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Internationalization at Home in Higher Education: Global Trends and Brazilian Perspectives from a Systematic Bibliometric and Integrative Review

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Abstract

International academic mobility has traditionally been the most visible expression of higher education internationalization. Internationalization at Home (IaH) offers another route by incorporating international and intercultural dimensions into curricula, teaching, and campus life, including for students who do not participate in mobility programs. This study examines 54 studies published from 2020 to 2025 through descriptive bibliometrics, exploratory statistical analysis, systematic review procedures, and integrative thematic synthesis. Publication counts peaked in 2022, but neither quasi-Poisson regression nor the Mann-Kendall test detected a temporal trend. The literature was dispersed across 34 journals and 26 countries, and virtual exchange occupied the most central position in the keyword network. DOI-based bibliographic coupling identified a shared-reference structure for 21 studies. The thematic synthesis was concentrated in virtual exchange and COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), followed by intercultural learning, curriculum internationalization, and institutional implementation. Most studies were qualitative and descriptive. IaH is best understood as a curriculum- and learning-oriented approach whose results depend on pedagogical planning, staff preparation, technological access, and institutional coordination.

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Keywords: higher education; curriculum internationalization; intercultural competencies; global competence; inclusive internationalization.

1. Introduction

Internationalization has become a regular component of university planning. Its expansion has followed the growth of academic mobility, research networks, and international cooperation in teaching and outreach (Knight, 2004; De Wit et al., 2015). How it is understood and implemented, however, differs among education systems, institutions, and disciplines. Students also have unequal access to the opportunities it creates (Whitsed et al., 2021; Alexiadou et al., 2021).

Academic mobility reaches a relatively small proportion of university students and may reinforce existing inequalities (De Wit & Hunter, 2015; Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011). Participation is shaped by costs, language proficiency, institutional resources, and the availability of international activities. These restrictions are especially important for students who cannot travel and for institutions with fewer resources (You, 2022; Sierra-Huedo et al., 2022; Şahin et al., 2025).

Internationalization at Home (IaH) was proposed to bring international and intercultural learning into the formal and informal curriculum of the home institution (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Beelen & Leask, 2011). It includes curriculum design, teaching practices, campus activities, and online collaboration, without requiring students to participate in physical mobility (Sierra-Huedo et al., 2022; Gosling & Yang, 2022; Woicolesco et al., 2022). Its application also varies by academic discipline and by the cultural composition of local classrooms (Eftekhari et al., 2025; Binkley et al., 2025).

Intercultural and global competence are among the main learning outcomes associated with internationalization. Intercultural competence concerns the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to interact across cultural contexts. Global competence includes the ability to examine issues from different perspectives and to act responsibly in an interconnected world (Deardorff, 2006; OECD, 2018). Studies of virtual exchange and online IaH show that contact between students is not sufficient by itself. Learning also depends on task design, the duration and quality of interaction, and teacher mediation (Zheng et al., 2022; Kor et al., 2022; Hackett et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2024).

Research in this area covers internationalization of the curriculum, virtual exchange, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), intercultural learning, and institutional implementation. Virtual exchange is a broad category of guided online interaction between students in different cultural or geographic settings. COIL is more specifically organized around collaborative assignments embedded in regular courses (O'Dowd, 2021; Rauer et al., 2021; Hackett et al., 2024; Cardoso et al., 2024). Terminology and course design are not uniform, and the level of institutional support differs markedly among initiatives (Whitsed et al., 2021; Ganassin et al., 2021).

For Brazilian institutions, IaH offers a way to provide international learning when mobility is financially or institutionally restricted. Brazilian experiences with virtual exchange report opportunities for intercultural learning and participation, but also describe language barriers, unequal technological conditions, limited institutional support, and imbalances between partner universities (Zilberberg Oviedo &

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Krimphove, 2022; Finardi & Aşık, 2024). Online delivery can reduce some barriers, but it does not guarantee equal participation.

IaH research now encompasses a wide range of practices and institutional settings. This breadth has also produced differences in terminology, study design, implementation, and assessment. Coordination within universities, equitable access, and the measurement of intercultural learning continue to be recurring problems (Alexiadou et al., 2021; You, 2022; Ganassin et al., 2021; Hackett et al., 2024; Şahin et al., 2025). Few studies compare institutions or follow participants over time, which limits conclusions about whether reported outcomes persist or apply to other contexts.

A review of this literature must address both publication patterns and the content of the studies. Descriptive bibliometrics can show when, where, and by whom the research was published. Systematic selection procedures define the corpus, and integrative synthesis allows the findings to be organized and interpreted. These components were therefore applied to the same set of articles.

The review examines Internationalization at Home research in higher education using descriptive bibliometrics, systematic selection procedures, and integrative thematic synthesis. It focuses on publication patterns, thematic axes, methodological approaches, and gaps in the available research.

The review also examines the implications of IaH for university management, particularly where opportunities for international mobility are limited. The analysis considers how curriculum planning, online collaboration, intercultural learning, inclusion, and institutional support are connected in the selected studies.

The following questions guided the analysis:

Q1: How did the annual volume of IaH publications change from 2020 to 2025?

Q2: Which thematic areas and digitally mediated strategies predominate in the selected literature?

Q3: Which gaps are reported regarding institutional governance, implementation, and educational impact assessment?

Q4: Which study types and methodological approaches characterize the corpus?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This exploratory, descriptive review applied three procedures to the same corpus. Descriptive bibliometric and statistical analyses examined publication year, journal, authorship, geographic affiliation, keywords, and shared references.

Systematic review procedures guided record identification, screening, and eligibility assessment. Integrative thematic synthesis was used to classify and interpret the principal topics addressed by the included studies. The quantitative procedures describe the structure of the corpus, whereas thematic coding supports interpretation of its content.

