ideologies (imperialism and multilingualism variables calculated excluding statements pertaining to language use). Model 3 includes valued purposes plus 'broad' ideologies (imperialism and multilingualism variables calculated including statements pertaining to language use). Model 4 is the same as Model 2, plus control variables (English level, Spanish level, race/ethnicity, response language, course type). Model 5 is the same as Model 3, plus the same control variables. *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001*

Variables Associated with Spanish Use

Two specific teacher-learning outcomes had significant relationships with Spanish use (see Table 7). Theoretical knowledge was consistently positively associated with use of Spanish (4B: $\beta$ = 0.94, $p$ < 0.05), while pedagogical skill was significantly negatively

associated with Spanish use when ideologies were defined broadly (5B: $\beta$ = -0.41, $p$ < 0.05) and in all models but 4B. Valuing empowerment as the first broad purpose of ELTE was positively associated with Spanish use (4B: $\beta$ = 0.33, $p$ < 0.05) in all but model 3B. In the case of Spanish use, both the ideologies of linguistic imperialism (5B: $\beta$ = -0.41, $p$ < 0.05) and of multilingualism (5B: $\beta$ = 0.29; $p$ < 0.05) had significant relationships with of Spanish use when broadly defined, but not otherwise. Finally, teacher educators' English level had a negative relationship with Spanish use (4B: $\beta$ = -0.47, $p$ < 0.001); furthermore, participants' choice of the Spanish version of the survey had a significant positive relationship with Spanish use (4A: $\beta$ = 0.67, $p$ < 0.01).

**Table 7: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results Depicting the Relationship Between Spanish Use and Valued Purposes, Ideologies and Teacher Educator Characteristics**

| | Model 1B | Model 2B | Model 3B | Model 4B | Model 5B |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.082 | 0.103 | 0.240 | 0.439 | 0.499 |
| *Purposes* | | | | | |
| English proficiency | -0.148 | -0.211 | -0.032 | -0.199 | -0.010 |
| Critical thinking | -0.243 | -0.189 | -0.185 | -0.012 | -0.018 |
| Pedagogical skill | -0.632* | -0.640** | -0.658** | -0.376 | -0.415* |
| Professional identity | -0.258 | -0.297 | -0.289 | -0.019 | -0.053 |
| Theoretical knowledge | 1.262** | 1.317** | 1.250** | 0.942** | 0.954** |
| Research skill | 0.020 | 0.020 | -0.086 | -0.336 | -0.369 |
| Empowerment | 0.405* | 0.390* | 0.275 | 0.333* | 0.262* |
| Accountability | 0.105 | 0.118 | 0.187 | -0.016 | 0.043 |
| Prestige and income | -0.511* | -0.508* | -0.462* | -0.317 | -0.305 |
| *Ideologies* | | | | | |
| Linguistic imperialism | - | -0.336 | -0.650** | -0.117 | -0.414* |
| Native-speakerism | - | 0.280 | 0.321 | 0.094 | 0.193 |
| Multilingualism | | 0.116 | 0.494** | 0.003 | 0.286* |
| *Teacher educator characteristics* | | | | | |
| English level | - | - | - | -0.472*** | -0.423*** |
| Spanish level | - | - | - | 0.100 | 0.079 |
| Race or ethnicity | - | - | - | 0.153 | 0.115 |
| Response language | - | - | - | 0.672** | 0.620** |
| Course type | - | - | - | -0.373 | -0.294 |

*Note: Model 1 includes only valued purposes. Model 2 includes valued purposes plus 'narrow' ideologies (imperialism and multilingualism variables calculated excluding statements pertaining to language use). Model 3 includes valued purposes plus 'broad' ideologies A (imperialism and multilingualism variables calculated including statements pertaining to language use). Model 4 is the same as Model 2, plus control variables (English level, Spanish level, race/ethnicity, response language, course type). Model 5 is the same as Model 3, plus the same control variables. *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001*

Variables Associated with Multilingual Use

Few independent variables were significantly associated with multilingual use (see Table 8). No significant relationships appeared between multilingual use and specific teacher-learning outcomes or broad purposes when control variables were included. Ideologies were significantly associated with multilingual use only in their broad definitions (5C: imperialism $\beta$ = -0.47, multilingualism $\beta$ = 0.36; $p < 0.05$). Teacher educators' own English proficiency did not appear significant to multilingual use, but participants' choice of the Spanish version of the survey had a significant positive relationship to multilingual use (4C: $\beta$ = 0.57, $p < 0.05$). Finally, teacher educators who did not identify as mestizo seemed to have greater multilingual use in one model (4C: $\beta$ = 0.53, $p$ = 0.049).

**Table 8: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Results Depicting the Relationship Between Multilingual Use and Valued Purposes, Ideologies and Teacher Educator Characteristics**

| | Model 1C | Model 2C | Model 3C | Model 4C | Model 5C |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.000 | 0.030 | 0.139 | 0.151 | 0.221 |
| | | | | | |
| *Purposes* | | | | | |
| English proficiency | 0.025 | -0.004 | 0.157 | -0.122 | 0.004 |
| Critical thinking | -0.017 | 0.069 | 0.076 | 0.195 | 0.184 |
| Pedagogical skill | -0.469 | -0.467 | -0.474* | -0.386 | 0.417 |
| Professional identity | 0.040 | -0.020 | -0.001 | 0.175 | 0.161 |
| Theoretical knowledge | 0.441 | 0.487 | 0.414 | 0.344 | 0.325 |
| Research skill | -0.021 | -0.066 | -0.172 | -0.206 | -0.258 |
| Empowerment | 0.303 | 0.278 | 0.168 | 0.245 | 0.165 |
| Accountability | -0.020 | 0.031 | 0.089 | -0.025 | 0.031 |
| Prestige and income | -0.283 | -0.310 | -0.256 | -0.220 | -0.196 |
| *Ideologies* | | | | | |
| Linguistic imperialism | - | -0.329 | -0.619** | -0.216 | -0.468* |
| Native-speakerism | - | 0.14 | 0.180 | 0.043 | 0.100 |
| Multilingualism | - | 0.145 | 0.447** | 0.101 | 0.357* |
| *Educator characteristics* | | | | | |
| English level | - | - | - | -0.185 | -0.147 |
| Spanish level | - | - | - | 0.028 | 0.020 |
| Race or ethnicity | - | - | - | 0.535* | 0.505 |
| Response language | - | - | - | 0.570* | 0.503* |
| Course type | - | - | - | -0.036 | 0.006 |

*Note: Model 1 includes only valued purposes. Model 2 includes valued purposes plus 'narrow' ideologies (imperialism and multilingualism variables calculated excluding statements pertaining to language use). Model 3 includes valued purposes plus 'broad' ideologies A (imperialism and multilingualism variables calculated including statements pertaining to language use). Model 4 is the same as Model 2, plus control variables (English level, Spanish level, race/ethnicity, response language, course type). Model 5 is the same as Model 3, plus the same control variables. *p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001*

# Discussion

### Language Use in English Language Teacher Education

This quantitative view across programs offers a sense of how common English-only, multilingual, and Spanish-dominant approaches are in local practice, information that teacher educators, policymakers, and scholars may use to interrogate norms and contextualize calls for change. For one, these findings suggest EMI predominates in Ecuadorian university-based ELTE. While Cajas et al. (2023) express concern over whether teachers-in-formation receive sufficient English-language input given how Ecuadorian ELTE programs vary in the language of instruction designated in curricula, only 10% of ELTE instructors in this study reported teaching primarily in Spanish. Spanish-medium instruction likely occurs in foundational classes not unique to the English teaching major and in core ELTE courses at a small number of universities. The primary use of English is consistent with discussions of language in Latin American ELTE (Banegas & Martínez Argudo, 2019; Barahona & Darwin, 2021) and in specific Ecuadorian ELTE programs (Argudo et al., 2018; Orosz, 2018) but has not previously been documented at scale.

Furthermore, these findings highlight that EMI is not necessarily English-only in practice (Aliaga Salas & Pérez Andrade, 2023). While almost a quarter of teacher educators reported always using English, a strictly English-only approach was not the norm. Most reported using and encouraging their ELTE students to use English during more than half of a typical content class, incorporating Spanish or a combination of English and Spanish minimally. That ELTE educators mostly use English but rarely enact a strictly English-only approach is consistent with survey data from global ELT and EMI research (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Hall & Cook, 2013; Kök, 2023). Here, too, English-only seems prevalent as a normative belief—also evidenced by widespread agreement with the ideological statement that "it is best to use English only"—more than a fully enacted practice. The prevalence of some own-language use raises the question of whether most teacher educators are truly falling short of best practice or whether what is "best" should be reframed.

Furthermore, this study visibilizes the practices of teacher educators who neither maximize English nor use solely Spanish, but draw on their own and their students' broader linguistic resources. Setting aside the few working *primarily* in Spanish, almost a quarter of participants reported using a multilingual approach during at least half of a typical content course, somewhat contradicting the idea that own language use is "taboo" in Latin American ELTE (Barahona, 2020, p. 6), as practiced in Ecuador. Teacher educators with multilingual approaches most often used and encouraged students to use more English than Spanish. Such approaches are consistent with a global tendency to implement EMI in ways that (often unofficially) incorporate students' and teachers' own non-English languages (Zhu & Wang, 2024).

Most teacher educators' language use was motivated by a desire to support students' reaching linguistic and pedagogical goals. Linguistic goals appeared to motivate the amount of English use, but what language use pedagogical goals motivated was unclear. Concern for professional credibility was an important reason for English use,

even more so than policies and expectations, perhaps indicative of pressures Latin American ELT professionals may face to establish legitimacy through proximity to monolingual "native speaker" norms (González Moncada & Llurda, 2016; Zaidan, 2020). Less than 40% of respondents indicated policies or expectations were a primary (one of up to three) reason for their language use choices, suggesting either that most instructors are not subject to firm language policies or that policies align with their more pressing motivations. Nonetheless, policies or expectations motivated some educators and may suppress multilingual use, as many global ELT professionals believe their colleagues and administrators disapprove of incorporating their own language (Hall & Cook, 2013).

The reason best explaining differences in language use was the desire to promote student understanding. This matches the observation that learning content in English is a challenge for many Latin American ELTE students (Abad et al., 2019; Banegas & Martínez Argudo, 2019; Morales et al., 2020), as with EMI in the region and globally (Kök, 2023). Interestingly, only about a third of teacher educators considered student understanding a primary motivator. Perhaps the others had not observed problems with understanding or considered it an implicit concern related to linguistic or pedagogical goals. Nonetheless, educators and administrators would do well to critically (re)examine how well their approaches and policies support student understanding, especially given that in Latin American EMI, "those who manage to overcome the linguistic barrier… in most cases, happen to be those who are privileged enough to receive quality English language education before starting higher education" (Aliaga Salas & Pérez Andrade, 2023, p. 149).

Scholars and practitioners should be cautious, however, of framing multilingual approaches only as a necessary support for those struggling with EMI, rather than as an inherently valuable and legitimate way of learning and communicating. Otherwise, educators and students "may feel translanguaging is not a resource but a crutch" (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021, p. 38) and may perpetuate the myth that multilingual practices reflect deficiencies (Sah & Fang, 2024). Critical EMI praxis requires connecting practices to other social and socially-constructed factors (Mirhosseini & De la Costa, 2024).

**Linking Language Use Practices with Valued Purposes**

The regression analyses explored whether valued purposes, prevalent language ideologies, or teacher educator's own characteristics were associated with reported language use when holding all else constant. Surprisingly, whether teacher educators ranked English language proficiency as the most important teacher-learning outcome appeared to have no relationship to their language use practices. Some teacher educators probably incorporate more Spanish because they feel their students' proficiency levels require it, which might make them as likely to prioritize English proficiency as those who enact English-only instruction without such challenges. Lack of consensus among educators on whether incorporating one's own language supports target language learning, which has been observed in surveys in other EFL contexts (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Hall & Cook, 2013), could also explain the lack of significant links between valuing English proficiency and language use. It is also possible

that ranking outcomes produced forced, but not meaningful, choices; however, some first-ranked purposes *did* appear meaningfully associated with practices.

Prioritizing future teachers' theoretical knowledge was associated with an increase in Spanish use of almost one point on the one-to-five scale, as compared to the group overall. Participants teaching linguistics, psychology, and "other" courses were most likely to rank theoretical knowledge first. Given some ELTE programs designate courses of these types for Spanish-medium instruction (Cajas et al., 2023), this finding can probably be attributed to differences in what participants taught not fully accounted for in the control variables.

Highly valuing pedagogical skill was associated with rather large differences in Spanish use before controlling for teacher educator characteristics. When characteristics were accounted for and language ideologies were defined broadly, prioritizing pedagogical skill was associated with a 0.4-point decrease in Spanish use on the five-point scale as compared to the group overall, though it was not associated with significant differences in English use. That is, where beliefs about ideal language were similarly prevalent, teacher educators who prioritized pedagogical skill tended to adhere more closely to an English-only approach. Teacher education may serve as a pedagogical model for teachers-in-formation (Banegas, 2020; Orosz, 2018), and teacher educators who highly value pedagogical methods may be especially conscious of demonstrating practices their community considers ideal. Notably, what these participants apparently chose to model was using *less* Spanish. Hypothetically, these mostly multilingual teacher educators *could* model translanguaging (Yüzlü & Dikilitaş, 2024). If accurate, this finding shows how teacher educators employ language to transmit stances that are ideological as well as pedagogical (Wei, 2020).

Language use was consistently linked to prioritizing the broad purpose of empowering teachers to differentiate their instruction according to context. Teacher educators who valued empowerment above accountability to standards or prestige and income tended to use less English and more Spanish than the group overall. The coefficients were not large—these participants still tended to use English during most of a typical class, as did the group overall—but gained statistical significance when teacher educator characteristics were held constant. Perhaps some teacher educators work in contexts where translanguaging pedagogy is particularly relevant in ELT, perhaps similarly to rural areas in Colombia (Cruz Arcila, 2018) or to Mexican communities where indigenous languages are spoken along with Spanish (Morales et al., 2020). A context-driven preference for language fluidity could lead some teacher educators to highly value the power to differentiate instruction by context. Or, teacher educators who prioritize empowering teachers-in-formation might feel incorporating Spanish in English-medium courses helps them do so, as suggested by Ubaque-Casallas' (2023) analysis of translanguaging as a decolonial practice in a Colombian ELTE program.

**Linking Language Use Practices with Language Ideologies**

The survey was informed by critical literature that theoretically links linguistic imperialism with a monolingual, English-only ideal and multilingualism with inclusion use of students' own languages (Deroo & Ponzio, 2019; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Zaidan, 2020). Unsurprisingly, those ideologies were consistently associated with teacher

educators' language use when the ideologies were measured partly by statements related to language in ELT (i.e., the "broad" operationalizations). With both ideology and language use represented on a five-point scale, an additional point indicating greater prevalence of linguistic imperialism was associated with using about 0.3 more English, 0.4 less Spanish, and 0.5 less multilingual use as compared to the group overall. An additional point indicating greater prevalence of broadly defined multilingualism was associated with about 0.3 more Spanish and 0.3 more multilingual use.

However, setting aside beliefs about language in ELT (i.e., the "narrow" operationalizations), linguistic imperialism and multilingualism did *not* appear related to teacher educators' language use. That is important given how participants' opinions on the two statements for each ideology often diverged. Those inconsistencies point to the complex ambivalence Deroo and Ponzio (2019) and others have observed where teachers espouse or earnestly hold beliefs about the value of multilingualism while also embodying entrenched monolingual beliefs in their practices. This data supports the idea that educators' abstract beliefs about language and their specific beliefs about language use practice can be quite divergent (Bettney Heidt & Olson-Wyman, 2025; Haukås, 2016; Tian, 2020). Educators may believe local language and knowledge is valuable while also believing the right way to teach is the way monolingual English speakers do it.

Given the imprecision of the survey regarding ideologies, any links between ideologies and practices suggested by this study could be considered misconstrued and perhaps more accusatory than descriptive. While I do not claim clear evidence of such links, I believe this data is worth pausing over. Some teacher educators might reconsider their practices if they notice their views about language in society and in the classroom are incongruent (Haukås, 2016) and recognize linguistic imperialism as operating in both spaces. Recent research with international-school teachers in Colombia found that reading critical texts about dominant language ideologies led some to reevaluate their language use in light of concepts like linguistic imperialism (Bettney Heidt & Olson-Wyman, 2025).

The English-only ideal is also theoretically linked to native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006; Zaidan, 2020). The descriptive finding of significant differences in English use between those who selected credibility as a reason for their language use and those who did not is evocative of that link. However, no significant relationships to native-speakerism appeared in the regression analysis. Given that native-speakerism impacts those perceived as "native" and "non-native" speakers of English differently (González Moncada & Llurda, 2016; Kamhi-Stein, 2016) and English was a first language of only six of 115 participants, related variation might not be observable here.

**The Role of Teacher Educator Characteristics in Language Use Practices**

Teacher educators' own (self-reported) English proficiency related to their language use, in one of the most consistent findings. Each level of additional English proficiency (for instance, advanced or CEFR C1, rather than high intermediate or B2) was associated with an almost 0.4-point increase in English use and a close to 0.5-point decrease in Spanish use on the five-point scale. That difference was not only attributable to the minority (9%) of participants with low intermediate (CEFR B1) or lower English levels likely teaching Spanish-medium courses. Teacher educators with high intermediate

levels (CEFR B2) used significantly less English ($t$ = 4.69, $df$ = 103, $p$ < 0.001) and more Spanish ($t$ = 4.08, $df$ = 103, $p$ < 0.001) and a combination of languages ($t$ = 2.76, $df$ = 103, $p$ < 0.01) than those with advanced (CEFR C1) or academic (CEFR C2) levels, though both groups tended to use English during more than half of a typical class ($\bar{x}$ = 4.14, $sd$ = 0.80; versus, $\bar{x}$ = 4.71, $sd$ = 0.45). Notably, 36% of participants reported a high intermediate (B2) English level, which is also the mandated minimum level for public-school EFL teachers (Kuhlman & Serrano, 2017). This finding suggests some teacher educators may incorporate more Spanish into EMI because they themselves—and not only or necessarily their students—can better address some topics with the support of their first language. That interpretation is consistent with the significant difference in English use between those who did and did not select clarity of expression as a reason for their language use practices. Teacher educator English level was not significantly associated with reported multilingual use when holding all else constant, but *was* related to survey response language.