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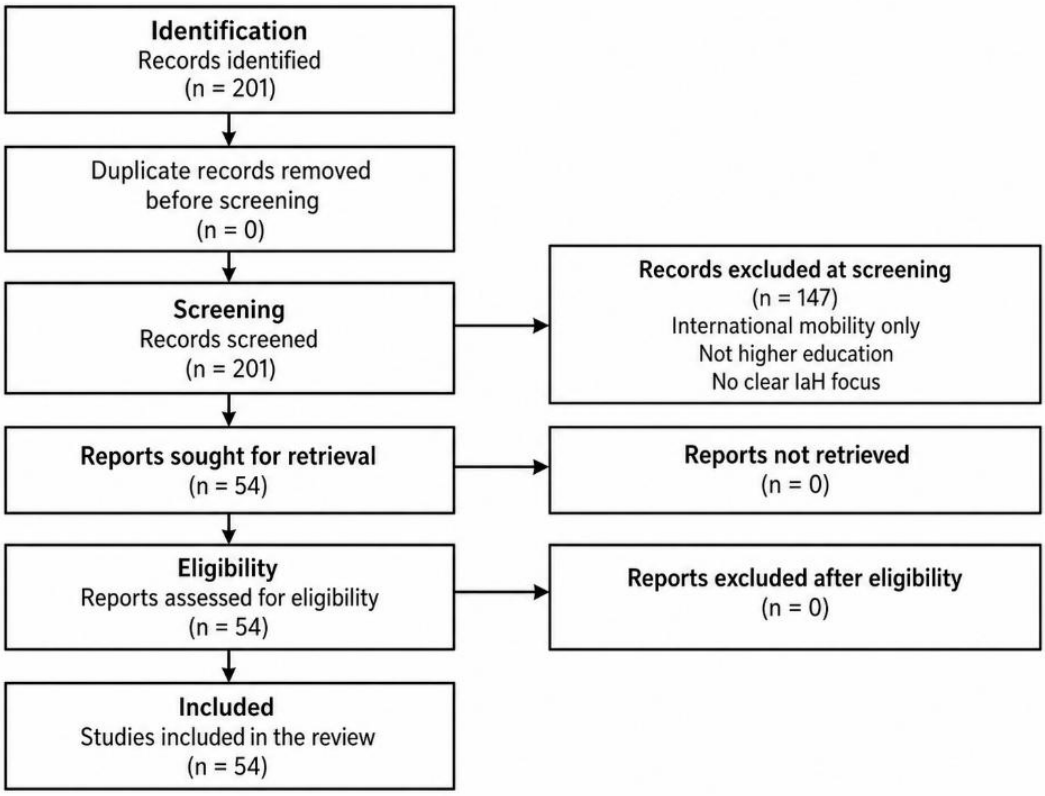
2.2 Review Protocol and Reporting Guidelines

The identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages were reported with reference to PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021) and are summarized in Figure 1. PRISMA was used as a reporting framework; it does not constitute an assessment of the methodological quality of the included studies.

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the study selection process.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

2.3 Research Question and Analytical Scope

The study was guided by the following research question: How has recent literature conceptualized, operationalized, and analyzed Internationalization at Home in higher education? Based on this question, complementary questions were defined to identify publication trends, thematic axes, methodological approaches, and research gaps, particularly regarding implementation, governance, and impact assessment. The analytical scope was organized into two dimensions: a bibliometric dimension, aimed at mapping the structure of scientific production, and a thematic dimension, based on the SILR, aimed at identifying and interpreting the main axes of literature.

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2.4 Information Sources and Search Strategy

The bibliographic search was conducted in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, which are widely recognized for their scope and quality in indexing international scientific journals. Descriptors and keywords were defined based on the specialized literature and recurrent terms in the field, with priority given to English-language terms.

The main terms used included: “internationalization at home,” “internationalization at home,” “virtual exchange,” “collaborative online international learning,” “COIL,” “internationalization of the curriculum,” “intercultural competence,” “global competence,” and “higher education.” These terms were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR to increase both the sensitivity and specificity of the search.

The search string adopted was:
("internationalization at home" OR "internationalization at home") AND ("higher education" OR university OR universities OR "tertiary education") AND ("virtual exchange" OR "collaborative online international learning" OR COIL OR "internationalization of the curriculum" OR "intercultural competence" OR "global competence").

2.5 Selection Criteria and Study Scope

The time frame covered publications from 2020 to 2025, a period marked by the intensification of digital internationalization strategies. The review included peer-reviewed articles written in English that explicitly addressed IaH or related strategies, such as virtual exchange, COIL, and curriculum internationalization, in the context of higher education. Studies with no thematic alignment, those focused exclusively on academic mobility, and documents such as book chapters, editorials, conference proceedings, and gray literature were excluded.

2.6 Identification, Screening, and Eligibility Process

The combined dataset contained 201 records. Titles and DOI values were normalized to identify duplicates, but no exact duplicates were found. All records were therefore screened by title, abstract, and keywords according to the eligibility criteria.

Screening was conducted by two reviewers. No disagreements occurred, and a consensus procedure or third reviewer was not required. After screening and eligibility assessment, 147 records were excluded and 54 articles were included in the review. The selection process is presented in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

2.7 Data Organization and Extraction

Data were organized in a structured spreadsheet containing publication year, authors, title, journal, DOI, abstract, pages, issue, volume, author keywords, affiliation, country, cited-by field, language, references, and final eligibility decision. Country strings were separated into individual countries, and spelling errors were normalized



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before aggregation; eight records had no evaluable country metadata. The language field was populated for 25 records and blank for 29, so English-language eligibility was checked against the article metadata and text. Keyword variants were harmonized for spelling, capitalization, and equivalent abbreviations. DOIs were extracted from cited-reference strings for bibliographic coupling. Each article was assigned to one predominant thematic axis according to its principal objective. Supplementary Table 1 lists all 54 included studies.

2.8 Bibliometric Analysis Procedures

The bibliometric analysis covered publication trends, authorship, journals, countries, keywords, and shared references. Annual counts were fitted with a log-linear quasi-Poisson model because the Pearson dispersion estimate exceeded 1. The incidence-rate ratio (IRR), 95% confidence interval, and p value were reported. The Mann–Kendall test and Theil–Sen slope provided complementary estimates of the temporal pattern. Authorship was described by the mean, median, interquartile range, and collaboration index. Journal dispersion was measured with the Herfindahl–Hirschman index (HHI), Shannon entropy, and normalized Shannon entropy. Country collaboration was calculated for records with usable country metadata. The keyword network retained terms found in at least two articles and links found in at least two articles. DOI-based bibliographic coupling connected articles that are shared at least one cited DOI. Citation counts were unavailable and were not used to identify gaps. Gaps were determined from the topics, methods, findings, and limitations reported in the studies. Citation counts primarily reflect scholarly visibility and vary with publication year and database coverage. Analyses were performed in Python 3.12.13 with pandas 2.2.3, NumPy 2.3.5, SciPy 1.17.0, and Matplotlib 3.10.8.

2.9 Integrative Review Procedures; SILR

The integrative synthesis was conducted from titles, abstracts, keywords, and full texts when clarification was required. Coding proceeded in three stages: (i) open identification of recurring topics; (ii) grouping of codes by conceptual similarity; and (iii) interpretation in relation to the theoretical framework on higher-education internationalization. Categories were data-informed rather than fixed in advance. Each article was assigned to the axis that best represented its principal objective; studies addressing multiple topics were classified by predominant focus. No formal risk-of-bias or methodological-quality instrument was applied because the corpus combined heterogeneous qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, theoretical, and practice-report designs. This decision limits claims evidence strength and is treated explicitly as a limitation.