Choosing to participate in Spanish was associated with an approximately 0.6-point increase in Spanish use and an approximately 0.5-point increase in multilingual use on the five-point scale, compared to the group overall. Participants' selection of the Spanish version of the survey was correlated with their English level ($r$ = -0.41, $p$ < 0.001) but seemed to reflect more than just language proficiency. As a reminder, just 26% of respondents chose the Spanish version of the survey, though Spanish was the first language of 89% and only 18% reported their English level as academic or CEFR C2. That so many of these teacher educators opted for English rather than the dominant language in Ecuador hints at the social context of language use for ELTE professionals, as well as the "identity concerns" (Mirhosseini & De la Costa, 2024, p. 7) in EMI generally. While choosing English may reflect personal preference, it might also reflect linguistic imperialism and native-speakerism operating through implicit pressures on South American ELT professionals to prove their legitimacy as English users (González Moncada, 2021).

Other contextual factors surely shape language use, too. Participants who did not identify as mestizo seemed more likely to use a multilingual approach than the group overall when ideologies were operationalized narrowly. The non-mestizo group was diverse, including participants who identified as White, Montubio, Afro-Ecuadorian or Black, Asian, and "other," and tended to teach at certain universities. Given geographic demographic variation, this finding probably reflects university-specific effects on multilingual use.

## Limitations

This study had several limitations that should be addressed in future research. It did not examine how multilingual practices include Ecuador's indigenous languages or other languages beyond English and Spanish. It was limited to teacher educators' survey responses and did not account for university policies or student English proficiency. The survey had flaws where it attempted to quantitatively measure the presence of broad

ideologies more commonly used as theoretical frames. Nonetheless, this approach served to broaden the conversation by connecting pragmatic and critical scholarship on ELTE and EMI.

## Conclusion

As a first quantitative study of English language teacher educators' language use, this research provides empirical evidence on practices in Ecuadorian university-based ELTE. It confirms the prevalence of EMI in ELTE in the region (Banegas, 2020; Barahona, 2020) but shows that, while English predominates, a strictly English-only approach is not the norm, and a notable minority teaches multilingually. Student understanding appears as a compelling primary reason for educators incorporating some Spanish into EMI.

Furthermore, this study examined factors associated with teacher educators' language use when holding all else constant. Valuing English proficiency as the most important learning outcome did not explain how much English or Spanish educators used. Highly valuing pedagogical knowledge *was* sometimes associated with a more purely English-medium approach, depending on how ideologies were held constant. Thus, English-only approaches may be less about transmitting the English language and more about transmitting a pedagogical norm. Multilingual approaches do not necessarily reflect a lack of concern with English learning, but may be explained by valuing teacher empowerment over accountability or prestige. While the evidence on ideologies is ambiguous, the findings suggest that educators' beliefs about using non-English languages play a role. Finally, instructors' own English proficiency is key to how they approach language.

The findings contribute to critical study of ELTE and EMI in Global South higher education by questioning how practices relate to both purpose and ideology—a key aspect of critical language education and critical EMI praxis (Mirhosseini & De la Costa 2024). The logic of adopting EMI for the purpose of fostering English proficiency through the simultaneous learning of content and language is particularly relevant to the education of English language teachers, but is by no means unique to ELTE (Dang et al., 2013). Unexamined assumptions should not dictate language use in such spaces. Considering the practices of these ELTE educators may help educators across ELTE and EMI higher education (re)examine how they use language, justify their approaches, and advocate for appropriate administrative and pedagogical support.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and Dr. Melissa Whatley, Dr. Alla Korzh, Dr. Elka Todeva, Dr. Laila McCloud, and Dr. Casey Aldrich for their insightful feedback and helpful guidance as I developed previous versions of this paper. I am also grateful to the many colleagues, administrators, and teacher educators who offered their support, advice, and participation.

## Ethics Addendum

This study was part of my dissertation research at SIT Graduate Institute and was reviewed and approved by the SIT Institutional Review Board (IRB Organization Number IORG0004408, Document Number 0000196). Invitations were sent to instructors at various Ecuadorian universities with permission from either the coordinator of the program or a higher authority responsible for research, depending on university procedure as communicated to me by contacts at each university. All participants confirmed their participation was voluntary and gave informed consent.

## Data Availability Addendum

Data supporting this study cannot be made available because participants did not give permission for their data to be shared.

## AI Statement

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

## Funding

The authors have not shared any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 159-185
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.334

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# Not All the Same: An Analysis of Diverse Help-Seeking Patterns among International Students

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## Abstract

This study explored the diversity of help-seeking among international students in U.S. higher education. Mental health has been a major concern among college students, and international students may encounter additional stressors, such as adjusting to an unfamiliar culture, using English as a non-native language, and being physically distant from their families. Help-seeking is a critical step for students to express their mental health concerns and receive appropriate support. While existing studies have examined the variety of help-seeking among domestic students, little is known about the diversity of help-seeking intentions and behaviors among international students. Inspired by a critical quantitative approach, this study examined the racial, sex, and age differences in help-seeking among international students. The analysis found that international students of color and male international students reported lower help-seeking intentions and behaviors.

**Keywords**: help-seeking, international students, mental health, race, sex

# Introduction

The U.S. higher education system hosts the largest number of international students globally (IIE, 2024b). During the 2023 to 2024 academic year, more than 1.1 million students from over 200 countries and regions, including those enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and optional training programs, studied in the U.S., and this number marked a record high (IIE, 2024a). Coming from diverse backgrounds and cultures, international students navigate new academic and social environments, develop their agency, and cultivate new identities after arriving in the U.S. (Hunter-Johnson, 2021; Kim, 2025; Malcolm & Mendoza, 2014; Metro-Roland, 2018).

However, the recruitment of international students tends to be the primary focus of many higher education institutions due to the benefits these students bring, particularly economic contributions (NAFSA, 2023), while support for international students' experiences and success after arrival is often treated as secondary (Arthur, 2017). That said, international students are frequently dehumanized and deemed as financial assets in U.S. higher education; this is exemplified by the use of the term "cash cow" to describe international students (Yao & George Mwangi, 2022; Yao et al., 2024). Given international students' resilience in navigating unfamiliar academic and social environments, it is critical for higher education institutions to create supportive educational spaces that actively foster their success and personal development upon arrival in the U.S.

Mental health is one of the major concerns that international students need to manage to achieve successful academic and social experiences. While mental health issues are common among all college students, including domestic students (Wood, 2024), the same issues may be even more pronounced among international students (Yeung et al., 2022). According to the American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment, a large-scale survey, international students were more likely to report suicide attempts and depression than domestic students (Yeung et al., 2022). These disparities may stem from the unique experiences international students undergo during their college years. For instance, social norms can differ between the U.S. and other countries, and some international students have difficulty forming positive relationships in the host country (Pedersen et al., 2016). Additionally, language barriers and physical distance from family members can increase feelings of stress or loneliness (Luo et al., 2019; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). Furthermore, discrimination against racially minoritized international students has been linked to negative mental health outcomes (Yao et al., 2019). Thus, additional attention should be paid to creating a supportive higher education environment for international students' mental health issues.

Help-seeking behaviors are critical for navigating mental health concerns among college students in general. Access to appropriate resources, such as counseling services, therapy, or peer support, helps college students improve their mental health and, consequently, their academic success. However, international students are often hesitant or unable to access these valuable resources (Brownson et al., 2014; Ji & Nagata, 2024; Xiong & Yang, 2021). For example, professional mental health support

from counselors or therapists may be uncommon in some countries, and stigmatization of mental health issues is more pronounced in other cultures (Clough et al., 2019; Hyun et al., 2007). International students from such countries and cultures may avoid expressing their mental health support needs or may prefer coping strategies that differ from those of others.

While scholars have explored international students' help-seeking intentions and behaviors in general, little is known about the variation in help-seeking among international students. Although international students are often viewed as a homogeneous group, they are not all the same (Heng, 2019). Existing literature focusing on domestic students has found inconsistencies in help-seeking intentions and behaviors by race or ethnicity and gender (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2012; Lipson et al., 2022). In contrast, research examining differences in help-seeking behaviors based on international students' diverse backgrounds has been limited. However, the lack of understanding of those international student differences can lead to the inaccurate portrayal of international students as a homogeneous group and may promote one-size-fits-all educational practices, which probably do not work for many international students (Katsumoto, 2025). In other words, to promote international student mental health, it is crucial for higher education institutions and practitioners to gain an accurate understanding of their help-seeking behaviors, including diverse patterns.

Therefore, using a multi-institutional dataset, this study explores the extent to which international students' help-seeking behaviors differ based on their backgrounds. This study is significant for comparative and international higher education because it challenges the stereotype of viewing international students as a homogeneous group and uncovers an accurate understanding of international students' diverse help-seeking patterns. Overgeneralization of experiences within a particular group masks the diversity within the group and encourages one-size-fits-all educational practices. However, such practices may not be effective for all members within a group and prevent the development of appropriate educational practices. Guided by a critical quantitative approach, this study examines and aims to provide empirical evidence of the diverse help-seeking intentions and behaviors among international students. In other words, this study explores the following research question: To what extent do international students' help-seeking intentions and behaviors differ based on their race, sex, and age?

## Literature Review

### International Student Navigational Experiences and Mental Health

Mental health has been a critical concern in the U.S. higher education system in general. The intensity of mental health issues among university students has increased significantly. According to Lipson et al. (2022), a nationally representative sample showed a 134 percent increase in depression and a 109 percent increase in anxiety between 2013 and 2021. Factors such as adjusting to higher education, academic pressure, family responsibilities, and personal relationships can negatively impact the

mental health of students (American Psychological Association, 2022; University of Colorado Boulder, 2024).

While mental health issues are widespread among higher education students, international students tend to face additional navigational experiences due to their backgrounds. Having left their home countries, international students must adjust to a completely new environment in the host country (Pedersen et al., 2016; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). Unfamiliar cultures, different social norms, and unique academic expectations in the host country complicate the adjustment process more for international students compared to domestic students. Additionally, due to cultural and linguistic differences, some international students in various countries find limited opportunities to develop meaningful connections with other students, faculty, and staff (Gareis, 2012; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018; Young & Schartner, 2014). International students who are racially minoritized, from non-Western countries, or non-native speakers of the host country's language often experience discrimination and bias, which hinders positive social integration and academic success (Rice et al., 2009; Valdez, 2015). The outbreak of COVID-19 has exacerbated discrimination against international students, particularly those from Asian countries, which has negatively affected their mental health and well-being (Yao & George Mwangi, 2022).

In addition to these navigational experiences, the U.S. political climate has also been unfriendly toward international students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most U.S. higher education institutions closed their physical campuses and shifted to online instruction. In 2020, the Department of Homeland Security announced that international students whose programs transitioned online might be required to leave the country (Redden, 2020). Although this announcement was later rescinded, it highlighted the fragile status of international students under visa restrictions, causing psychological distress (Johnson, 2018; Lynch et al., 2024). Anxiety and concern among international students increased during the first Trump administration (Lynch et al., 2024), and it is assumed that a similar political climate under a returning administration may again have a negative impact on the mental health of international students.

**Help-Seeking**

Help-seeking is the process of attempting to access external support for mental health concerns, which includes both formal and informal support (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012). Help-seeking intention refers to the psychological willingness or interest in seeking support from others (White et al., 2018), while help-seeking behavior refers to the actual act of searching for or requesting help from others (APA, 2025). Due to the prevalence and severity of mental health issues among students in general, higher education institutions have provided mental health support. Many U.S. universities have offered on-campus counseling services and telehealth services and have initiated comprehensive programs for improving student mental health (ACE, 2024; Wood, 2024).

However, the availability of mental health support does not guarantee better mental health. Without expressing the need for support, students may not receive proper help from others, including professional mental health services (American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges, 2020). Help-seeking can guide students in accessing appropriate support, which eventually enhances mental health (Vidourek et al.,

2014; Yonemoto & Kawashima, 2023). In other words, help-seeking is a critical first step in connecting students with mental health support. Unfortunately, it is reported that most college students who perceive a need for mental health support do not actually seek it (Wood, 2024).

Existing literature has explored potential factors that influence help-seeking among university students in general. In their systematic review, Eisenberg et al. (2012) listed several potential factors influencing help-seeking: stigma, perceived need for help, social context, and mental health literacy. Stigma, including both self-stigma and perceived public stigma, discourages students from seeking help (Broglia et al., 2021; Eisenberg et al., 2012). Moreover, ones who are unaware of the need or benefits of mental health support are unlikely to seek it (Eisenberg et al., 2012). In contrast, having a close friend or family member who has used professional mental health support can promote help-seeking (Eisenberg et al., 2012).

In addition to these factors impacting students in general, unique elements affecting help-seeking have been identified among international students. The stigmatization of mental illness and its treatment is often more pronounced in other cultures, such as in many Asian countries (Brownson et al., 2014; Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016; Hyun et al., 2007). Such home countries' cultures and values regarding mental health can impact international students' help-seeking in a host country; for example, students from Asia are more reluctant to utilize professional mental health support (Hwang et al., 2014; Hyun et al., 2007; Maeshima & Parent, 2022). Proficiency in the primary language of the host country is also a critical factor for international students' help-seeking. According to studies from other English-speaking countries, such as Australia, some international students hesitate to use professional mental health support because they fear that using English as a non-native language may hinder effective communication (Clough et al., 2019; Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016). Similarly, cultural differences between the home and host countries may cause international students to question whether mental health professionals in the host country fully understand their unique experiences (Cogan et al., 2024; Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2016). International students tend to prefer counselors and mental health professionals who share a similar background, as this can facilitate better understanding (Chen & Lewis, 2011); however, it is often difficult for international students to find mental health professionals from the same countries or cultures in the host country.

**Moderation on Help-Seeking Intentions and Behaviors**

In addition to the benefits and barriers associated with help-seeking, existing literature, which focuses on students in general rather than international students, has suggested moderating effects that shape help-seeking intentions and behaviors. In other words, help-seeking intentions and behaviors are not uniform across all students. White students are more likely to seek counseling or professional mental health support compared to students of color, even though the latter group experiences greater mental health challenges (Brownson et al., 2014). The longitudinal study by Lipson et al. (2022) also indicates that White students have become more inclined to utilize treatment compared to other groups between 2013 and 2021. On the other hand, Asian students have been reported to access professional mental health support less frequently than

White students (Eisenberg et al., 2007, 2012; Lian et al., 2020). This is likely because the stigma surrounding mental health and the use of professional services is more pronounced in Asian cultures (Eisenberg et al., 2012; Masuda et al., 2009).

Other moderating factors include sex and sexuality. Female students tend to report higher help-seeking behaviors and perceive greater benefits from seeking help than their male counterparts (Eisenberg et al., 2012; Vidourek et al., 2014). Similarly, sexual minorities, such as bisexual and gay students, report a higher perceived need for mental health support and are more likely to seek help (Eisenberg et al., 2012). Additionally, age is positively associated with help-seeking behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, existing studies on the variation in help-seeking have primarily focused on students in general or only on domestic students. When studies have examined international students' help-seeking, the focus has been on whether international students engage in help-seeking or on how their help-seeking intentions and behaviors differ from those of domestic students (Brownson et al., 2014; Cogan et al., 2024; Eisenberg et al., 2007; Lian et al., 2020; Maeshima & Parent, 2022). Also, a study by Xiong and Yan (2021) compared a group of Asian international students with a group of all other international students. However, whether help-seeking intentions and behaviors vary between multiple racial categories and other identities within international students has not been fully discussed.

## Conceptual Framework

A critical quantitative approach guided the present study. Stage (2007) developed this approach, being inspired by the Frankfurt School of critical philosophy. Importantly, while the terms critical quantitative (or quantitative criticalism) and QuantCrit are often used interchangeably, there are philosophical differences between them (Tabron & Thomas, 2023). QuantCrit, developed by Gillborn et al. (2018), is derived from Critical Race Theory and focuses explicitly on race and racism. In contrast, critical quantitative approaches stem from Frankfurt School critical theory and aim to explore "experiences of individuals and groups in light of cultural constraints and societal prescriptions" (Stage, 2007, p. 6; Tabron & Thomas, 2023). With the goal of examining international students' diverse experiences related to help-seeking intentions and behaviors, beyond solely race and racism, this study employs a critical quantitative lens.

According to the work of Stage (2007) and Stage and Wells (2014), critical quantitative research involves three main tasks. The first is to use large-scale datasets to reveal systemic inequality. The second is to accurately depict the experiences of understudied populations. The third is to develop culturally relevant research. In addition, based on an extensive review of the literature, Rios-Aguilar (2014) identified eight important elements of critical quantitative research (Tabron & Thomas, 2023). These elements include: (1) asking relevant questions about equity and power, (2) selecting appropriate data and applying rigorous, sophisticated analyses, (3) disaggregating data by gender, race/ethnicity, language proficiency, and socioeconomic

status, and conducting research on multiple groups of marginalized students, (4) interpreting results with care, (5) using enriching theories from multiple disciplines, (6) informing and challenging existing institutional practices and decisions, and (7) informing and challenging educational policies.

In short, this critical quantitative approach weighs the importance of appropriately utilizing quantitative methods to examine the diversity existing within a particular group, which is directly associated with Stage's second purpose of a critical quantitative approach. To accurately understand student experiences and challenges, researchers need to utilize large-scale data and rigorous methodology to examine disaggregation within a particular group (particularly responding to the first, second, third, fourth, and sixth elements argued by Rios-Aguilar). Thus, this study uses a large-scale dataset, aiming to explore the diverse help-seeking intentions and behaviors of international students beyond their general pattern.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) also guides this study. It is one of the most widely used theories for explaining human behavior, including mental health help-seeking (Ajzen, 2020; Mo & Mak, 2009). According to the theory, three key factors influence an individual's intention to engage in a specific behavior: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. According to the first factor, international students may hold diverse attitudes toward mental health based on their cultural beliefs and past experiences. For instance, professional psychological help is often considered shameful in collectivist cultures. Students from such backgrounds may have a personal preference for relying on personal connections, such as friends, rather than accessing counseling services to address mental health challenges (Han & Pong, 2015; Shea & Yeh, 2008).

The second factor, subjective norms, refers to perceived social expectations. If a student's community or society bears particular messages about mental health treatment, whether encouraging or stigmatizing, these social norms may influence the student's behavior beyond their personal attitudes. Third, perceived behavioral control refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to perform the behavior. For example, differences in first languages, healthcare systems, or financial concerns may lower international students' perceived control over seeking help, which reduces the likelihood of utilizing professional services. In sum, the Theory of Planned Behavior provides a useful framework for examining both internal and external influences on international students' help-seeking intentions and behaviors.

## Data and Methods

This study, as a secondary data analysis, employed the Healthy Minds Study (HMS) dataset, which was collected during the 2021–2022 academic year. The HMS has collected national, multi-institutional data annually since its initiation in 2007 to reveal mental health trends and service utilization among students in U.S. universities and colleges (HMS, n.d.a). At each participating institution, students were either randomly selected or all students were invited to participate (HMS, n.d.b). Scholars can request

access to the deidentified HMS data by completing the required form. This dataset was selected because of its national, multi-institutional scope, the variety of variables collected, and its large sample size.

Such a large-scale dataset is appropriate for critical quantitative studies, as it provides a sufficient sample size and relevant variables for analyzing diversity within the group of international students, who have often been portrayed as a homogeneous population (Heng, 2017; Stage, 2007; Stage & Wells, 2014). The HMS includes core sections completed by all participants, as well as elective sections that institutions may choose to administer. This study focused on participants who completed the section on Knowledge and Attitudes about Mental Health and Mental Health Services, which includes critical information for this research, such as attitudes toward mental health.

The analytical sample comprises 2,333 international students from 58 four-year institutions, including baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral universities. Associate's colleges and special-focus institutions were excluded due to their different institutional and curricular structures. The average age of the sample was 24.01 years, and more than half of the participants identified as female (59%). The racial composition of the sample was 9% Black/African, 51% Asian, 7% Hispanic, 5% Middle Eastern/Arab, 18% White, and 10% other. Thirty percent of the participants were first-generation university students. Regarding academic characteristics, 46% were STEM majors, 23% were enrolled in a master's program, and 25% were pursuing a doctoral degree. In terms of mental health experiences and perceptions, 53% reported having experienced a mental health problem, and 69% indicated having friends or family members who had sought professional help. The mean perceived public stigma score (i.e., student perceptions of public stigma) was 0.45 (SD = 0.50), while the mean personal stigma score was notably lower at 0.13 (SD = 0.33). A majority of students (81%) reported knowing where to access mental health resources at their school. Descriptive statistics for all variables are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

| Variables | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| *If you were experiencing serious emotional distress, whom would you talk to about this?* | | |
| Professional clinician (e.g., psychologist, counselor, or psychiatrist) | .32 | .47 |
| Roommate | .16 | .37 |
| Friend (who is not a roommate) | .49 | .50 |
| Significant other/romantic partner | .30 | .46 |
| Family member | .43 | .49 |
| Any therapy visits in the past 12 months | .27 | .45 |
| Any medication use during the past 12 months | .12 | .32 |
| *In the past 12 months have you received support for your mental or emotional health from any of the following sources?* | | |
| Roommate | .13 | .33 |
| Friend (who is not a roommate) | .40 | .49 |
| Significant other/romantic partner | .22 | .42 |
| Family member | .33 | .47 |
| Faculty member/professor | .06 | .23 |
| White | .17 | .38 |
| Black/African | .09 | .28 |
| Asian | .51 | .50 |
| Hispanic | .07 | .26 |
| Middle Eastern/Arab | .05 | .21 |
| Other | .10 | .31 |
| Female | .59 | .49 |
| Age | 24.01 | 5.23 |
| First-generation | .30 | .46 |
| Knowing where to access resources for my mental health from my school | .81 | .39 |
| Any mental health problem | .53 | .50 |
| Perceived public stigma of mental issues | .45 | .50 |
| Personal stigma of mental issues | .13 | .33 |
| STEM major | .46 | .50 |
| Bachelor's degree | .52 | .50 |
| Master's degree | .23 | .42 |
| Doctoral degree | .25 | .43 |
| Having friends or family member who have ever sought professional help | .69 | .46 |

*Note: The reference categories for race and degree are White and bachelor's degree, respectively.*

## Measures

### Dependent Variables

This study employs a series of binary variables related to help-seeking intentions and behaviors. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, intention is a key predictor of engaging in a particular behavior. Some students might not currently experience mental health challenges and therefore might not engage in immediate help-seeking behaviors. However, an understanding of students' help-seeking intentions can provide

insights into how likely they are to seek help if they do encounter mental health issues. Help-seeking generally involves external support in both formal (e.g., professional services) and informal (e.g., support from friends or family members) forms (APA, 2025; Rickwood & Thomas, 2012). Therefore, this study examines help-seeking intentions and behaviors in both formal and informal contexts.

The first set of binary variables indicates to whom students would talk if they encountered emotional distress. That is, these variables measure help-seeking intentions. The question stem was: "If you were experiencing serious emotional distress, whom would you talk to about this?" The response options included: "Professional clinician (e.g., psychologist, counselor, or psychiatrist)," "Roommate," "Friends (who are not roommates)," "Significant other/romantic partner," "Family member," and "Religious counselor or other religious contact" (0 = not selected; 1 = selected).

In contrast to these perception-based measures, other outcome variables assess actual help-seeking behaviors with the question stem: "In the past 12 months, have you received support for your mental or emotional health from any of the following sources?" Two binary variables asked whether students had used therapy or medication during the past 12 months (0 = no; 1 = yes), respectively. In addition, another series of binary variables asked whether students had actually received support for their mental or emotional health from various sources, including "Roommate," "Friend (who is not a roommate)," "Significant other," "Family member," "Religious counselor or other religious contact," "Faculty member/professor," and "Staff member" (0 = not selected; 1 = selected).

Independent Variables

Given that this study is guided by a critical quantitative approach and aims to examine diversity in help-seeking among international students, the key independent variables are their demographic characteristics. Previous studies have found differences in help-seeking among domestic students based on race, sex, and age, so this study includes the same variables. The HMS dataset provides self-reported racial categories, and the race variable in this study comprises six categories: White (reference category), Black/African, Asian, Hispanic/Latin(x), Middle Eastern/Arab, and Other. Sex is measured as a binary variable (0 = male, 1 = female; note that the original surveys provided three options of male, female, and others, but none of the international students in this sample chose others), and age is treated as a continuous variable.

This study intentionally used privileged groups, White international students and male international students, as reference groups. I am aware that such a practice poses the risk of strengthening the current social norm (Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015) as if the reference group is centered or their experience is normalized. At the same time, one of the major elements of the critical quantitative approach is to reveal inequity and power in society (Rios-Aguilar, 2014). To directly and critically capture the differences between the privileged group and other groups, this study used the privileged group as the reference category and compared the disparities between this group and others.

In addition to these key independent variables, the model includes various control variables. First-generation college student status and STEM major are included as binary control variables, as these characteristics tend to be associated with college student

experiences and success (Mayhew et al., 2016). Degree level is also included as a categorical variable, with master's and doctoral degrees compared to a reference category of bachelor's degree. Following previous studies (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2007), additional variables were taken into account: whether a student knows where to access resources on campus (0 = disagree, 1 = agree); whether a student has been bothered by any mental health issues in the past two weeks (0 = no, 1 = yes); whether a student perceives public stigma related to mental health issues (0 = no, 1 = yes); whether a student holds stigma about mental health issues (0 = no, 1 = yes); and whether a student knows family members or close friends who have used professional mental health support (0 = no, 1 = yes).

**Analytical Approach**

Because this analytical sample contained missing values (2.8% of the data), multiple imputation by chained equations was conducted to create 20 complete datasets. The results from these datasets were pooled, and the standard errors were adjusted accordingly. This imputation method produces less bias compared to traditional methods, such as listwise deletion or mean imputation (for more information, see Carpenter & Kenward, 2013; Van Buuren, 2018).

As an analytical method, this study used multilevel logistic regression to predict binary outcome variables. One of the critical assumptions in estimating the relationships between predictors and an outcome variable is the independence of observations (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). However, the HMS sample design is multilevel, and students are nested within institutions. Because students from the same institution may be more similar to each other, this can violate the assumption of independence of observations. Multilevel modeling was employed to account for institution-level differences and to explore individual-level relationships (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). To assess the extent to which the key independent variables (race, sex, and age) predict help-seeking, each model included one outcome variable along with all control variables. The initial analyses were conducted using the full sample. In addition to the base model using the full sample, I conducted the same analysis on a subsample of students who reported mental health challenges in the past 12 months, as these students might have distinct help-seeking intentions and behaviors.

## Findings

Overall, international students of color consistently reported lower help-seeking intentions and behaviors compared to White international students, especially in seeking support from professionals, friends, and family members. Female international students were more likely than male students to seek help through various channels, while older students were generally less likely to do so. Variables like perceived stigma showed no significant effect, but knowing someone who had used mental health services was linked to greater help-seeking across the models.

**Racial Differences**

Table 2 presents the results of the multilevel logistic regression predicting international students' help-seeking intentions using the full sample. Compared to White international students, international students of color were less likely to talk to others when experiencing serious emotional distress, as indicated by significant coefficients. In particular, Black/African international students had lower probabilities of speaking with their roommates (OR = .58, $p < .05$) or family members (OR = .64, $p < .05$) than the privileged group, White international students. In other words, the former group's odds of seeking help from roommates or family members were 42% and 36% lower, respectively, than the latter group. Additionally, Asian international students had a lower intention to seek professional help (OR = .68, $p < .01$) compared to White international students. Hispanic international students also had 42% lower odds of talking to roommates (OR = .58, $p < .05$) compared to the privileged racial group. Middle Eastern/Arab international students were less likely to seek help from roommates (OR = .36, $p < .05$) or significant others (OR = .51, $p < .05$) than White international students if they experienced mental health challenges.

When the analysis was restricted to international students with prior mental health challenges, the discrepancies between White international students and international students of color remained or became even more pronounced (Table 3). Compared to White international students, Black/African international students were less likely to seek help from professional clinicians (OR = .57, $p < .05$), friends (OR = .50, $p < .01$), and family members (OR = .54, $p < .05$). Consistent with the full sample analysis, Asian international students reported 46% lower odds of intending to talk to professional clinicians (OR = .54, $p < .01$) than White international students. Additionally, Hispanic international students and Middle Eastern/Arab international students showed lower odds of talking with friends or roommates, respectively, compared to White international students.

Differences between White international students and international students of color were also evident in actual help-seeking behaviors (Table 4 for the full sample results and Table 5 for the results of the sample with mental health challenges). In the full sample analysis, Black/African international students sought less support from therapy (OR = .50, $p < .01$), friends (OR = .54, $p < .01$), and significant others (OR = .42, $p < .001$) in the past 12 months compared to the privileged racial international students. Similarly, the odds of using therapy and medication were 48% ($p < .001$) and 49% lower ($p < .01$), respectively, among Asian international students than among White international students. Hispanic and Middle Eastern/Arab international students were also less likely to seek help from roommates (OR = .49, $p < .05$ for Hispanic international students; OR = .30, $p < .05$ for Middle Eastern/Arab international students) or significant others (for Middle Eastern/Arab international students only; OR = .48, $p < .05$) compared to White international students.

As with help-seeking intentions, the limited help-seeking behaviors among international students of color relative to White international students remained, or became even stronger, when the analysis focused on international students with mental health challenges. Black/African international students sought less support from therapy (OR = .48, $p < .05$), friends (OR = .41, $p < .01$), and significant others (OR = .30, $p < .001$)

in the past 12 months compared to the privileged racial international students. These odds ratios were lower than the results based on the full sample. In other words, when Black/African international students had mental health concerns, their odds of seeking help from those sources were even lower.

**Sex and Age Differences**

Sex and age also showed significant associations with international students' help-seeking intentions. Female international students had 32% higher odds of having the intention to talk to significant others (OR = 1.32, $p < .01$) when facing mental health issues than male international students (Table 2). However, this significant difference was not observed when the analysis focused solely on students with mental health concerns. In the full sample analysis, age was negatively related to the odds of having the intention to talk with roommates (OR = .91, $p < .001$) and friends (OR = .96, $p < .01$) and positively related to the odds of having the intention to talk with significant others (OR = 1.02, $p < .05$). However, among students with mental health challenges, only the negative relationship with the intention to talk with roommates remained significant.

Female international students also engaged in help-seeking behaviors more actively than male international students. The odds of utilizing therapy (OR = 1.99, $p < .001$) and medication (OR = 1.54, $p < .01$), and seeking help from roommates (OR = 1.60, $p < .01$), friends (OR = 1.75, $p < .001$), significant others (OR = 1.84, $p < .001$), family members (OR = 1.48, $p < .001$), and faculty members (OR = 1.75, $p < .01$), were higher among female international students than male international students. This pattern was similar among international students with mental health challenges, particularly for help-seeking via therapy and medication.

In the full sample analysis, older students were less likely to utilize support from therapy (OR = .92, $p < .05$), roommates (OR = .91, $p < .001$), and friends (OR = .96, $p < .001$). That is, being one year older was associated with 8%, 9%, and 4% lower odds of utilizing therapy or seeking help from roommates or friends, respectively. However, among international students with mental health challenges, most of these significant effects became insignificant, except for support from roommates.

In addition to the main dependent variables, several noteworthy findings emerged from the control variables. Overall, international students' perceived public stigma and personal stigma regarding mental health were not significantly associated with help-seeking intentions or behaviors. Doctoral international students were more likely to receive support through therapy and medication compared to bachelor's-level international students. Additionally, knowing family members or close friends who had used professional mental health support was associated with higher help-seeking intentions and behaviors among international students.

**Table 2: Multilevel logistic regression results predicting help-seeking intention variables using the full sample**

| | Professional clinician | | Roommate | | Friend | | Significant other | | Family member | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE |
| Black | .83 | .19 | .58* | .25 | .72 | .18 | .71 | .20 | .64* | .19 |
| Asian | .68** | .13 | .76 | .16 | 1.23 | .12 | .79 | .13 | .83 | .13 |
| Hispanic | 1.01 | .19 | .58* | .26 | .83 | .19 | .96 | .20 | .87 | .19 |
| Middle | .90 | .24 | .36* | .39 | .81 | .23 | .51* | .27 | .83 | .23 |
| Other | 1.03 | .17 | .65 | .22 | 1.21 | .17 | .98 | .18 | .93 | .17 |
| Female | 1.19 | .10 | 1.02 | .12 | 1.12 | .09 | 1.32** | .10 | 1.11 | .09 |
| Age | 1.01 | .01 | .91*** | .02 | .96** | .01 | 1.02* | .01 | 1.01 | .01 |
| First-gen | .91 | .11 | 1.19 | .13 | .90 | .10 | .84 | .11 | .87 | .10 |
| Problem | 1.21* | .10 | .80 | .12 | .74** | .09 | .89 | .10 | .40*** | .09 |
| Perceived | .97 | .11 | .90 | .13 | .86 | .10 | .95 | .11 | .90 | .10 |
| Own | .80 | .17 | .84 | .22 | 1.08 | .15 | .76 | .17 | .78 | .16 |
| STEM | .89 | .10 | 1.02 | .12 | .84 | .09 | .92 | .10 | .98 | .09 |
| Master's | .73 | .16 | .96 | .19 | 1.05 | .13 | 1.01 | .15 | .96 | .14 |
| Doctoral | 1.23 | .17 | 1.35 | .23 | 1.25 | .15 | 1.49* | .16 | .96 | .15 |
| Someone | 2.20*** | .12 | 1.05 | .15 | 1.80*** | .11 | 1.38** | .12 | 1.14 | .11 |

*Note: The reference categories for race and degree are White and bachelor's degree, respective. *p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001*

**Table 3: Multilevel logistic regression results predicting help-seeking intention variables among students with mental health challenges**

| | Professional clinician | | Roommate | | Friend | | Significant other | | Family member | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE |
| Black | .57* | .28 | .60 | .34 | .50** | .27 | .65 | .31 | .54* | .30 |
| Asian | .54** | .18 | .66 | .21 | .93 | .17 | 1.03 | .19 | .97 | .18 |
| Hispanic | .65 | .28 | .53 | .37 | .53* | .27 | 1.31 | .28 | .84 | .28 |
| Middle | .87 | .32 | .02** | .62 | .55 | .31 | .68 | .35 | 1.14 | .31 |
| Other | .89 | .23 | .62 | .29 | .75 | .23 | 1.40 | .24 | 1.42 | .23 |
| Female | 1.23 | .14 | 1.17 | .18 | 1.09 | .13 | 1.26 | .14 | 1.07 | .14 |
| Age | .97 | .02 | .93* | .03 | .99 | .02 | 1.01 | .02 | 1.03 | .02 |
| First-gen | .98 | .15 | 1.31 | .18 | .73* | .14 | 1.03 | .15 | .72* | .15 |
| Perceived | 1.08* | .14 | .73 | .19 | .92 | .13 | 1.07 | .14 | .96 | .14 |
| Own | .59 | .24 | .77 | .32 | .86 | .21 | .90 | .23 | .83 | .23 |
| STEM | .90 | .14 | .83 | .17 | .79 | .13 | 1.07 | .14 | .92 | .13 |
| Master's | .86 | .22 | 1.14 | .27 | .88 | .19 | 1.08 | .21 | .92 | .20 |
| Doctoral | 1.49*** | .26 | 1.79 | .33 | .92*** | .23 | 1.52* | .24 | .73 | .24 |
| Someone | 1.95*** | .17 | 1.11*** | .21 | 1.79 | .15 | 1.39*** | .16 | 1.30* | .16 |