This process made it possible to organize the literature into five main thematic axes: (i) virtual exchange and COIL; (ii) development of intercultural competencies; (iii) curriculum internationalization; (iv) institutional implementation; and (v) general studies on IaH.

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2.10 Integration of the Analyses

Finally, the results of the bibliometric analysis and the integrative review were articulated in a complementary manner, allowing quantitative and qualitative evidence on scientific production to be integrated. This strategy made it possible to understand both the structure of the research field and the main analytical patterns, methodological trends, and gaps that shape the contemporary debate on Internationalization at Home in higher education.

3. Results

3.1 Characterization of the Scientific Corpus

The final corpus contains 54 articles published between 2020 and 2025 in 34 journals. The metadata included 156 authorship occurrences and 150 unique authors. Country information was available for 46 articles and covered 26 countries; eight records lacked usable country data. Publication counts were highest in 2022, but no temporal trend was detected. Citation counts were unavailable. The thematic and methodological gaps were identified from the content of the studies.

Table 1. General indicators of scientific production on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).

Indicator	Value
Number of articles	54
Time frame	2020–2025
Distinct journals	34
Identified authors	150
Average number of authors per article	2.89
Single-authored articles	16
Coauthored articles	38
Collaboration index — coauthored articles only	3.68
Identified countries/territories	26
Average number of keywords per article	3.35
Reported languages	English (54; eligibility criterion)

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the metadata of the studies included in the review.

The mean number of authors was 2.89 per article, with a median of 3, an interquartile range of 1–4, and a range of 1–10. Sixteen studies were single-authored and 38 were coauthored (70.4%). Among multi-authored articles, the collaboration index was 3.68 authors per study. The mean number of author keywords was 3.35 per article.

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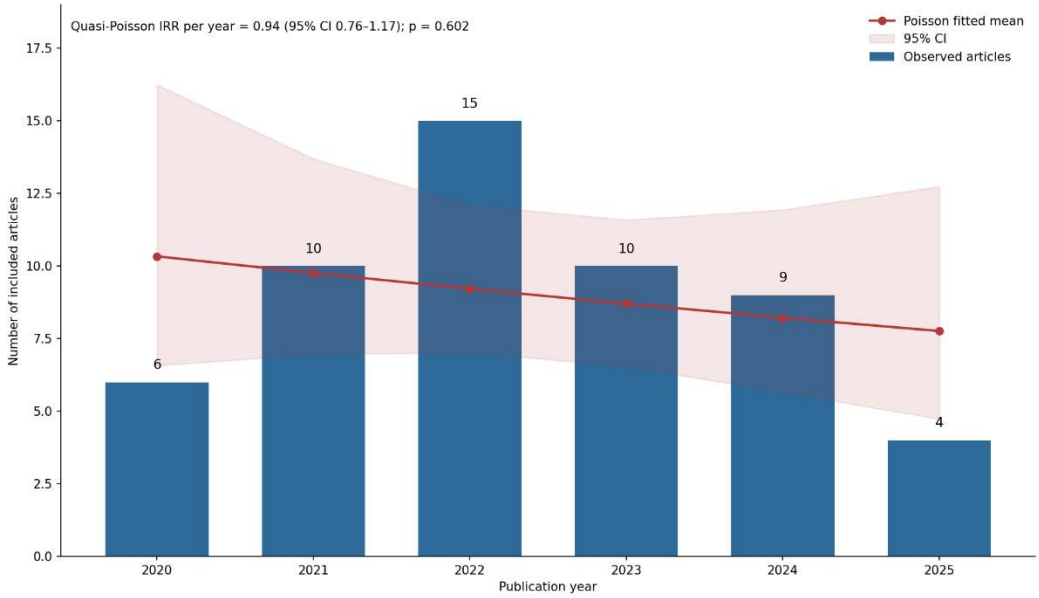
3.2 Temporal Evolution of Scientific Production

Annual counts were 6, 10, 15, 10, 9, and 4 from 2020 through 2025, respectively. The quasi-Poisson model estimated an IRR of 0.94 per year (95% CI 0.76–1.17; p = 0.602), providing no evidence of a linear temporal trend. The Mann–Kendall result was consistent with this interpretation (τ = −0.276; p = 0.444), and the Theil–Sen slope was −0.4 articles per year (95% CI −5.0 to 4.5). The 2022 peak is therefore reported as a descriptive feature of the corpus rather than evidence of sustained growth (Figure 2).
Figure 2. Annual publication counts and exploratory quasi-Poisson trend for the 54 included studies (2020–2025).



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

The cumulative curve reflects the addition of the 54 selected studies over the review period. Because cumulative counts necessarily increase as records are added, this figure is descriptive and should not be interpreted as evidence of acceleration in publication output (Figure 3).

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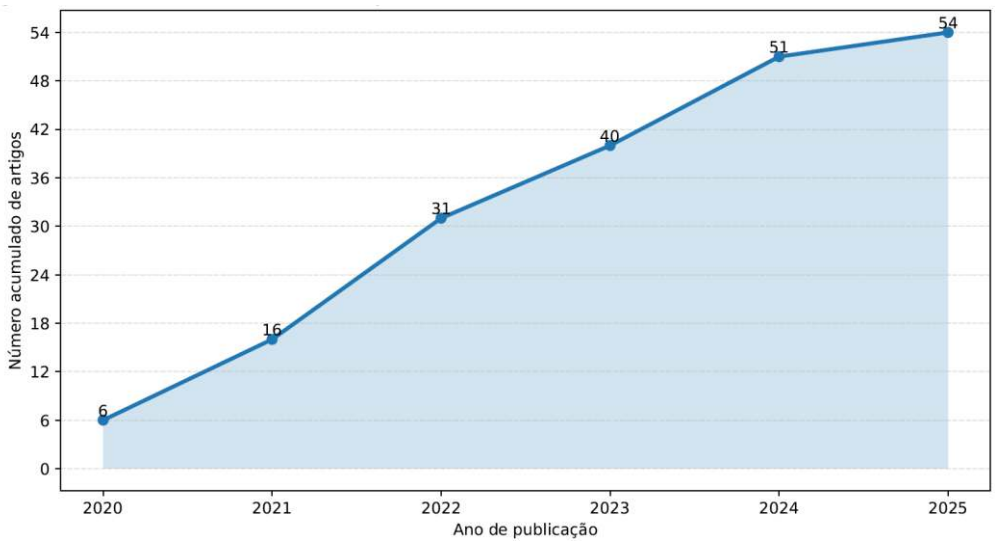
Figure 3. Cumulative number of publications included in the review on Internationalization at Home in higher education, 2020–2025.