*Note: The reference categories for race and degree are White and bachelor's degree, respective. *p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001*

**Table 4: Multilevel logistic regression results predicting help-seeking behavior variables using the full sample**

| | Therapy | | Medication | | Roommate | | Friend | | Significant other | | Family member | | Faculty member | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE |
| Black | .50** | .24 | .53 | .32 | .61 | .28 | .54** | .20 | .42*** | .25 | .73 | .20 | .44 | .47 |
| Asian | .52*** | .15 | .51** | .20 | .77 | .17 | .86 | .13 | .82 | .14 | .86 | .13 | .84 | .25 |
| Hispanic | 1.39 | .21 | .73 | .29 | .49* | .30 | .80 | .19 | .97 | .21 | 1.14 | .19 | 1.21 | .35 |
| Middle | 1.43 | .27 | 1.11 | .33 | .30* | .48 | .81 | .24 | .48* | .30 | .70 | .25 | .53 | .56 |
| Other | 1.07 | .19 | 1.17 | .23 | .97 | .23 | 1.07 | .17 | 1.03 | .19 | 1.06 | .17 | 1.45 | .31 |
| Female | 1.99*** | .12 | 1.54** | .16 | 1.60** | .14 | 1.75*** | .10 | 1.84*** | .11 | 1.48*** | .10 | 1.75** | .21 |
| Age | .97* | .02 | 1.03 | .02 | .91*** | .02 | .96** | .01 | 1.01 | .01 | 1.00 | .01 | 1.03 | .02 |
| First-gen | .80 | .13 | .93 | .16 | 1.04 | .15 | .90 | .10 | .99 | .12 | .84 | .10 | .91 | .21 |
| Problem | 2.41*** | .11 | 3.86*** | .18 | 1.34* | .13 | 1.16 | .09 | 1.13 | .11 | .78** | .09 | 1.82** | .20 |
| Perceived | 1.06 | .12 | 1.38* | .15 | .89 | .14 | .98 | .10 | 1.01 | .11 | .92 | .10 | 1.04 | .20 |
| Own | .73 | .22 | .81 | .28 | .87 | .24 | .84 | .16 | .76 | .20 | .66* | .17 | .73 | .37 |
| STEM | .90 | .11 | 1.02 | .15 | 1.02 | .14 | 1.03 | .10 | 1.08 | .11 | 1.16 | .10 | .63* | .20 |
| Master's | .65* | .20 | .36*** | .28 | .98 | .22 | .94 | .15 | .91 | .17 | .99 | .14 | .27** | .39 |
| Doctoral | 1.52* | .21 | .90 | .25 | 1.57 | .26 | 1.13 | .17 | 1.73** | .17 | 1.16 | .16 | 1.52 | .32 |
| Someone | 2.46*** | .16 | 1.95** | .21 | 1.65** | .17 | 2.46*** | .11 | 1.79*** | .14 | 1.73*** | .12 | 1.49 | .26 |

*Note: The reference categories for race and degree are White and bachelor's degree, respective. $^{*}p < .05$ $^{**}p < .01$ $^{***}p < .001$*

**Table 5: Multilevel logistic regression results predicting help-seeking behavior variables among students with mental health challenges**

| | Therapy | | Medication | | Roommate | | Friend | | Significant other | | Family member | | Faculty member | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE | Odds Ratio | SE |
| Black | .64 | .29 | .48* | .36 | .52 | .37 | .41** | .28 | .30** | .39 | .64 | .30 | .57 | .53 |
| Asian | .48*** | .19 | .43*** | .22 | .66 | .22 | .74 | .18 | .93 | .19 | .86 | .18 | .79 | .30 |
| Hispanic | 1.17 | .29 | .68 | .33 | .52 | .37 | .57* | .27 | 1.01 | .30 | 1.05 | .28 | .65 | .50 |
| Middle | 1.34 | .33 | .60 | .41 | .31* | .55 | .64 | .32 | .46 | .40 | .58 | .35 | .51 | .66 |
| Other | 1.14 | .24 | .99 | .26 | .90 | .28 | .87 | .23 | 1.25 | .25 | 1.35 | .23 | 1.51 | .36 |
| Female | 2.14*** | .15 | 1.58* | .19 | 1.40 | .19 | 1.54** | .14 | 1.77*** | .16 | 1.13 | .14 | 1.52 | .26 |
| Age | .96 | .02 | 1.02 | .03 | .92* | .03 | .98 | .02 | .98 | .02 | .99 | .02 | 1.06 | .04 |
| First-gen | .84 | .16 | .94 | .19 | 1.01 | .19 | .84 | .14 | 1.15 | .16 | .73* | .15 | .76 | .28 |
| Perceived | 1.08 | .16 | 1.35 | .18 | .80 | .18 | 1.13 | .14 | .95 | .16 | .88 | .15 | 1.25 | .25 |
| Own | .71 | .25 | .92 | .32 | .82 | .32 | .69 | .22 | .88 | .26 | .65 | .25 | .76* | .43 |
| STEM | .85 | .14 | 1.03* | .17 | .78 | .18 | .92 | .13 | 1.09 | .15 | 1.00 | .14 | .53** | .25 |
| Master's | .67 | .24 | .48 | .31 | 1.25 | .28 | .90 | .20 | 1.01* | .23 | 1.27 | .21 | .17 | .55 |
| Doctoral | 1.38*** | .28 | 1.12* | .30 | 1.82* | .34 | .99*** | .24 | 1.92* | .27 | 1.48** | .26 | 1.05 | .43 |
| Someone | 2.03 | .19 | 1.82*** | .24 | 1.57*** | .22 | 2.32*** | .15 | 1.55*** | .18 | 1.63*** | .17 | 1.35*** | .31 |

*Note: The reference categories for race and degree are White and bachelor's degree, respective. *p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001*

## Limitations

There are several noteworthy limitations in this study. First, although student race was used to examine diversity in help-seeking among international students, a more detailed variable for ethnicities and nationalities would be ideal. Although the HMS questionnaire includes items on student nationality, this information is not available in the public dataset. A similar analysis should be conducted if a large dataset including international student nationalities becomes available. Second, the study could not include a potentially critical variable: English proficiency. Only an elective section of the HMS inquired whether students were raised in an English-dominant environment, and the majority of the sample did not complete this section. Moreover, this question only addressed the English environment in which students were raised, and no objective measure of English proficiency, such as test scores, was available. Given that proficiency in the host country's primary language significantly impacts many aspects of university life, I urge the HMS to include a comprehensive English proficiency item in future surveys.

Third, while the HMS either randomly selected students or invited all students from each participating institution, generalizability to all international students is not fully ensured, as not all institutions in the U.S. participated or were randomly invited to participate. Fourth, to clarify the differences between the privileged group and non-privileged groups, this study, which was guided by a critical quantitative approach, selected White international students and male international students as a reference group. While this approach should be effective in depicting the exact discrepancy between the privileged and non-privileged groups, it is not free from the risk of normalizing the privileged group. Future studies may be interested in using a person-centered approach, such as latent class analysis, to explore the differences within a group of international students from a different perspective.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Guided by the aims of critical quantitative research (Stage, 2007; Stage & Wells, 2014), this study explored whether help-seeking behaviors and intentions are diverse within a group of international students. The literature has increasingly explored international students' help-seeking or diverse help-seeking patterns among domestic students (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2012; Ji & Nagata, 2024; Lipson et al., 2022; Xiong & Yang, 2021). However, international students in U.S. higher education have largely been treated as a homogeneous group (Heng, 2019), and little research has examined the differences that can exist within the international student group. An accurate understanding of international students' help-seeking is critical for higher education institutions to develop tailored practices, rather than one-size-fits-all approaches.

One significant finding from this study is that help-seeking behaviors among international students vary significantly by race, sex, and age. Previous studies on diverse help-seeking among domestic students have revealed similar discrepancies between

students of color and White students (Brownson et al., 2014; Lipson et al., 2022). In particular, Asian American students have reported lower levels of help-seeking than White domestic students, which is often attributed to the strong stigma associated with mental health issues and professional mental health support in Asian cultures (Brownson et al., 2014). However, this study, which adjusted for both public and personal stigma, still found that international students of color exhibited lower help-seeking intentions and behaviors than their White counterparts.

A potential explanation for these findings is the contextual factor of available support. While past studies often cited cultural backgrounds, such as stigmatization of mental health in the country of origin, as a potential barrier (Clough et al., 2019; Hyun et al., 2007), researchers should further examine organizational barriers that may prevent international students of color from expressing their need for help. For instance, college students in general often feel more comfortable with therapists who share similar ethnic backgrounds (Chen & Lewis, 2011). According to the American Psychological Association (2022), 88% of health service psychologists are White. If school counselors reflect a similar racial composition, this may represent an organizational barrier that discourages international students of color from actively seeking help while White international students may more easily find counselors who share similar ethnic backgrounds. Similarly, if a preference for support from same-race or ethnic peers extends to informal sources, White international students may be more likely to access help from other White students, who make up the majority of the U.S. higher education population. On the other hand, international students of color may have a lower probability than their White international peers of finding students who share similar racial or ethnic backgrounds. In short, context and institutional settings should be critically assessed to determine whether the environment allows international students of color to feel comfortable expressing their need for mental health support.

Another significant finding is the variation in help-seeking intentions and behaviors among different racial groups of international students when White international students are used as the reference group. While international students of color generally expressed lower help-seeking intentions and behaviors, the patterns were not consistent across all groups. For instance, among international students who had experienced mental health problems, Black/African and Asian international students were less inclined to seek help from professionals or use medication than White international students, whereas this tendency was not observed among Hispanic and Middle Eastern/Arab international students. Additionally, compared to White international students, Middle Eastern/Arab international students hesitated to, and did not, receive help from roommates, while Hispanic and Black/African international students were less likely to receive mental health support from their friends.

Differences between male and female international students were also evident in the findings. Female international students consistently reported higher help-seeking behaviors compared to their male counterparts, even among those who had experienced mental health issues in the past. Specifically, female international students were more likely to receive support through therapy, medication, friends, and significant others than male international students. Interestingly, a similar pattern has been found among samples of domestic students in previous studies (e.g., Brand et al., 2019; Vidourek et al.,

2014). Future studies may explore the mechanisms underlying this consistent trend, regardless of student nationality.

Additionally, this study found that older international students reported less likelihood of seeking help for their mental health. This tendency was opposite to findings from domestic students (Eisenberg et al., 2009). The question raised is what dynamics demotivate older international students from actively seeking help. While research on nontraditional-aged international students is rare, existing work suggests that family obligations may be one such factor (Gallie & Griffin, 2025). Such additional responsibilities may limit their access to networks or information resources for seeking help.

Given these racial, sex, and age differences, U.S. higher education institutions need to consider how to promote help-seeking among their diverse international student populations. For instance, Asian international students, who represent the largest racial group among international students, along with Black/African international students, should be effectively connected with professional mental health services. International student offices might consider allocating more time during orientation to explain available mental health services and collaborating with ethnicity- or race-based international student organizations, if they exist.

Another effective strategy is actively recruiting a diverse range of counselors and other mental health professionals from various cultural backgrounds, including those who are foreign-born. Given international students' preference for counselors who share similar cultural experiences, particularly among students of color, such diversity in counselors may help reduce perceived barriers to seeking support. Higher education institutions should critically assess whether their mental health professionals reflect the diversity of their student population.

In addition, opportunities to intervene in the key behavioral factors identified in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) may be beneficial. Students from different cultures hold diverse attitudes toward help-seeking and may be influenced by different social norms. For instance, Chinese international students often prefer self-management of mental health issues over the use of professional services, which influences their help-seeking decisions (Ji & Nagata, 2024). Introducing new perspectives or social values that actively encourage the use of both formal and informal mental health support may help shift help-seeking intentions and behaviors among international students.

Additionally, U.S. higher education institutions could offer mental health training for students. Roommates and friends with basic mental health knowledge and an understanding of how to access services can encourage international students to seek help. These roommates are likely to recognize when their international roommate needs support and connect them with appropriate professionals. Although the primary responsibility for mental health care should remain with institutions and professionals, having a network of informed peers can help in identifying concerns.

Another recommendation is that higher education institutions develop targeted support systems specifically for older international students. In contrast to previous findings on domestic students (Eisenberg et al., 2009), older international students in this study reported greater reluctance to seek help. Researchers and institutional leaders should investigate the factors that discourage help-seeking in this group. If these factors

are rooted in unique life circumstances, such as caregiving responsibilities for family members, relevant offices should take active action in connecting these students to appropriate mental health support services. Additionally, the availability of support services, such as affordable daycare, can be helpful for international students with families, as it allows them to secure the time needed to seek help.

Moreover, scholars need to examine whether such variation in help-seeking intentions and behaviors is consistent outside of the U.S. context. While the U.S. has been the top host country for international students and hosts approximately 16% of the global international student population, more than 80% of international students pursue their education elsewhere (IIE, 2024b). Thus, it is critical to understand international students' help-seeking intentions and behaviors and their potential diversity in order to develop appropriate support systems in other host countries.

The findings of this study should be valuable for critically examining the experiences and differences among international students. International students are likely portrayed as a homogeneous group (e.g., Heng, 2019). However, the oversimplification of international students hinders the development of an accurate understanding of international student experiences, which is essential for creating appropriate support. Critical quantitative approaches emphasize the importance of selecting appropriate data and methods to accurately understand the experiences and diversity of understudied groups (Rios-Aguilar, 2014; Stage, 2007; Stage & Wells, 2014). This study reveals the diversity within a group of international students and provides statistical evidence against the oversimplification of their experiences.

U.S. higher education has often been criticized for its approach to prioritizing the recruitment of international students, rather than providing support for them (Choudaha & Hu, 2016). However, preparing an appropriate environment for international student success must be central to the discussion. Given the potentially adverse social and political climate in the U.S., international student mental health is at greater risk than ever before. Higher education institutions and professionals must develop a nuanced understanding of international students' diverse experiences, including their help-seeking intentions and behaviors, to ensure the U.S. remains an attractive destination for students from around the world.

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## Acknowledgements

The author has made no acknowledgements regarding this publication.

## Data Availability Addendum

The original data can be requested from the Healthy Minds Network, the survey administrator.

## AI Statement

Grammarly and ChatGPT were used to identify grammatical errors, and the author made final revisions based on his own judgment.

## Funding

The author has not shared any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 186-201
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.10

**PRACTICE ARTICLE**

# Using Technology-Enhanced Differentiated Instruction to Support Learning in Higher Education

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## Abstract

The expansion of access to higher education, as well as the global circulation of students, herald greater diversity on campus and the need for more inclusive teaching practices. Responding to Stentiford and Koutsouris's (2021) call for expanded conversations in inclusive pedagogies in higher education, this article explores the synergistic potential of technology with differentiated instruction—a learner-centered educational approach. Technology was adopted to collect information on students' backgrounds and learning, enhance the learning environment, scaffold content outside the classroom, as well as diversify teaching processes and modalities, thus enhancing differentiated instruction practices. Students' appreciation for these practices point to the potential of technology-enhanced differentiated instruction in attending to the diverse needs of learners and achieving greater inclusion of all learners in higher education classrooms. Simultaneously, students' appreciation underscores how clear principles and reflective philosophies drive teaching and learning practices.

**Keywords**: differentiated instruction, inclusion, diversity, technology, pedagogy

## Introduction

Higher education institutions worldwide are seeing unprecedented diversity in their campuses with the expansion of access to higher education, as well as the global circulation of students. Ethnicities, (dis)abilities, nationalities, and socio-economic statuses are but a few examples of the differences based on various facets of students' identities which contribute to diversity in higher education (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). Greater diversity has prompted an urgent attention to the need for more inclusive

and nuanced teaching practices—no longer does a one-size-fit-all approach work. However, Stentiford and Koutsouris (2021) have argued that widespread interest in— and conversations about—inclusive pedagogies in higher education are recent phenomena, and it is imperative to expand the discourse on how inclusive pedagogies can be interpreted and implemented. This article aims to contribute to such discourse by discussing how technology-enhanced differentiated instruction can support diverse student populations in higher education.

Differentiated instruction (DI) is a learner-centered educational approach premised on an appreciation for learner diversity, aiming to maximize the academic potential of learners through adaptive teaching (Tomlinson, 2014). It draws upon constructivist theories of learning that assumes that learners have pre-existing knowledge and experiences that should be taken into consideration in crafting learning experiences (Tomlinson et al., 2003). Although commonly used in K-12 settings to enhance inclusion, student engagement, and achievement, the higher education community has been slower in adopting DI despite its benefits (Melese, 2019; Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009; Turner et al., 2017). By drawing upon examples from a pedagogical exploration and research study on students' experiences with technology-enhanced DI, this article offers ideas on how technology-enhanced DI can be used as a curricular and pedagogical approach to enhance inclusion and engagement in higher education. Additionally, it hopes to encourage readers to contemplate how our philosophical assumptions on education can shape the teaching and learning principles and practices we implement.

## Differentiated Instruction and Its Benefits

Differentiated instruction (DI) is a systematic and intentional way to plan curriculum and teach diverse learners. DI draws on philosophical underpinnings that include an appreciation of student diversity and the growth mindset, with educators accepting responsibilities for removing barriers to students' learning to maximize their learning potential (Tomlinson, 2014). Educators are encouraged to adapt various classroom elements, such as the learning content (or concepts, facts, and skills to be attained), process (by which students understand the content), product (that showcase their learning), and environment (in which students learn) (Tomlinson, 2014). Five principles guide the adaptation of these classroom elements: creating a supportive learning environment where students feel safe, implementing a quality curriculum that is authentic and relevant, using assessment data to inform teaching and learning, adapting instruction to students' variances, and leading and managing the classroom through the use of routines and clear instructions (Tomlinson, 2014). DI has been associated with increased academic outcomes both within K-12 (Deunk et al., 2018) and higher education (Chamberlin & Powers, 2010; Chen & Chen, 2018; Dosch & Zidon, 2014), in addition to enhanced student collaboration, interaction, and engagement (Joseph et al., 2013).

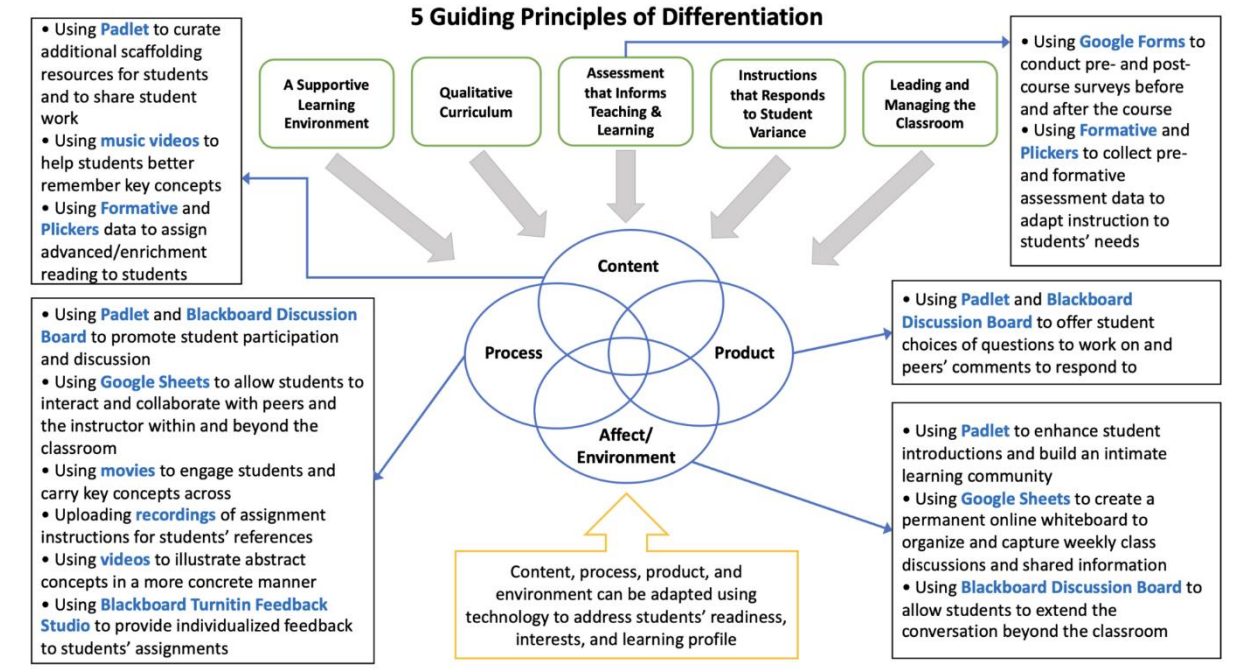
Despite these benefits, the uptake to DI has been slow in higher education. Barriers to adoption in higher education have been attributed to a lack of teacher training in DI (Melese, 2019; Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009; Turner et al., 2017), insufficient planning time (Joseph et al., 2013; Melese, 2019; Turner et al., 2017), large class sizes (Melese, 2019; Turner et al., 2017), lower familiarity with students due to fewer contact hours (Chamberlin & Powers, 2010), and faculty paying greater attention to professional obligations other than teaching (Turner et al., 2017).

## Differentiated Instruction X Educational Technology

Technology has been touted as holding promise in overcoming some DI implementation barriers. College faculty who have undergone a professional development program concerning DI concluded that "when technology is used as a tool for DI, a better learning environment is created for all students" (McCarty et al., 2016, p. 41). Technology offers different platforms for learners to discuss and share ideas (Joseph et al., 2013), supports multimodal access to content and learning (McCarty et al., 2016), and provides assessment options catering to students' needs (Boelens et al., 2018). These uses of technology reflect considerations for students' prior knowledge and experiences and, thus, an alignment with constructivist learning theory. Further, when computerized systems are used to collect formative assessment information to support DI, an improvement in students' academic outcomes has been associated with a small to medium effect size (Deunk et al., 2018).

Given these promising outcomes, I sought to explore the various ways by which technological tools can support DI in higher education. Figure 1 is a summary of how DI principles (in green boxes) are used to guide how technology is used to differentiate the four classroom elements of content, process, product, and environment (in blue circles). The black boxes linked to the classroom elements and principles offer ideas for how various technological mediums—such as Padlet, Google Suite, Learning Management System (Blackboard)—can be leveraged; these practices will be unpacked in the next section.

**Figure 1: Technology-Enhanced Differentiated Instruction**




## Brief Overview of the Teaching Context Methodology

Before unpacking Figure 1, I will offer brief contextual information driving these curricular and pedagogical innovations. The teaching took place at the National Institute of Education (NIE), an education college that is part of a Tier-One research university, Nanyang Technological University, in Singapore, which has one of the highest GDP per capita in Asia. NIE offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, attracting both part- and full-time students from various institutional contexts and countries. As a faculty member, I have seen increasing diversity amongst postgraduate students in my Masters' level course. This diversity—be it students' professional context (e.g., public vs. private schools, healthcare, military), age, student status (e.g. full- vs. part-time), and/or familiarity with Singapore's education system—poses increasing challenges in pitching lessons to appropriately address students' needs. For instance, a preschool educator may engage with certain educational ideas differently from a military educator given their professional contexts. Recent graduates are more comfortable with academic writing than those returning after a longer hiatus. Furthermore, amidst Nanyang Technological University's internationalization policy and Singapore's strategic development of higher education institutions, the number of international students has risen sharply. Some international students appear uncomfortable with classroom discussions in English and assessment expectations, exhibiting reticence and hesitance. Additionally, international students are unfamiliar with Singapore's educational system and its commonly utilized terminologies. I have observed that growing diversity beyond national lines creates

divisions, limits interactions and collaborations among students and professors, and reduces a sense of belonging and inclusion in class. International and/or full-time students tend to cluster together in class and during groupwork. Thus, by leveraging technological mediums to innovate curricular and teaching practices undergirded by DI principles in my classroom, I hoped to help my students overcome the affective, social, and learning challenges they face.

## Technology-Enhanced DI Practices

In the subsequent sections, I will share information about the various technology-enhanced DI practices captured in Figure 1, as well as students' qualitative responses to these practices. These responses were extracted from a larger mixed-method research study involving 32 students who voluntarily agreed to participate and were enrolled in one of two rounds of a 13-week graduate-level module for in-service teachers. Research assistants collected data on students' experiences with the technology-enhanced practices via observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Per institutional ethics policy, as an instructor, I was only privy to the data and participants' names after course and assessment completion. Given that this is a practice- (not research-) based article aimed at sharing curricular and pedagogical ideas, students' responses are included to illuminate some perspectives, and are not meant to represent rigorous research findings.

### Using Technology to Build Classroom Community

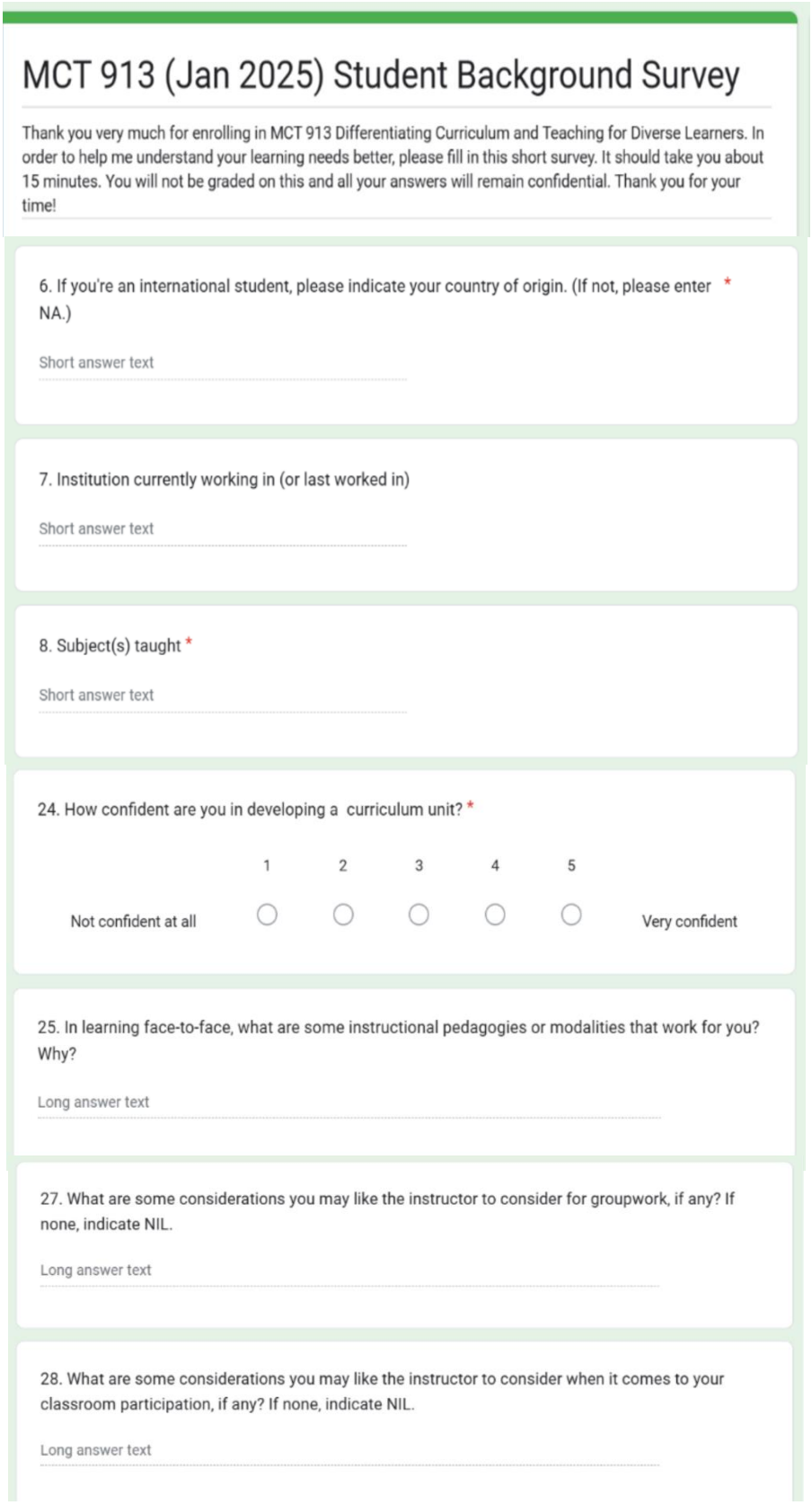
A positive and supportive classroom environment is essential for learning to take place; thus, students need to feel comfortable with each other (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021; Tomlinson, 2014). To help students get to know each other better, before the first class, they were invited to give a brief introduction of themselves on the class Padlet. Doing so helped break the ice amongst them, consequently lubricating interactions in class and facilitating organisation for group assignments. By asking students to share something not often known about themselves, they were given a chance to see a more personal side of their peers, allowing for connections beyond the professional. Students shared that the Padlet was a "nice way to know everyone and hear from them [as] it made getting to know them less intimidating, especially for individuals who are more introverted and/or less verbally expressive." Learning more about their peers helped them "understand the background of [their] classmates so that [they were] able to put [themselves] in their [classmates'] shoes during class discussion." Moreover, students felt that the Padlet made it easier for them to approach a "stranger" on assignment collaboration as they felt "surrounded by people [they] know."

**Figure 2: Student Introduction Padlet**


**Using Technology to Support Assessment**

Formative assessment is essential to differentiated instruction as the collection of information related to students' learning, interests, and preferences can feed forward into adaptive curricular and instructional design (Moon & Tomlinson, 2013). Assessment can take place at various times. Before the first lesson, I invited students to complete a "Student Background Survey" via GoogleForm to collect information pertaining to their prior knowledge, interests, learning mode preferences, as well as to open up a space for students to articulate any concerns they may have (see Figure 3). Collected data were used to organize subsequent instruction and sensitize the instructor to students' needs, like their preferred mode of learning or preference in classroom participation. Additionally, the information was used to organize students in either heterogeneous or homogeneous groups—for instance, students who lived in the same regions in Singapore were invited to sit together for the first two lessons so that carpooling could take place to ease their travels to school or back home.

**Figure 3: Excerpt of Student Background Survey**



MCT 913 (Jan 2025) Student Background Survey

Thank you very much for enrolling in MCT 913 Differentiating Curriculum and Teaching for Diverse Learners. In order to help me understand your learning needs better, please fill in this short survey. It should take you about 15 minutes. You will not be graded on this and all your answers will remain confidential. Thank you for your time!

6. If you're an international student, please indicate your country of origin. (If not, please enter NA.) *

Short answer text

7. Institution currently working in (or last worked in)

Short answer text

8. Subject(s) taught *

Short answer text

24. How confident are you in developing a curriculum unit? *

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not confident at all | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | Very confident |

25. In learning face-to-face, what are some instructional pedagogies or modalities that work for you? Why?

Long answer text

27. What are some considerations you may like the instructor to consider for groupwork, if any? If none, indicate NIL.

Long answer text

28. What are some considerations you may like the instructor to consider when it comes to your classroom participation, if any? If none, indicate NIL.

Long answer text

During the lessons, formative assessment was implemented using the online software Formative. Formative assessment data were collected to check on students' understanding of content taught, as well as assignment instructions. Pertaining to the latter, I administered a quiz via Formative to elicit students' understanding of the assignment demands for more complex performance tasks that involved extended instructions (Figure 4). Consequently, feedback was given to students to correct any erroneous understanding they had prior to their embarkation on the assignment (Figure 5). Students appreciated regular formative assessment via Formative as it "[enabled them] to assess [their] own understanding after the lesson and surface [their] own misconception." Further, they recognized that the data also "guides teachers in planning instruction and lessons."

**Figure 4: Using Formative to Assess Students' Understanding of Assignment**

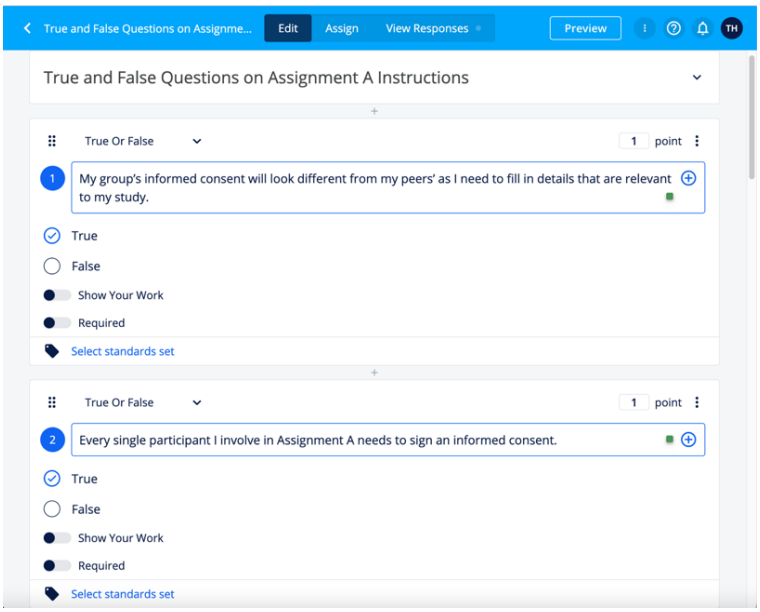
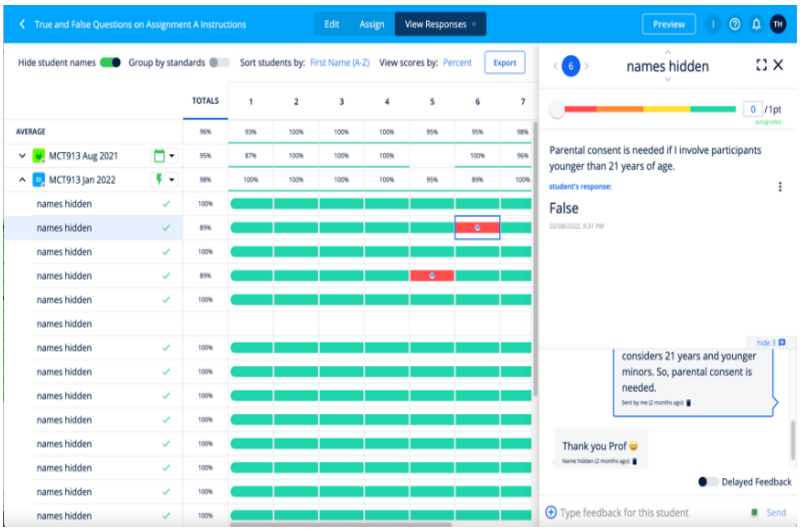
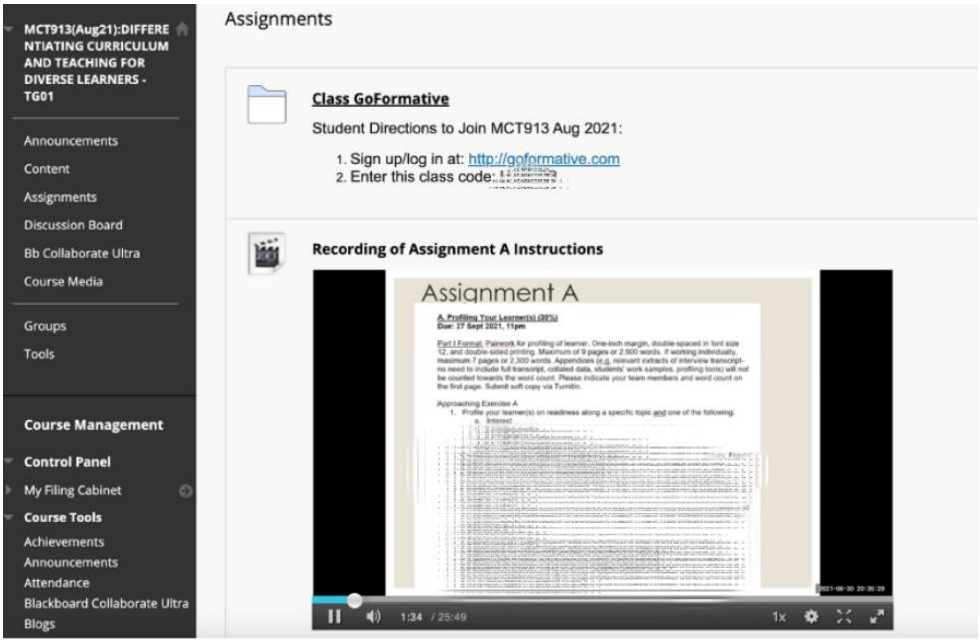


**Figure 5: Using Formative to Give Feedback to Students**




Complementing formative assessment check-in on students' understanding of assignment instruction was the recording and uploading of assignment instructions in the Learning Management System (Figure 6). Recordings for instructions for more complex tasks were made available to students so that they could refer to the instructions whenever necessary, reducing the frequency in which they had to clarify their questions with the instructor. Students commented that having the video recording "helped to set the expectations, clarify any doubts that [they] may have about the assignments."