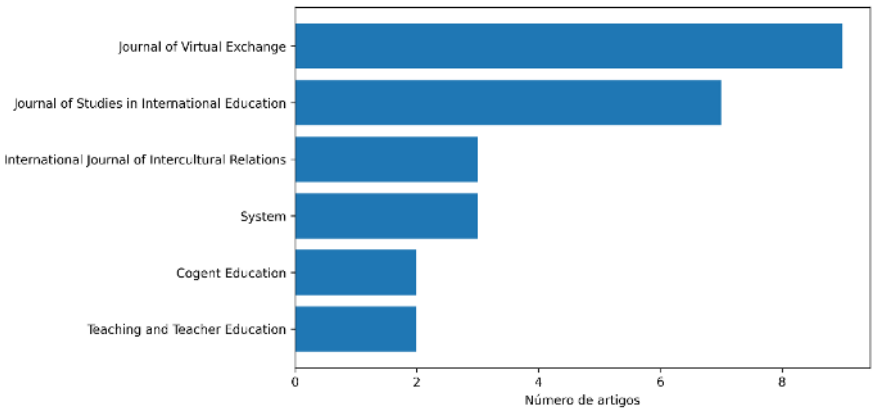


Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

3.3 Journal Dispersion of Scientific Production

The 54 articles were distributed across 34 journals. The Journal of Virtual Exchange published 9 articles and the Journal of Studies in International Education published 7; together they accounted for 29.6% of the corpus. Twenty-eight journals (82.4%) contributed only one article. The HHI was 0.063, Shannon entropy was 3.197, and normalized Shannon entropy was 0.907, indicating broad journal dispersion rather than strong editorial concentration. The five most frequent journals accounted for 44.4% of the articles (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Journals with the highest publication frequency on Internationalization at Home in higher education from 2020 to 2025.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

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This pattern indicates that research on IaH is mainly connected to journals focused on international education, interculturality, and pedagogical innovation, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of the field (Table 2).

Table 2. Most recurrent journals in the corpus of scientific production on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).

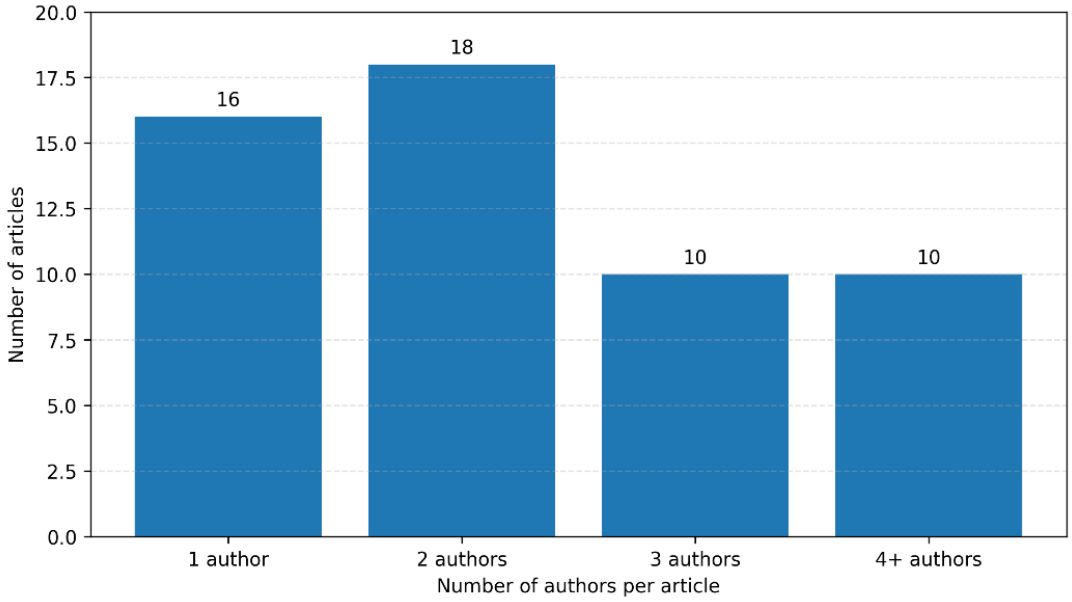
Rank	Journal	Number of articles
1	*Journal of Virtual Exchange*	9
2	*Journal of Studies in International Education*	7
3	*International Journal of Intercultural Relations*	3
4	*System*	3
5	*Cogent Education*	2
6	*Teaching and Teacher Education*	2
7	*Journal of Education*	1
8	*Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*	1
9	*The International Journal of Management Education*	1
10	*Turkish Journal of Biochemistry*	1

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the systematic review.

3.4 Authorship Structure and Scientific Collaboration

Thirty-eight of the 54 articles were coauthored and 16 were single-authored. Coauthored articles therefore represented 70.4% of the corpus (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Distribution of the number of authors per article in scientific production on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

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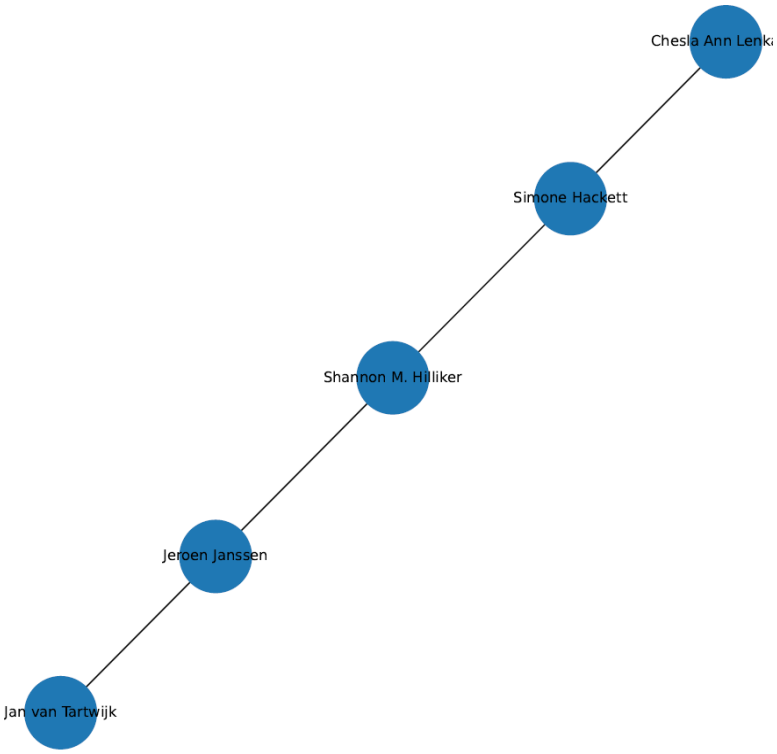
The coauthorship network consisted mainly of small, separate groups. Chesla Ann Lenkaitis appeared in three articles. Simone Hackett, Jan van Tartwijk, Jeroen Janssen, and Shannon M. Hilliker each appeared in two articles (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Coauthorship network among authors with two or more occurrences in scientific production on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

Author totals were calculated from the names recorded in the exported metadata. Indexing and name-format variations may therefore cause small differences in the count (Table 3).