**Figure 6: Uploading Recordings of Assignment Instructions Online**



**Differentiating Content Using Technology**

As students had different levels of familiarity with the Singapore education system, as well as varying competencies and comfort with academic writing, I created and shared two Padlets around these two topics at the beginning of the module to serve as resources to extend learning beyond the classroom.

Given the different nationalities and institutional backgrounds of students, the Singapore education system Padlet offered background information arising from differing institutional and sociocultural contexts. Students felt that the Padlet "gives a good overview of Singapore edu [sic] system from the outside especially for foreigner students" and observed that international peers appeared better able to keep up with classroom discussions as the Padlet helped to bridge the "gap between international students and local students."

The second Padlet curated textual, visual, and online writing resources. Students shared that writing could be a big challenge in the first semester and found the Padlet useful in helping them work through technicalities, such as "APA citations," and insights learned were "helpful for other modules."

**Figure 7: Padlet on Singapore Education System**

*Screenshot of the Singapore Education Resource Padlet showing information organised by categories such as Singapore Education System, and Curriculum and Teaching in Singapore.*

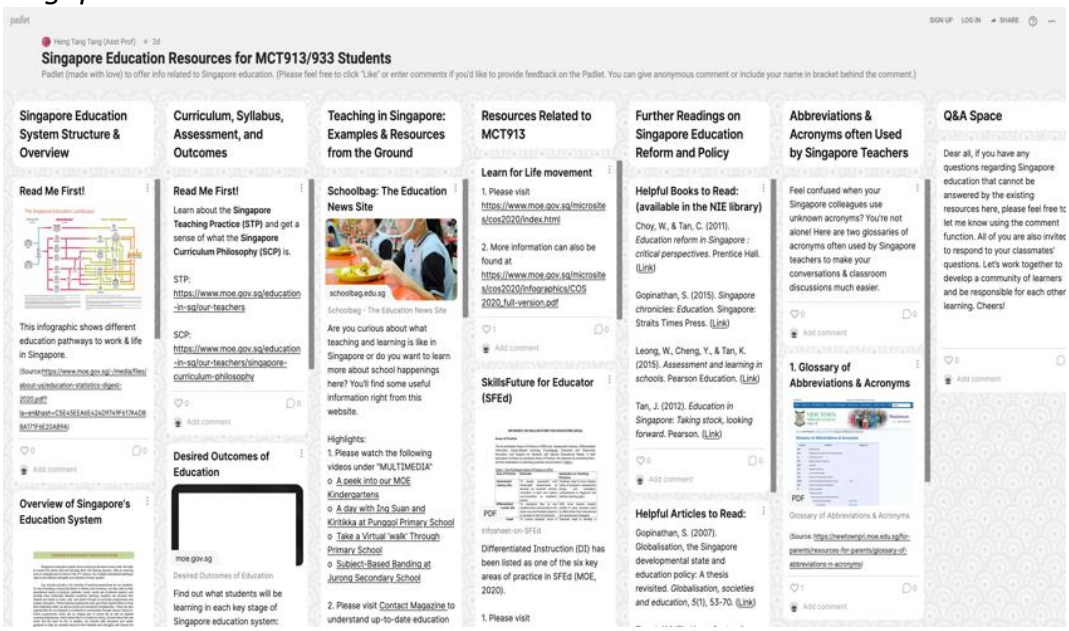
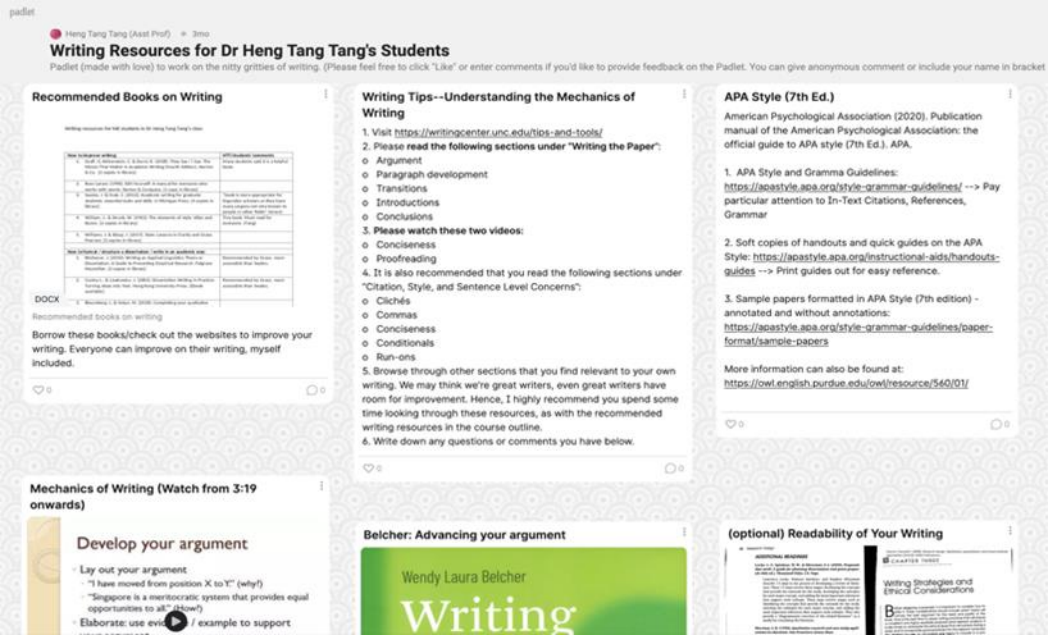


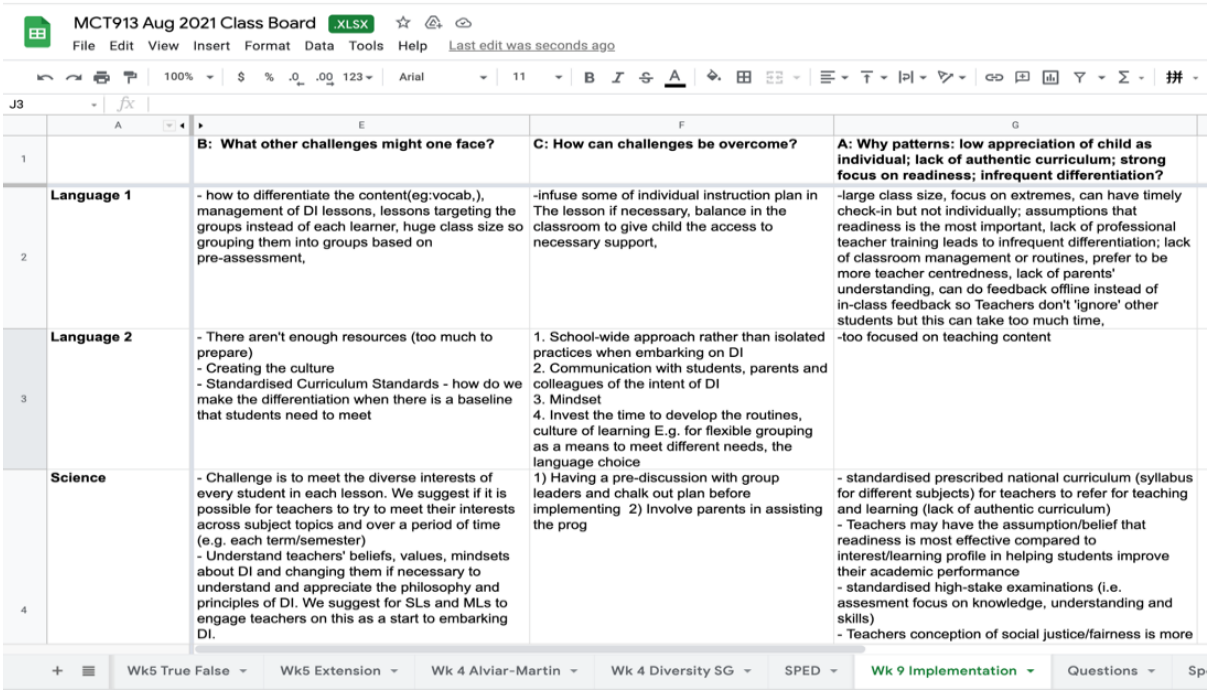
**Figure 8: Padlet on Academic Writing**




**Differentiating Process Using Technology**

The learning process was also enhanced with the help of technology tools. Using GoogleSheet, I created a class E-Board (Figure 9) to capture weekly discussions across groups so that students could be cognizant of their peers' discussions. Moreover, this E-Board served as a visual archive of weekly discussions that we returned to, and to which students could reference should they have trouble following classroom discussions. Students appreciated this evergreen E-Board as "it [allowed them] to capture [their] points of discussion, revisit the discussion points even after lessons have ended. Furthermore, [they got] to view others' points too enabling multiple perspectives." Thus, the E-Board served as a vehicle through which students felt more included in class.

**Figure 9: Group Discussions Captured in Class E-Board**

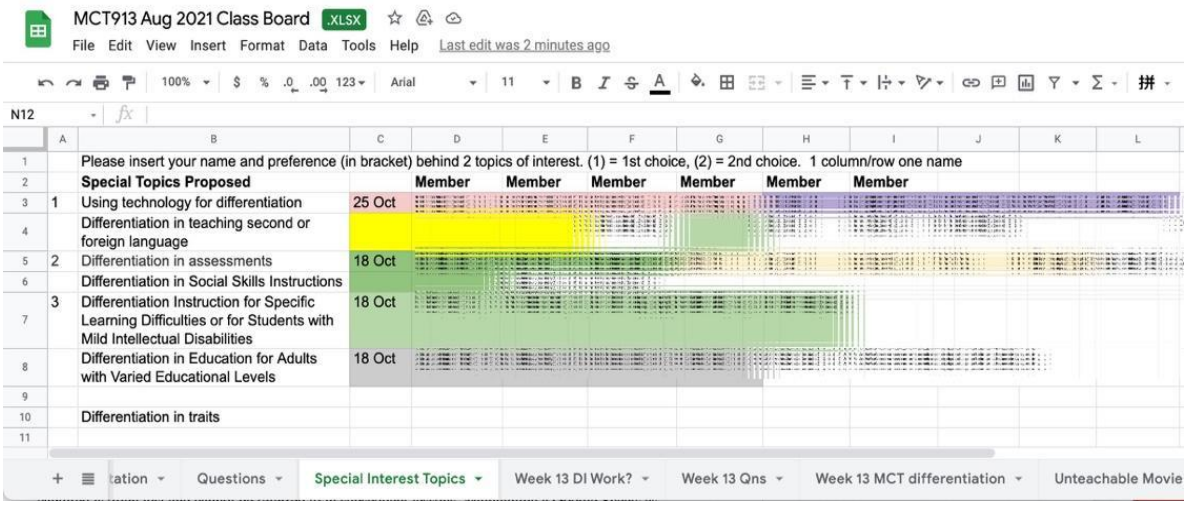



| | A | E | F | G |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | **B: What other challenges might one face?** | **C: How can challenges be overcome?** | **A: Why patterns: low appreciation of child as individual; lack of authentic curriculum; strong focus on readiness; infrequent differentiation?** |
| 2 | **Language 1** | - how to differentiate the content(eg:vocab,), management of DI lessons, lessons targeting the groups instead of each learner, huge class size so grouping them into groups based on pre-assessment, | -infuse some of individual instruction plan in The lesson if necessary, balance in the classroom to give child the access to necessary support, | -large class size, focus on extremes, can have timely check-in but not individually; assumptions that readiness is the most important, lack of professional teacher training leads to infrequent differentiation; lack of classroom management or routines, prefer to be more teacher centredness, lack of parents' understanding, can do feedback offline instead of in-class feedback so Teachers don't 'ignore' other students but this can take too much time, |
| 3 | **Language 2** | - There aren't enough resources (too much to prepare)<br>- Creating the culture<br>- Standardised Curriculum Standards - how do we make the differentiation when there is a baseline that students need to meet | 1. School-wide approach rather than isolated practices when embarking on DI<br>2. Communication with students, parents and colleagues of the intent of DI<br>3. Mindset<br>4. Invest the time to develop the routines, culture of learning E.g. for flexible grouping as a means to meet different needs, the language choice | -too focused on teaching content |
| 4 | **Science** | - Challenge is to meet the diverse interests of every student in each lesson. We suggest if it is possible for teachers to try to meet their interests across subject topics and over a period of time (e.g. each term/semester)<br>- Understand teachers' beliefs, values, mindsets about DI and changing them if necessary to understand and appreciate the philosophy and principles of DI. We suggest for SLs and MLs to engage teachers on this as a start to embarking DI. | 1) Having a pre-discussion with group leaders and chalk out plan before implementing 2) Involve parents in assisting the prog | - standardised prescribed national curriculum (syllabus for different subjects) for teachers to refer for teaching and learning (lack of authentic curriculum)<br>- Teachers may have the assumption/belief that readiness is most effective compared to interest/learning profile in helping students improve their academic performance<br>- standardised high-stake examinations (i.e. assesment focus on knowledge, understanding and skills)<br>- Teachers conception of social justice/fairness is more |

Wk5 True False | Wk5 Extension | Wk 4 Alviar-Martin | Wk 4 Diversity SG | SPED | Wk 9 Implementation | Questions

Additionally, this E-Board served as a platform to organize students into presentation groups. Often, the assumption in higher education is that adult learners are able to self-organize. However, I observed that students tended to organize themselves into project groups according to who they knew, as opposed to what they are interested in. Consequently, I tasked students to propose topics they would like to pursue for their projects on the E-Board so that they could self-organize into groups aligned to their interests (Figure 10). Doing so also meant that no student would feel left out as they self-elect into various proposed topics. Furthermore, students are invited into the curriculum planning so that their learning can be made relevant to their needs. Students felt that the E-Board "provided an open space for [students]… altering [their] topics from one to another" and was "especially effective to link people up from similar fields when [they didn't] know each other yet."

**Figure 10: Using the E-Board to Coordinate Group Projects**




## Conclusion

The above ideas illustrate how DI can be enhanced with the use of technology to overcome barriers to its adoption in higher education. More importantly, these ideas showcase how technology-enhanced DI practices can be used to heighten students' emotional and social inclusion in the higher education classroom, increase engagement in class, as well as attend to various learning needs (e.g., their varying interests or readiness in a topic) and preferences (e.g., groupwork preferences or learning extensions beyond the classroom). Students reported an appreciation for the learning and socialization scaffolding, thus pointing to the applicability and helpfulness of technology-enhanced DI in higher education. This exploration of how an inclusive pedagogical approach like DI can be augmented with technology corroborates and expands the conversation on the synergistic potential of both (McCarty et al., 2016; Boelens et al., 2018) and responds to Stentiford and Koutsouris's (2021) call for greater discourse on inclusive pedagogies in higher education.

While some of the tools or strategies shared in this article may not be accessible or applicable in different contexts, I hope that readers can gain appreciation for the principles and philosophies undergirding these practices. In particular, Tomlinson's (2014) principles (below) can guide higher education educators' curricular and pedagogical approaches to address learner diversity in their contexts, beyond the examples illustrated above. Where learner diversity is not a cause for concern, some of these principles can help us reflect on our own teaching as we work out what is suitable for our own contexts:

- Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment,
- Offering a quality curriculum that is authentic and relevant,
- Using assessment data to inform teaching and learning,
- Adapting instruction to students' variances,

- Using routines and offering clear instructions

Further, in contexts where technology is not easily available, embracing the philosophical intent can similarly arrive at the same goals. For instance, instead of using Padlet to build an online classroom community, teachers can facilitate in-class introductions to build community. Instead of creating online content extensions to support learners, teachers can provide hard copies of content on academic writing or sociocultural-contextual information related to lesson content (e.g., a list of acronyms) to address learners' needs. Instead of using software or online surveys to collect student (assessment) data, offering print outs or having students respond with hand gestures can circumvent technological constraints to collect data on learners' needs. These practices are driven by the philosophical beliefs that all learners should be valued and teachers are responsible for removing learning barriers.