Table 3. Authors with the highest number of occurrences in scientific production on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).

Rank	Author	Number of occurrences
1	Chesla Ann Lenkaitis	3
2	Simone Hackett	2
3	Jan van Tartwijk	2
4	Jeroen Janssen	2
5	Shannon M. Hilliker	2
6	Lin Zheng	1
7	Yifei Yang	1

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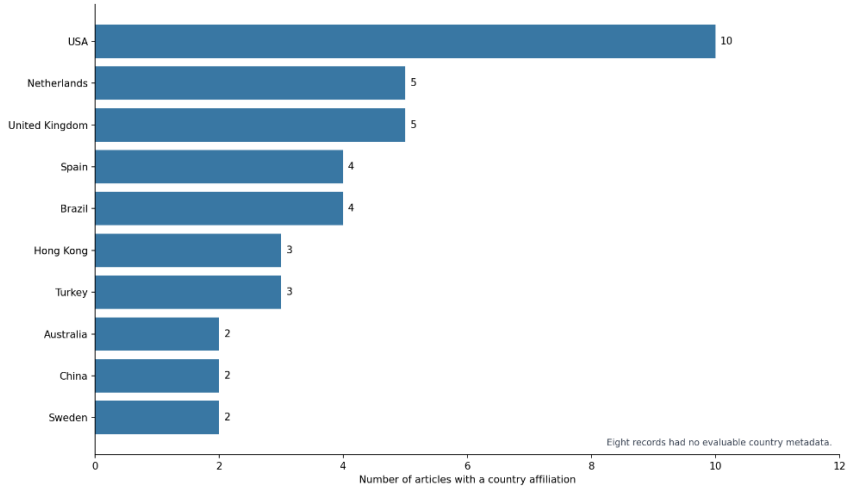
Rank	Author	Number of occurrences
8	Charlotte Westerhaus-Renfrow	1
9	Zhiwei Lin	1
10	María Luisa Sierra-Huedo	1
11	Cayetano Fernández Romero	1
12	Lindsey Bruton	1

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the metadata of the studies included in the review.
Note: Author counts were based on the authorship string available in the database and may therefore reflect indexing variations.

3.5 Geographic Distribution of Scientific Production

Occurrences from 26 countries or territories were identified in the corpus, with the highest concentration in the United States (10), the United Kingdom (5), the Netherlands (5), Spain (4), and Brazil (4). Hong Kong and Turkey also appear with three occurrences each, followed by China, Australia, Singapore, Sweden, and Japan, with two occurrences each (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Ten most frequent country affiliations in the 54 included studies.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

Country metadata were evaluable for 46 articles. Twelve of these articles involved more than one country (26.1%). The dataset covered 26 countries, led by the United States (10 articles), the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (5 each), Spain and Brazil (4 each), and Hong Kong and Turkey (3 each). Eight articles had no evaluable country entry. The distribution remains concentrated in the Global North, although the corpus includes work from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania (Figure 7).

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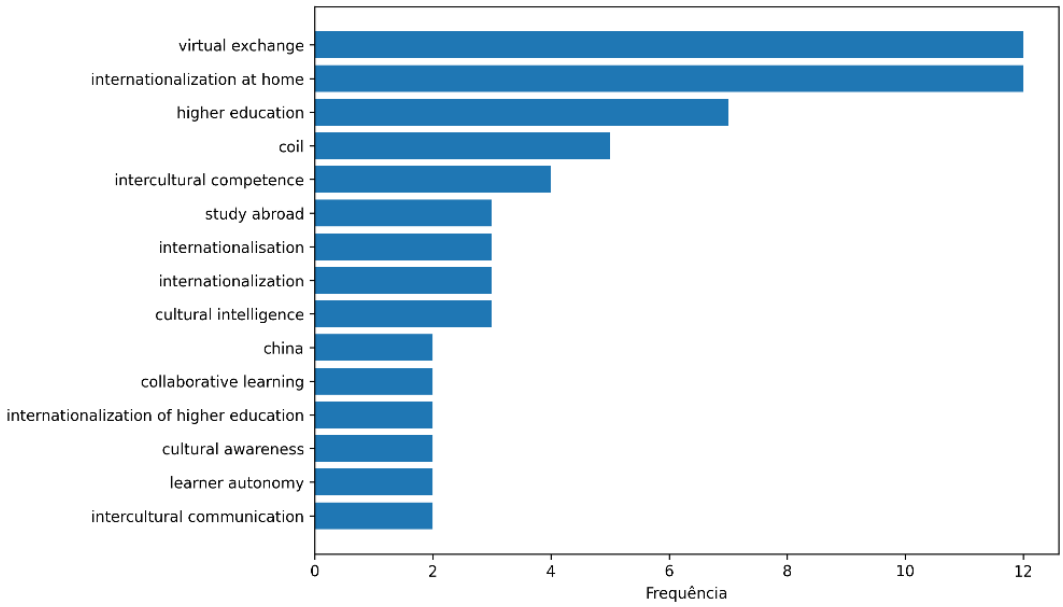
3.6 Thematic Structure of the Corpus: Keywords

After normalization, the co-occurrence network contained 9 terms and 8 links, with a density of 0.222 and two connected components. Internationalization at Home occurred in 14 documents and virtual exchange in 12. Virtual exchange had the highest total link strength (12) and the highest betweenness (0.429), followed by IaH in total link strength (7) and betweenness (0.179). COIL formed a smaller component with cultural intelligence under the adopted threshold. The map represents document-level keyword co-occurrence and not citation-based intellectual structure (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Most frequent keywords in scientific production on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

Table 4 shows the vocabulary most frequently used in the corpus. Virtual exchange and internationalization at home each occurred 12 times. Higher education, COIL, and intercultural competence were also recurrent, linking the literature primarily to curriculum, digitally mediated collaboration, and intercultural learning.

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Table 4. Main keywords and their respective frequencies in scientific production on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).

Rank	Keyword	Frequency
1	virtual exchange	12
2	Internationalization at home	12
3	higher education	7
4	COIL	5
5	intercultural competence	4
6	study abroad	3
7	internationalization (normalized variants)	6
8	cultural intelligence	3
9	China	2
10	collaborative learning	2
11	internationalization of higher education	2
12	cultural awareness	2
13	learner autonomy	2
14	intercultural communication	2

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the metadata of the studies included in the review.

The keyword pattern links curriculum internationalization, digital mediation, intercultural competence, and international learning that does not require physical mobility.

3.7 Lexical Analysis of Titles

The most frequent title terms were virtual, exchange, internationalization, home, learning, students, higher education, and curriculum. Virtual exchange, intercultural learning, and curriculum internationalization were therefore the main subjects represented in the titles (Table 5).

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Table 5. Most frequent terms in article titles in scientific production on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).

Rank	Title term	Frequency
1	virtual	28
2	exchange	23
3	internationalization	23
4	virtual exchange	23
5	home	22
6	internationalization home	15
7	learning	15
8	students	12
9	education	11
10	international	11
11	intercultural	10
12	higher	8
13	higher education	7
14	curriculum	6
15	development	6

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the lexical analysis of the titles of the studies included in the review.

The recurrence of these terms also suggests a shift in the field toward concrete pedagogical practices, particularly those enabled by digital technologies and aimed at expanding access to internationalization.

3.8 Bibliometric Interpretation

Journal output was dispersed (HHI = 0.063; normalized Shannon entropy = 0.907), and 70.4% of the articles were coauthored. Virtual exchange connected the main groups in the keyword network. Extractable reference DOIs were available for 33 articles. Bibliographic coupling connected 21 articles through 36 links distributed across three components; the largest component contained 17 articles, and network density was 0.025. The limited DOI coverage restricts interpretation of this network. The most frequently shared reference was O'Dowd's review of the transition from telecollaboration to virtual exchange (10.14705/rpnet.2018.jve.1), cited by six articles.

3.9 Descriptive-Analytical Synthesis of the Systematic Review

The systematic review was based on the same corpus of 54 studies and made it possible to deepen the characterization of the field in terms of study type, methodological approach, and predominant thematic axis. The results show a higher concentration of publications in 2022, a predominance of empirical studies, and a strong presence of qualitative or descriptive approaches (Figure 10).

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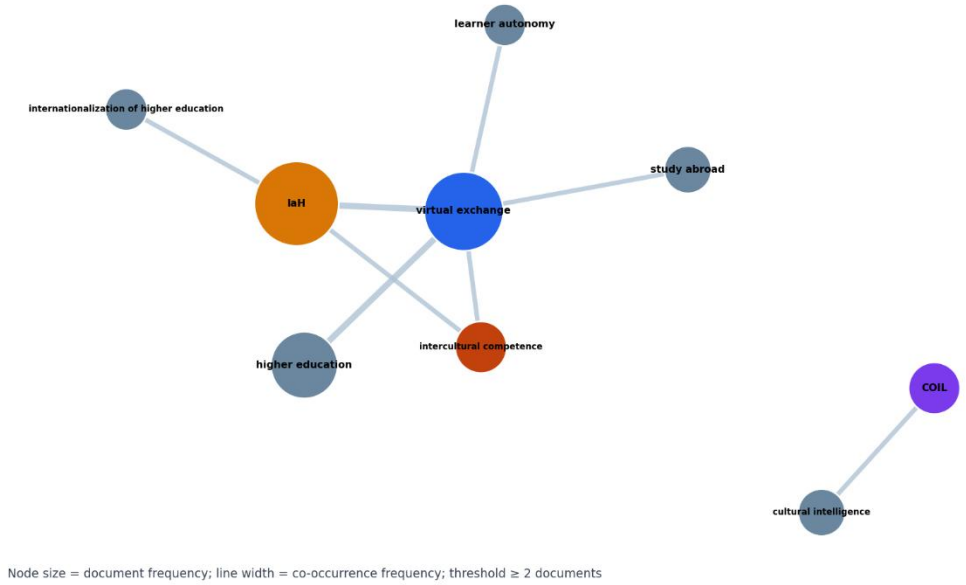
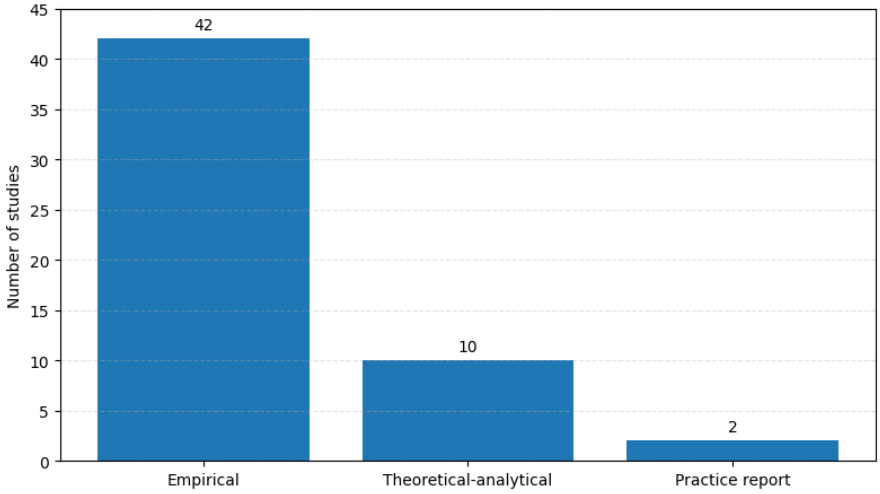
Figure 9. Normalized author-keyword co-occurrence network for the 54 included studies.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

The corpus comprised 42 empirical studies, 10 theoretical or analytical studies, and two systematic reviews (Figure 10). Most empirical studies examined implemented activities and educational outcomes. The smaller number of theoretical studies points to limited development of broader conceptual and analytical models.

Figure 10. Distribution of studies by study type.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

Figure 11 presents the predominant thematic axis assigned to each study. Virtual exchange and COIL form the largest group, followed by intercultural competence, curriculum internationalization, institutional implementation, and

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inclusion. The classification records the main objective of each article; secondary themes were not counted separately.