Fundamentally, what I hope to achieve through this article is not to preach rigid applications of DI philosophies, principles, or practices (technologically-enhanced or not). Rather, by offering practical ideas of how DI practices can be synergized with technology, I underscore the necessity for educators to reflect on their personal teaching and learning philosophies and contemplate how their philosophies drive the principles and practices they use. Developing an appreciation for and belief in the philosophies undergirding DI is one—but not the only—inclusive pedagogical approach. I hope that the ideas in this article can catalyse conversations on the philosophical stance educators may need to nurture in their contexts, so that different learners can equitably access learning in higher education.

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## Acknowledgements

With deep appreciation for the support of Lynn Song, Nannan Lu, and Chen Deng for their support of the research project.

## Ethics Addendum

This research was approved by the Nanyang Technological University's Institutional Review Board, under IRB-2021-328.

## AI Statement

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

## Funding

This project was sponsored by the NIE Incentivising ICT Use Innovation grant (I3G 12/20HTT).

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 202-214
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.368

**CRITICAL REFLECTIONS**

# Silicon and Ivory: How Will AI Reshape Universities?

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## Abstract

This reflection examines artificial intelligence's impact on higher education, particularly the evolving relationship between faculty and students that has defined universities since mediaeval times. This paper analyses how AI tutoring systems or generative AI challenge traditional academic structures. Whilst optimists herald AI's potential for democratising knowledge, personalising learning, and enhancing research capabilities, significant concerns emerge regarding skills atrophy, widening global educational inequalities, and ethical dilemmas surrounding academic integrity. The reflection critiques AI's energy consumption, copyright infringement, and potential job displacement in academia. Despite predictions of universities' obsolescence, this paper argues that institutions must critically embrace AI whilst preserving the essential human bonds between educators and learners. The emergence of what might be termed the 'Universit-AI' requires careful navigation between technological advancement and maintaining universities' core mission of developing critical thinking and serving the common good. Universities must maintain their agency through adaptation rather than resistance to ensure their continued relevance.

**Keywords**: Artificial intelligence (AI); generative AI; higher education institutions; university transformation; skills atrophy; academic integrity.

## Introduction

In his book *The Light Ages* (2020), Falk explained that universitas refers to the unions between students and teachers more than to any building or formal course of study. The term was used to describe communities of teachers and students who shared a similar purpose: learning. It was around these associations that the first universities in Europe were established. Rashdall (1895) noted:

> The word 'university' means merely a number, a plurality, an aggregate of persons. Universitas vestra, in a letter addressed to a body of persons, means merely 'the whole of you'; in a more technical sense it denotes [...] practically the equivalent of collegium. [...] It is particularly important to notice that the term was generally in the Middle Ages used distinctly of the scholastic body whether of teachers or scholars, not of the place in which such a body was established, or even of its collective schools. The word used to denote the academic institutions in the abstract – the schools or the town which held them – was studium rather than universitas. (p. 7)

This reflection discusses the challenges that AI presents in higher education[11], focusing first on the changes in interactions between faculty and students (as the core of the university establishment) and then on how the organisation of work in higher education institutions would be modified. Two other critical considerations concern the general purpose of developing AI versus the overall drive of higher education, which is to educate society and future citizens and enhance the common good and development of nations. However, it is less clear, given how recent it is, whether AI has a higher purpose for society. Most companies that develop AI are private; this may limit its interests and communal goals. The other concern is that dependency on AI would impact the way ideas and critical thinking are learned by students. If critical thinking is not taught in school, how will it be learned by students?

Recent surveys (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2023) indicate that about half of higher education students use AI weekly or daily. They feel it is convenient and helps with tasks students do not want to do or do not understand. In some cases, brainstorming is the most important use. Other surveys show that 30% of faculty use AI (Tyton Partners, 2023), but 37% prohibit students from using it (Quacquerelli Symonds, 2023). Another questionnaire to about 600 institutions reported that only 39% have policies about the use of AI (Robert & McCormack, 2025).

AI refers to computing systems that can engage in human-like processes such as learning, adapting, synthesising, self-correction, and data use for complex processing tasks (Popenici & Kerr, 2017). This definition may be outdated, depending on whether generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is assumed to have arrived. GenAI is 'a form of AI that can autonomously generate new content, such as text, images, audio, and video' (Lv, 2023). Authors such as Kronblad et al. (2024) and Usher (2025) take a more sceptical approach to GenAI, especially when applied to fields such as business or journalism. Other authors, such as Bentley (2025), suggest that GenAI is a 'new revolutionary technology', while Miikklainen (2024) says GenAI is inaugurating a new era.

AI is an industry. The estimations as a market go from US $294 billion in 2025 (Fortune Business Insights, 2025) to US $758 billion (Grand View Research, 2024), the discrepancies depend on if the value of hardware, software and services is included or

[11] 'Higher education' and 'universities' do not mean the same thing. Universities are a type of higher education institution, while 'higher education' includes different types of institutions such as polytechnical, technical, vocational training, two-year and four-year and even research centres if they include undergraduate programmes. Higher education institutions can be public or private, for profit or not.

not. Moreover, there is a problem with access to this technology given socio-economic dissimilarities within and between countries. Gaps between higher education institutions in developed and developing countries might increase with the use of AI.

## The Future is Here

Since the twelfth century, much has happened with European-model universities, starting with the birth of the nation-state and then all the major social transformations that have occurred over the centuries – advances in agriculture, transportation, architecture, social organisation, science, art and technology. Universities today are places of knowledge construction, culture dissemination, teaching, research and socialisation. While they have changed over time, they continue to perform the same three main activities since their creation in the Middle Ages: teaching, producing knowledge and certifying the knowledge they impart. Over time, the development of autonomous or non-university accreditors has introduced new actors, but universities continue to accredit most of the student learning they oversee (Olds & Lubienski, 2010).

As a user of major large language models (LLMs), I have witnessed their fast progression, potential and limitations. The option 'deep search' and the reports it produces have replaced the work I delegate to a research assistant. As an exercise for this reflection, I asked some of the major LLMs – Claude, ChatGPT, DeepSeek, Notion, Perplexity and Gemini[12] – about their predictions for higher education in 25 years. I considered including some of their responses, but since LLMs develop so fast, I prefer only mentioning the key idea behind their broad responses: the future will be dominated by individualised teaching and personalised learning, with a strong emphasis on AI mentors.

The answers are not far from reality. Currently, AI tutoring models are becoming more prevalent at educational institutions. Examples are Khan Academy with *Khanmigo* (https://www.khanmigo.ai), the Chinese platform *Squirrel AI* (http://squirrelai.com/#/), *MATHia* by Carnegie Learning (https://www.carnegielearning.com/solutions/math/mathia/), and *Duolingo Max* for learning languages. In higher education, some examples are *ALEKS* (Assessment and Learning in Knowledge Spaces, https://www.aleks.com/?_s=8750619280018660), developed by the University of California, Irvine, and acquired by McGraw Hill; *Knewton* (https://www.wiley.com/en-us/education/alta) and *Jill Watson* (a teaching assistant created at the Georgia Institute of Technology). Other developments worth mentioning are the University of Michigan's *ECoach* (personalised feedback for STEM students, https://ecoach.ai.umich.edu/AboutUs/), Georgia State's *Pounce* (a chatbot for academic support and retention) and the University of Memphis' *AutoTutor* (https://www.memphis.edu/iis/projects/autotutor.php).

AI tutors are always available. This is another shift with respect to faculty. While open and online courses already offer this possibility, the feature of constant,

[12] The versions were ChatGPTo1, Claude 3.5 Sonnet, DeepSeek (DeepThink R1), Notion AI, Perplexity Standard and Gemini 2.0 Flash. The date I worked with the models was February 2, 2025.

personalised attention and adapting to students' individual paces creates a new scenario. The COVID-19 pandemic boosted asynchronous learning, which involves self-paced classes with access to immediate attention.

In a generation accustomed to fast-paced stimuli and engaging visuals and sounds, keeping people's attention is a great challenge in education. Although there is no definitive consensus on whether digital technology is 'good or bad' for attention, there is concern about how it will impact education at all levels, including higher education (Beland & Murphy, 2016; Cardoso-Leite et al., 2021; Deng et al., in press; Glass & Kang, 2019; Vedechkina & Borgonovi, 2021).

## Resistance to Change

At every technological turning point, especially the advent of television, the internet and massive open online courses (MOOCs), universities' future survival has been questioned. These innovations relate not only to learning and teaching processes but also to other changes, such as universities being surpassed by industries in knowledge creation and the development of patents or innovations.

Peter Drucker famously said: 'Thirty years from now, the big university campuses will be relics. Universities won't survive' (Forbes, 1997). Following his thinking, universities would die in 2027. Similarly, Clayton M. Christensen (2013) predicted, 'In fifteen years from now, half of US universities may be in bankruptcy' (quoted in Watters, 2016). This would be in 2028. Sebastian Thrun (2012), a pioneer of MOOCs with his company Udacity[13], expressed, 'In fifty years, there will be only ten institutions in the world delivering higher education. Udacity has a shot at being one of them' (quoted in Watters, 2016).

Beyond predicting their end, it is important to discuss whether the community between students and professors would survive the changes produced by AI or whether a new kind of institution would be developed given the rapid AI advancement. It goes beyond students using LLMs for assignments or faculty using them to complete tasks like translating, editing, clarifying or suggesting ideas. Teaching the best way to use prompts to receive better answers from AI will be insufficient. Higher education institutions must critically embrace technology and offer abilities and skills for a world with AI.

Modern universities demonstrate their value to society by educating the citizens and workers that society needs. In many ways, their usefulness depends on the value of their graduates. AI needs to prove its usefulness the same way. However, the signals shown by AI are mixed: AI is constraining the labour market and replacing jobs without offering a way to compensate (Roose, 2025). It is promising a better future in terms of scientific development or machines helping us with time-wasting activities such as driving (with self-driven cars).

[13] An American for-profit educational organisation.

## Optimistic View of AI

In the current debate on AI, there are two principal tendencies: the optimistic and the pessimistic. I will address both. Some possible positive aspects of incorporating AI into higher education include knowledge democratisation, decentralised education, lifelong learning, flexible curriculum, more sophisticated virtual collaboration, increasing internationalisation, research facilitation, more multimodal and multidimensional learning methods, micro-credentials, more sustainable education, improved soft and hard skills and the democratisation of mental health services (Marshall et al., 2024; The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2024). Another optimistic advantage I see is that academics will have more time to work on important activities, such as dedicating more time to work with students, because AI will manage less relevant and more tedious tasks. However, the paradox of the relationships between faculty and students is that the latter prefer working with AI personal assistants/tutors because they are flexible with time and can be personalised. Finally, AI can facilitate the acquisition of micro-credentials and teach the skills required to obtain them. This includes the likely creation of innovative programmes in disciplines that are currently difficult to imagine and the blending of traditional disciplines with AI training.

Another possibility is that AI makes higher education services cheaper. The price of higher education might decline if online and open alternatives colonise tertiary-level courses and services, but it is less clear whether increased AI use will help make universities more sustainable (Madabathula et al., 2025). According to some authors, AI incorporation will widen the gap between rich and poor countries (Capraro et al., 2024).

It has been said that AI will help solve not only scientific problems but also the most important problems affecting humans, such as climate change (Chen et al., 2023), poor healthcare (Bajwa & Munir, 2021; Burdick et al., 2020), low agriculture yields (Logeshwaran et al., 2024), poverty (Jean et al., 2016) and earthquake detection (Saad, 2023).

The more power AI companies have, the more governments or international organisations will attempt to regulate AI (Shein, 2024). This could counterbalance its power effectively. This has been the case in Europe (European Parliament, 2024), Africa (African Union, 2024), Asia (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2024) and Latin America (Cumbre Ministerial, 2023). There are interesting governmental initiatives: Canada (Parliament of Canada, 2023), China (Sheehan, 2023; Zhang, 2024), Korea (National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, 2024), the UK (Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, 2023), and the US, where the Trump administration has revoked President Biden's executive order regarding AI (Software Improvement Group, 2025). These regulations can affect the speed of AI development and implementation in higher education (and in general), but they seem necessary, considering the possible risks (Slattery et al., 2024) of its use in developing weapons and wars, as indicated, among others, by Geoffrey Hinton, the so-called 'Godfather of AI' (Metz, 2023; The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, 2024b).

## Concerns That Should Receive Attention

The main alarm is whether AI use might produce skills atrophy like thinking or creativity or relevant skills such as arguing, researching and writing (e.g. Kosmyna et al., 2025). Given inequalities in capacities, infrastructure and resources in countries and universities, some will not experience major changes soon. One notable change with AI's arrival is the probable substitution of people in the workforce. This could happen to staff or faculty in higher education. As AI continues to improve (Brennan et al., 2024), it is difficult to predict whether one of these tools could substitute for a higher education professor. There are already examples of programmes that have substituted teachers with AI, such as *Sabrewing*, which was piloted at David Game College (2025) in the UK and is an adaptative learning model 'with all core subjects being taught entirely by an AI-driven adaptive learning platform' to prepare students for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).

There are initiatives to automatize every job (https://www.mechanize.work). Companies such as Artisan (https://www.artisan.co) offer to hire AI instead of humans to avoid the typical complications of working with people. Most of these initiatives are not preparing nations to deal with the new reality of losing jobs or offering alternatives for people to earn a living. This is not something that will happen soon, but AI is already impacting entrance-level jobs for young professionals in the labour market in the USA (Roose, 2025).

An important dilemma concerns the ethics of using AI. More students are using LLMs and other tools for school assignments. This represents a challenge in teaching the adequate use of AI in academic activities for students and teachers (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2024). Higher education institutions will lose the AI detection race even after spending huge amounts of money on trying. I conducted an experiment with two tools (Compilatio and Ithenticate) to detect plagiarism in a paper written 100% with "deep search" by Open AI. Both tools (the versions that include the revisions for AI material) detected only 1%–2% AI use.

There are already legal battles with some AI companies like OpenAI because they infringe the copyrights of authors, publishers and newspapers (Associated Press, 2024) to feed data into their systems. Moreover, AI has been criticised for its bias and reproduction of prejudices against women or minorities (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018), as well as 'unfair discrimination and misrepresentation and exposure to toxic content' (Slattery et al., 2024). This can be extremely problematic for universities, both legally and ethically. As impressive as the "search the web" or "research" functions are in most LLMs, they maintain a major limitation: they cannot access to articles that are property of major editorial corporations; this limits deeply its scope.

Furthermore, AI hallucinations (inventing information and sources) can be problematic, not only in LLMs but also in other areas such as healthcare (Bhadra et al., 2021) or driver assistance systems (Nassi et al., 2020). Universities must be aware of AI's limitations and teach students to distinguish between facts and hallucinations. They must also develop protocols and rules for AI use. Some have already started (i.e., University of Toronto, 2025; Yale University, 2025).

The amount of energy required to use AI is an additional downside. A report by the International Energy Agency suggests that 'electricity usage by data centres will increase significantly in the near future thanks to the demands of AI and crypto currency'. The energy spent in 2022 in those areas was equivalent to the energy demanded by countries such as Sweden and Germany combined (Vincent, 2024). Microsoft already plans to reopen a nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania to power its technology, which includes its AI programs (Mandler, 2024). There are also calls for governments to regulate the energy use by these technologies, such as the statement signed by 100 organisations to demand that AI systems 'be made compatible with our planetary boundaries' (Green Screen Coalition, 2025).

## Final Remarks: The Universit-AI?

Scholars reflecting on higher education have coined different terms to define the higher education institutions that are emerging with social and institutional changes. Ben-David (1992) described the German research university as a 'revolution' in knowledge production. Kerr (1995) described it as 'multiversity', an institution that responds to many demands, unlike the mediaeval European university. Clark (1998) named it 'entrepreneurial university' to describe how institutions restructured their internal governance, diversified funding and nurtured innovative academic units to thrive in a market-like environment. If AI modifies the relationship between faculty and students, it will represent a change like the ones described by these authors.

Finding new names for these 'interactive learning spaces' will be among the least of universities' problems. What is critical is whether this transition will change the core of these institutions or whether they are prepared for the future independently of the names are used to define universities.

AI is transforming many aspects of society, including higher education. Ideally, universities will critically embrace this technology; discussed and not only adopted automatically. Nevertheless, there are concerns about the homogenisation of education or the fixation with a singular paradigm of learning or teaching. Perhaps the key is to understand that instead of fighting what AI represents, it is best that humans work with AI (Shao et al., 2025) to face these challenges.

The world is witnessing a period of significant change. However, while technology is progressing in one direction, political and ideological movements may alter its course. The LLMs I consulted predicted that in 25 years, there would be greater global integration in higher education thanks to AI through the creation of truly global classrooms without boundaries. This seems realistic, but many factors could hinder the better integration of countries and cultures. Supremacist ideologies are on the rise in different parts of the world, and these ideologies could be a constraint on AI advancement and its impact on higher education.

It is hard to refuse that this technology will profoundly change higher education; institutions must be prepared to face this new reality. More importantly, faculty and students, who are the reason these institutions exist, need to understand the AI

potential, risks and contributions. Universities must maintain the human bond between faculty and students, despite the changes AI brings. It is important to observe whether universities will preserve their agency by adapting and using AI or whether this agency will be diminished.