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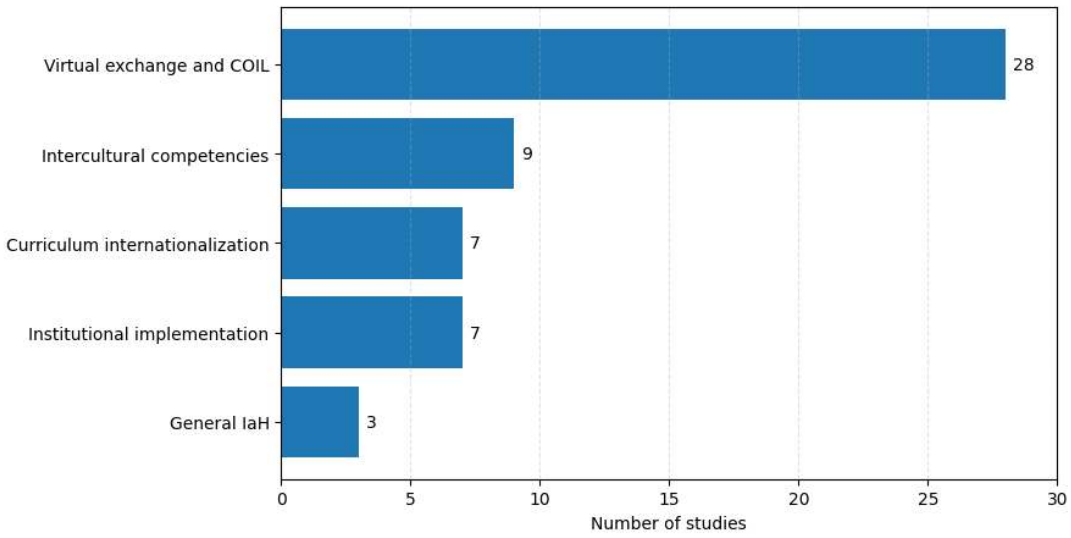
Figure 11. Distribution of studies by predominant thematic axis.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.

Table 6 summarizes the corpus, period, study designs, and thematic distribution. The 54 studies were published from 2020 to 2025, with the largest annual count in 2022. Empirical and qualitative designs predominate, and virtual exchange and COIL constitute the largest thematic axis.

Table 6. Descriptive indicators of the systematic literature review on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).

Indicator	Result
Studies included	54
Time frame	2020–2025
Year with the highest frequency	2022 (15 studies)
Predominant study type	Empirical (42)
Predominant thematic axis	Virtual exchange and COIL (28)
Most frequent methodological approach	Qualitative (30)
Journal with the highest number of studies	*Journal of Virtual Exchange* (9)

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic review.

The corpus describes a field that is expanding in application but remains conceptually unsettled. Most articles examine individual practices or local experiences; cross-country comparisons, longitudinal designs, and explanatory models are uncommon.

3.10 Methodological Profile of the Corpus

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Empirical studies based on qualitative approaches predominate, with frequent use of interviews, experience analyses, student and faculty reflections, implementation reports, and program evaluations. Quantitative and mixed-methods studies are also present, especially when the focus is on measuring intercultural competencies, intention to participate, or the effects of pedagogical interventions (Table 7).

Table 7. Methodological profile of the corpus by study type and methodological approach in the literature on Internationalization at Home in higher education (2020–2025).

Classification	Category	n
Study type	Empirical	42
Study type	Theoretical-analytical	10
Study type	Practice report	2
Methodological approach	Qualitative	30
Methodological approach	Not specified	11
Methodological approach	Quantitative	10
Methodological approach	Mixed methods	2
Methodological approach	Practice report	1

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the classification of the studies included in the systematic review.
Note: The methodological classification was based on the analytical reading of titles, abstracts, and keywords and may therefore simplify some nuances of the studies when compared with a full-text analysis.

This methodological pattern reinforces the idea that the literature on IaH is still in a consolidation phase, with a strong descriptive and applied orientation.

3.11 Thematic Synthesis of the Findings

The analysis of titles, abstracts, and keywords made it possible to organize the studies into five main thematic axes: (i) virtual exchange and COIL; (ii) development of intercultural competencies; (iii) curriculum internationalization; (iv) institutional implementation; and (v) general studies on IaH.

3.11.1 Virtual Exchange and COIL

This is the largest axis in the corpus, comprising 28 studies. Literature describes virtual exchange, COIL, e-tandem, and other forms of online collaboration as the main contemporary pathways for operationalizing IaH. The studies indicate that these strategies broaden access to international experiences, reduce dependence on physical mobility, and promote transnational academic interactions on a more inclusive scale. Recurrent challenges include pedagogical design, alignment of academic calendars, language proficiency, faculty mediation, and technological infrastructure.

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3.11.2 Intercultural Competencies

Nine studies examined cultural awareness, empathy, openness to otherness, intercultural competence, and global citizenship. Reported intercultural outcomes depended on planned activities, guided reflection, and faculty mediation rather than international contact alone.

3.11.3 Curriculum Internationalization

With seven studies, this category shifts internationalization from the extracurricular sphere to the core of the educational process. The findings show that embedding IaH into the curriculum requires reviewing course syllabi, redefining learning outcomes, supporting faculty pedagogical development, and aligning these efforts with program-level educational plans.

3.11.4 Institutional Implementation

Also comprising seven studies, this axis examines institutional policies, coordination across administrative and academic units, faculty development, formal recognition of activities, and the integration of internationalization, inclusion, and pedagogical innovation. The findings suggest that isolated initiatives tend to produce localized effects, whereas institutionalized approaches have greater reach and continuity.

Finally, general studies on IaH, although fewer in number, contribute to understanding factors such as student engagement, perceived value, expectations of success, and conditions that influence student participation in internationalization-at-home programs (Table 8).

Table 8. Synthesis of the five thematic axes in the literature on Internationalization at Home in higher education, including the number of studies and the predominant analytical focus (2020–2025).

Thematic axis	Number of studies	Predominant analytical focus
Virtual exchange and COIL	28	Digital technology-mediated internationalization strategies, transnational academic collaboration, online learning, and intercultural experiences without physical mobility.
Intercultural competencies	9	Development of cultural awareness, empathy, openness to otherness, intercultural competence, global citizenship, and educational outcomes associated with internationalization.
Curriculum internationalization	7	Integration of international and intercultural dimensions into courses, curricula, syllabi, and learning outcomes, with emphasis on embedding internationalization into the curriculum.
Institutional implementation	7	Institutional policies, governance, coordination across units, faculty development, organizational support, and sustainability of IaH strategies.

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Thematic axis	Number of studies	Predominant analytical focus
General studies on IaH	3	Student perceptions, perceived value, willingness to participate, student engagement, and broader understandings of Internationalization at Home.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the systematic and integrative literature review.
Note: The thematic organization was based on the analytical reading of titles, abstracts, and keywords of the studies included, considering the predominant focus of each article.

3.12 Cross-Cutting Findings of the Review

The synthesis of the corpus made it possible to identify five cross-cutting findings. First, literature shifts the focus of internationalization from physical mobility to academic and curricular experiences that are accessible to a broader audience. Second, the concept of IaH is strongly associated with virtual exchange and COIL, indicating the expanding role of digital mediation in the field. Third, the development of intercultural competencies emerges as the main assessed outcome. Fourth, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on intentional pedagogical design, faculty support, and institutional anchoring. Fifth, curriculum internationalization is treated as a strategic condition for IaH to move beyond isolated initiatives and become a structuring academic policy.