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## Acknowledgements

The author has made no acknowledgements regarding this publication.

## AI Statement

This article´s content did not include textual material from any Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool like a Large Language Model (LLM), but it used the 'deep research' model ChatGPTo3 by Open AI as a research assistant, mostly to find peer review sources and process the information from such sources. Other LLMs were used to test some ideas on the future of higher education as it is indicated in the reflection. The abstract was written partially by Claude (Opus 4).

## Funding

The author has not shared any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2025), pp. 215-225
Journal of Global Higher Education
https://www.jghe.org
DOI: 10.25774/jghe.v1i1.367

**PRACTICE ARTICLE**

# Navigating Complex Challenges in GHE: Reflections on the GlobalEd Early Career Research Fellowship

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## Abstract

This article reflects on the GlobalEd Early Career Research Fellowship's capacity to create supportive environments where Fellows address pressing issues at the intersection of theory and practice. By emphasizing the importance of breaking down disciplinary silos, the program encourages the cross-pollination of ideas from fields such as artificial intelligence, global health, and critical theory, thereby generating new knowledge and frameworks for understanding contemporary educational challenges. The Fellowship's praxis-oriented focus enables participants to infuse their course designs with the latest

theoretical insights and practical applications, equipping them with the tools to enact institutional change. Gaps in the existing literature on faculty development in GHE are acknowledged, particularly concerning decolonial and transformative frameworks. Such reflections underscore the need for a more equitable approach to professional development that considers systemic inequities in higher education. As the ECRF responds to these needs, it promotes essential values of epistemic plurality and inclusivity. Ultimately, this piece advocates for collaborative efforts in GHE that embrace innovative pedagogies, thus empowering stakeholders to address the multifaceted challenges facing the field and to foster educational practices that are both equitable and transformative.

**Keywords:** Critical being, global health, artificial intelligence, AI, GlobalEd

## Introduction

The GlobalEd Early Career Research Fellowship (ECRF) program emerged as a critical intervention in contemporary higher education, challenging institutional fragmentation. The Fellowship is a flagship program of GlobalEd, an organization devoted to democratizing Global Higher Education (GHE). Founded in 2022, GlobalEd is a digital, alternative academy, anchored by eight to ten Visiting Faculty – senior scholars and practitioners– and the Early Career Research Fellows. GlobalEd offers online courses, an upcoming Certificate Program, and a collaboration platform for building joint projects, from research to teaching to institutional partnerships. This Fellowship recognizes that meaningful engagement with GHE requires a fundamental reimagining of how knowledge is produced, transmitted, and applied, and connects scholarly inquiry with pedagogical practice.

We understand GHE as a dynamic and contested field of knowledge production and dissemination, shaped unevenly by political, social, and institutional discourses (Marginson, 2022). Moving beyond nation-to-nation knowledge exchange, GHE contains a multiplicity of digital and physical networks that shape flows of knowledge and power (Altbach et al., 2019), inflected and constrained by current colonial relations of power (Shahjahan et al., 2022). The program's commitment to breaking down artificial boundaries between theory and practice reflects deeper understandings that challenges facing higher education today - from access and equity to the definition of legitimate knowledge - cannot be addressed through conventional academic approaches alone.

ECRFs are selected for promising research contributions to GHE, broadly understood. We, the authors, are three Research Fellows and two senior academic mentors. We spent a year in a virtual residency designing separate online courses and with a modest stipend. At the end of the fellowship, the course is made available to everyone via https://myglobaled.org/. The Fellowship's design recognizes that early career scholars occupy a strategic position within the academic ecosystem, bringing fresh perspectives to debates, while grappling with the institutional pressures that shape scholarly careers. Through monthly mentorship sessions and collaborative course

development, Fellows engage in a novel form of intellectual apprenticeship. The program's virtual residency structure creates sustained dialogue about fundamental questions: What constitutes the "field" of GHE? How do we navigate the tension between scholarly rigor and activist engagement? These conversations acknowledge knowledge production as political while maintaining commitment to intellectual integrity.

The Fellowship program responds to an "era of conformity" within higher education - a moment when institutional pressures toward standardization and market-driven metrics constrain the very intellectual diversity that universities claim to champion. By creating opportunities for Fellows to develop activist-oriented scholarship, the program acknowledges that meaningful research in GHE cannot remain politically neutral. Instead, it must tackle questions of power, access, and justice embedded within educational institutions. Our reflections are a result of our lived experience in GlobalEd. This piece consists of an outline of the context, and our personal reflections which support the discussion and conclusion. We finish with reflective suggestions for educators.

## Global Trends and Challenges in Higher Education

GlobalEd's ECRF program models new ways of working and advancing thought in GHE through interdisciplinary dialogue across institutional boundaries. Recently, the more commonly referenced field of international higher education has been rethought by Heleta and Chasi (2023) as GHE, from a functional analysis of the internationalization of academic institutions, to promoting epistemic plurality and "equitable and transformative" practices as the purpose of higher education for advancing social change (Levy, 2023).

If we understand the purpose and vision of GHE as creating epistemologically inclusive spaces for teaching and research, how do we support emerging scholars and practitioners in this work? How can new approaches to professional development such as the ECRF program help the field to innovate?

Literature on faculty and professional development in GHE is minimal, even in traditional settings. Extensive work cites the general benefits of mentoring, peer support, and communities of practice for faculty development (Irby, et al, 2020; Chen et al, 2022; Coria-Navia & Moncrieff, 2021). Research on supporting faculty in international education focuses on several factors: strategies for university internationalization (Childress, 2018), the logistics of operating international education programs (Gillespie et al, 2020), intercultural skills for faculty (Sherman et al., 2024), critique of the hegemonic "westernized" academy (Fleras, 2021) and a philosophical debate regarding the narrow emphasis on the teaching & learning practices involved in faculty work (Evans, 2023).

Few models extend decolonial and transformative frameworks to professional development to address current challenges in GHE. Sanderson (2008) focused on internationalizing the concept of the "authentic self" (Cranton, 2001), as critical for the transformational potential of the "cosmopolitan" educator and their students. Like Mezirow's (2018) transformative learning model, this requires intensive reflective

practice, yet Mezirow's model applied to academic career development does not address broader structural inequities of higher education.

Possibilities for GHE require adaptations of inquiry and pedagogies as reflections on the multiple ways our identities are expressed as members of a broader, global academic community. Through reflecting on and sharing their work in its diverse manifestations in research, teaching and pedagogical innovation, as GlobalEd Fellows we enriched our thinking and approaches to our respective projects.

## Reflections

The following sections outline how each of us approached our GlobalEd course development and subject matter. GL provides an outline of extending critical thinking in higher education to "Critical Being," which Kombe expands upon in her section that critically contextualizes Global Health. Finally, Josiah continues the reflections with his own engagement with AI in education, before we identify parallels and distinctions between approaches. We end by synthesizing what this means for GHE and providing some qualified recommendations.

### Critical Pedagogy

GL: My offering speaks to the intertwined nature of embodied knowledge and critical being. This section is an autoethnographic reflection on the creative process of creating my course within the GlobalEd fellowship, and the individual and structural aspects that highlight how the course and this reflective piece engage with GHE.

The course that I developed, *Learning Through Critical Being* emphasizes three facets of being critical: critical thinking (knowledge), critical reflection (self), and critical action (the world) (Barnett, 2015; Wilson & Howitt, 2018). In selecting this topic, I addressed scholar-practitioners and the broader public of potential learners. I refer to 'student-teacher' or 'teacher-student', Freirean constructions that highlight the role all individuals play in educational contexts, to highlight the dynamic and mutually constitutive nature of knowledge production in classroom settings (Freire, 1996). My course and experience of developing it testify to how being a critical individual requires thought *and* action, from the body into the world.

Critical being as holistic engagement with the world means challenging traditional knowledge dissemination models. The development of this course was an exercise in an alternative knowledge platform, as the intent was to globally disseminate this content.

The course design was shaped by the supportive environment fostered by GlobalEd, particularly during our meetings. The mentorship offered by the senior academics attending the sessions, and the unique expertise offered by my co-Fellows sharpened my understanding of critical being as a holistic endeavor.

The process also had individual and structural challenges. First, the role of bodily experience in knowledge production shapes individual challenges. We are not disembodied vessels of knowledge, for each of us carries our body with us as we move through (international) space. Some, due to historical, colonial power dynamics, are

rendered invisible (Hernandez, 2023). Also, material, bodily practices, and knowledge dissemination are profoundly interconnected. For example, this text was transcribed from a recording made on a rainy walk to the pharmacy to collect medication to treat depression. I then read and reflected upon it before sitting down to write and further explore my ideas. Thus, my contribution is produced through my physical and mental engagement with the world. This visceral engagement with knowledge emphasizes thinking as occuring within lived human lives, not as an abstract endeavor. Too often, the body is relegated to second place behind the mind in academic practice. However, scholars emphasize that embodiment actively influences education, particularly international higher education (O'Loughlin, 2006; Waters et al., 2024). The development of my course on *Critical Being* reflects how our existence fights against the erasure of mind-only knowledge production.

Structural challenges are also situated in embodied social relations. As many scholars, scholar-practitioners, and teacher-students attest, time, resources, and attention affect course completion. This collaborative effort occurred amidst career changes, illness, and life changes, characterized by structural academic precarity (Hernandez & da Silva Canavarro, 2025). As an individual, I faced the privileges and disadvantages of being an international academic, such as the lack of security in academic work (Schaer, 2020), which informed how I shaped and promoted the course. Undergirding this endeavor was my desire to provide the kind of education I view as necessary for student-teachers across the globe. I often say that my North Star is to be the kind of person I needed to see when I was younger. This ethos guides my educational work, including this course, and can and should inform how others engage with it.

**Regional Specificities and Contextual Practices in Global Health**

**Kombe**: Creating courses that address artificial intelligence (AI), critical thinking, and global health demands an intricate balance of technological innovation, pedagogical strategies, and a strong commitment to equitable and just practices. Course creators must navigate complex intersections of global trends, local contexts, and ever-present challenges of health disparities and systemic inequities.

Global health initiatives have prioritized technology in interventions, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) in recent years. However, like previous technological solutions, AI alone cannot address the underlying determinants of global health inequities (Shipton & Vitale, 2024). Course creators can design curricula that balance the promise of AI with critical insights into its limitations. This requires thoughtful integration of equitable principles, ensuring that students understand how AI applications can either perpetuate or dismantle health inequities. depending on how they are implemented. For example, Europe's policy frameworks often emphasize ethical AI deployment (Castelnovo et al., 2022), and course creators can draw from these frameworks to educate students on biases inherent in AI systems and the importance of equitable design and implementation. This enhances critical thinking and prepares students to approach global health challenges with nuanced understandings of technology's potential.

Critical thinking in health involves actively analyzing and evaluating information related to health issues, considering various perspectives, social determinants, power dynamics, and potential biases to form informed conclusions and develop effective

solutions (Papathanasiou et al., 2014). This practice considers the complex political, economic, and cultural contexts that influence health disparities worldwide. Incorporating this into course development requires creators to embed diverse perspectives and encourage students to question assumptions, assess biases, and consider systemic health factors.

In North America, educational institutions often emphasize critical thinking in learning, centering equity and social justice by including diverse voices and case studies, by for instance, focusing on marginalized communities' experiences (Devine & Ash, 2022). Reflecting on these practices allowed us as course creators to design modules that inspire learners to engage deeply with the underlying causes of health challenges through case studies.

Our collaboration  in developing interconnected global health courses has fostered rich professional development through shared reflection, interdisciplinary exchange, and mutual learning. Each Fellow brings a unique regional lens and thematic focus, yet our work intersects around core principles of equity, justice, and pedagogical innovation. For example, the Fellows' courses underscore the necessity of aligning technological advancement with ethical frameworks and DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion). This prompted me to critically reflect on how technologies are deployed across different regions, reinforcing or disrupting systemic health inequities. The collaborative environment enabled Fellows to draw from shared case studies to inform one another's course design. These regional examples deepened each Fellow's understanding of contextual specificity and encourage the cross-pollination of pedagogical strategies that enhance critical thinking, such as integrating real-world case studies and encouraging students to examine systemic determinants of health.

Through iterative feedback, interdisciplinary dialogue, and shared commitment to transformative education, our collective work reflects a dynamic development process that strengthens individual courses and enriches global higher education. Our collaboration reflects trends in global higher education essential in preparing future health professionals for the complex health challenges of our time.

**AI in Education**

**Josiah:** For the ECRF, I developed a course on *AI in Education*. This reflection explores how digital education tools, such as COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) and AI-enhanced learning environments, contribute to inclusivity and innovation, while also addressing challenges like digital access disparities.

COIL fosters global collaboration, enabling students to engage across borders and cultures through online platforms. By leveraging digital tools, COIL creates opportunities for students in diverse regions to work together, breaking down physical and cultural barriers, and helps develop intercultural competencies and shared global perspectives (Rubin and Guth, 2015). This aligns with the ECRF's commitment to inclusivity, as digital education enables marginalized groups to access opportunities, particularly for students facing barriers due to geographic isolation, disability, or socioeconomic disadvantage.

In designing the *AI in Education* course, I integrated AI tools as a pedagogical inquiry into the role of automation in learning. AI-driven platforms such as neuro-linguistic programming-based feedback systems, engagement trackers, and generative

tutoring agents were piloted in formative tasks, allowing students to receive adaptive support. These tools exemplify what Fadel et al. (2019) term "AI-enabled formative assessment," empowering learners to reflect and iterate without requiring constant human intervention. The course development was deeply collaborative, shaped by ongoing ECRF dialogue. Peer feedback from Fellows working in digital equity, internationalisation, and policy reform informed key decisions, such as ensuring transparency in algorithmic feedback and providing multilingual chatbot support (Koh et al., 2024).

The iterative course design was a shared, interdisciplinary effort. Monthly ECRF meetings created a sustained, reflective space for challenging assumptions and integrating diverse perspectives. These sessions became incubators for collaborative thinking—where ideas were co-constructed, reshaped, and often reimagined entirely. The reflexive insights I gained from these discussions - on surveillance, student agency, and the ethics of educational AI - were crucial in refining the course and responding to the lived realities of global learners.

Despite the promise of digital education, structural inequities persist. Many learners still lack access to reliable internet or appropriate devices, reinforcing disparities in participation and achievement (Selwyn, 2016). AI's development pace requires ongoing professional development and collaboration across domains. The ECRF's interdisciplinary framework provided a collaborative infrastructure and theoretical grounding for praxis—highlighting how early-career scholars can collectively prototype, critique, and refine innovations in real time.

Digital education, particularly through COIL and AI-mediated learning, holds immense potential for promoting inclusion and innovation in higher education. The ECRF's emphasis on interdisciplinary, co-creative practice offers a compelling model for overcoming barriers and designing ethical and effective educational futures. By integrating digital tools and fostering genuine cross-cultural collaboration, we can help ensure that transformative educational experiences are accessible to all.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Global educators must incorporate urgently criticality and praxis in curricula. The courses designed by the three GlobalEd ECRF represent innovative approaches to incorporate this imperative. The design process allowed each fellow to effectively communicate pressing issues within sub-fields, while relying on collective knowledge to generate examples of courses for future generations of interdisciplinary scholars.

As problems such as a lack of critical thought and access to material and digital resources persist globally, our reflections help create awareness around how to approach these issues. This reflection provides some directions on how global educators can pursue equitable approaches to course development.

Tensions between quality education and financial sustainability require careful thinking. To create and sustain equitable access to digital education, challenges are immense, as the *AI in Education* course highlights. In our practice, we found it challenging

to balance providing quality courses with the capitalist need to generate revenue. While the GlobalEd courses is not financially motivated, the infrastructure for our courses requires financial investment.

We recognize the inherent potential conflicts of interest our social positions may represent. We gave serious thought to making the courses "attractive" to potential audiences, while emphasising providing knowledge in a broader sense. Accessibility was a consistent theme of our monthly meetings; we thought critically about who could be excluded from conversations generated by participation in a GlobalEd course. Our positionalities as scholars working at Global North institutions, privileged and marginalized at various intersections of gender, race, and nationality, meant that we had to be aware of those power dynamics while constructing our courses. We hope to have incorporated an emancipatory spirit, and recognize there is always room for growth.

We must pay attention to the value these kinds of courses provide and how that value can be transferred to marginalized communities. One effort we made was to provide financial hardship scholarships, but we invite conversations about other ways HE scholars/practitioners can make GHE more equitable.

As the *Critical Being* course suggests, the embodiment of knowledge production is essential. Things as simple as a reminder to breathe deeply (try it right now, if you like) work wonders. Physical and mental well-being are not optional but vital elements of pedagogical processes, requiring contextual and holistic approach as emphasised in the course on *Global Health* suggests.

Our discussion meetings exposed how this work entails both producing educational content and the maintenance of our relationships. Checking in and building community from our own positionalities played an important role in developing these courses. We exhort anyone interested in knowledge production to provide space for such meetings, given the importance of exchanging knowledge as socially located.

This piece is a call to action to follow the thinking suggested in our courses. We encourage all stakeholders (educators, policymakers, institutions, and students) to engage with the principles that undergirded our intellectual engagement with the subject matter. For all reading this, remember that critical thinking, mental and physical health, and technology are fields that require careful engagement.

Global pressures like climate change and political division show us the demand for innovative and inclusive education to address root problems and create solutions. GHE initiatives like our GlobalEd courses provide an opportunity to engage deeply and collectively with these pressures. The potential for GHE is great; we must simply act such that equity and inclusivity become the norm.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors have made no acknowledgements regarding this publication.

## AI Statement

This article was not written with the assistance of any Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, including ChatGPT or other support technologies. All text and figures are generated exclusively by the authors.

## Funding

The authors have not shared any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.