3.13 Gaps Identified in Literature

Despite the recent growth in scientific production, the review reveals important gaps. There is a relative scarcity of large-scale longitudinal and comparative studies, insufficient research on consistent institutional assessment of IaH, and limited analysis connecting inclusion, equity, and curricular justice in greater depth. Studies on disciplinary differences and comparisons among implementation models across national contexts are also less frequent.

4. Discussion

Since 2020, IaH research has focused increasingly on digital collaboration and international learning within the curriculum. Definitions are not uniform. IaH is described as a curriculum strategy, a form of virtual exchange, or an institutional approach to inclusion (Sierra-Huedo et al., 2022; Gosling & Yang, 2022; Woicolesco et al., 2022; Hackett et al., 2024).

Publication counts reached their highest value in 2022. The quasi-Poisson model, Mann–Kendall test, and Theil–Sen estimate did not support a sustained temporal trend; therefore, the observed peak is interpreted descriptively and not as statistical growth.

Many articles were published as universities expanded online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, virtual exchange allowed intercultural activities

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to continue despite restrictions on travel and face-to-face contact (Sebastián & Souza, 2022; Hilliker & Loranc-Paszylk, 2022; Kor et al., 2022). Its use in established internationalization programs predates this period, as documented by Rauer et al. (2021) and Cardoso et al. (2024). The pandemic appears to have accelerated existing practice.

Student learning and curriculum receive more attention in these articles than mobility totals. IaH is examined as an institution-wide process, a curriculum model, and learning in culturally diverse classrooms (Sierra-Huedo et al., 2022; Woicolesco et al., 2022; Eftekhari et al., 2025; Binkley et al., 2025). This does not mean that mobility-centered internationalization has disappeared; it marks the increased visibility of another approach.

Three areas predominate in relation to Q2: virtual exchange and COIL, intercultural learning, and internationalization of the curriculum. They often overlap because many online exchanges form part of regular courses and include an intercultural learning objective.

Virtual exchange and COIL are the most frequent ways of putting IaH into practice. Students in different locations work through planned discussion and collaborative assignments (Rauer et al., 2021; O'Dowd, 2021; Aquino et al., 2023; Cardoso et al., 2024). COIL is not simply another name for every virtual exchange. It generally requires course integration, collaboration, and explicit intercultural objectives (Hackett et al., 2024).

Online delivery reduces some costs associated with travel, yet access still depends on connectivity, language proficiency, preparation, and institutional resources. Aquino et al. (2023) reported unequal expectations and participation within a virtual exchange, and You (2022) related access to students' institutional position. Experiences in France and the Global South likewise depended on course design, facilitation, and the conditions of the partner universities (Reynolds, 2024; Finardi & Aşık, 2024). Digital access creates an opportunity for inclusion but does not confirm that participation is equitable.

Intercultural competence is the outcome examined most often, although instruments and definitions vary. Zheng et al. (2022), Kor et al. (2022), and Hackett et al. (2023) reported positive changes using, respectively, a virtual business exchange, a mixed-methods health program, and a quasi-experimental COIL design. Interviews and reflections identified changes in cultural awareness, communication, and reflection (Ismailov, 2021; Heymans et al., 2024). Classroom composition, task structure, interaction, and teacher support help explain why results differ among studies (Grosch et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2024).

Curriculum internationalization is discussed at institutional and disciplinary levels. The examples include tourism, accountancy, health education, and culturally diverse classrooms (Renfors, 2021; Daza, 2022; Eftekhari et al., 2025; Binkley et al., 2025). Mesa (2024) places curriculum change within a broader model of comprehensive internationalization in Colombia. The variety of aims and assessment procedures prevents a shared estimate of educational effect.

The studies related to Q3 repeatedly mention coordination, continuity, staff preparation, access, and assessment. Their expression differs according to institutional resources and national policy.

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Dependence on individual teachers or temporary partnerships threatens continuity. In China, staff described a gap between virtual exchange practice and institutional strategy; in Albania, the reported obstacles included policy, infrastructure, and implementation (Ganassin et al., 2021; Rubarth et al., 2023). Research involving education programs and international offices points to the need for coordinated action in curriculum, staff development, student services, and leadership (Alexiadou et al., 2021; Şahin et al., 2025).

Assessment ranges from reflection reports and interviews to pre-post scales and quasi-experimental designs. Quantitative examples include multilevel analysis of cultural intelligence, a mixed-methods health program, and a quasi-experimental COIL evaluation (Grosch et al., 2023; Kor et al., 2022; Hackett et al., 2023). Wong et al. (2023) and Lv et al. (2024) examined intention or willingness to participate, which is different from demonstrated learning. Variation in outcomes, instruments, and follow-up periods prevents direct comparison and leaves long-term effects unresolved.

IaH may denote an institution-wide process, curriculum internationalization, interaction in an international classroom, or a single online project (Whitsed et al., 2021; Gosling & Yang, 2022; Sierra-Huedo et al., 2022). A related overlap occurs between COIL and virtual exchange (Hackett et al., 2024). More precise definitions would improve comparison without imposing one model on all institutions.

Empirical, qualitative, and descriptive designs predominate in relation to Q4. Mixed-methods, quasi-experimental, multilevel, and longitudinal analyses occur less often (Kor et al., 2022; Hackett et al., 2023; Grosch et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2021). These frequencies describe methodological choices and do not constitute a quality rating.

Most cross-institutional and cross-national studies involve few sites or one discipline. The examples include health education in Hong Kong and Indonesia, graduate education in the United States and Ireland, and international programs in Vietnam (Kor et al., 2022; Aquino et al., 2023; Luong et al., 2023). Wider comparisons could help distinguish intervention effects from differences in discipline, institution, language, and national policy.

Author affiliations are concentrated in the United States and Europe. Articles from Brazil, China, Turkey, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Colombia extend the geographic coverage, although the Global North still predominates (Ganassin et al., 2021; You, 2022; Luong et al., 2023; Mesa, 2024). Models developed in well-resourced universities may consequently receive disproportionate attention.

Four country-affiliation occurrences were attributed to Brazil, too few for national generalization. The corresponding articles examine institutional models, virtual exchange, intercultural competence, and COIL partnerships (Woicolesco et al., 2022; Zilberberg Oviedo & Krimphove, 2022; Finardi & Aşık, 2024; Cardoso et al., 2024). They describe opportunities to extend international learning beyond mobility alongside limitations in language, connectivity, staff preparation, funding, and curricular recognition. Regional, institutional, and disciplinary differences within Brazil have received little attention.

Geographic concentration has implications for theory. Financial, linguistic, infrastructural, and policy conditions outside the Global North may not be adequately represented in models derived from well-resourced institutions.

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Greater attention to curriculum-embedded learning does not establish that higher education has moved away from mobility. Mobility, partnerships, local intercultural activities, and online collaboration coexist in literature.

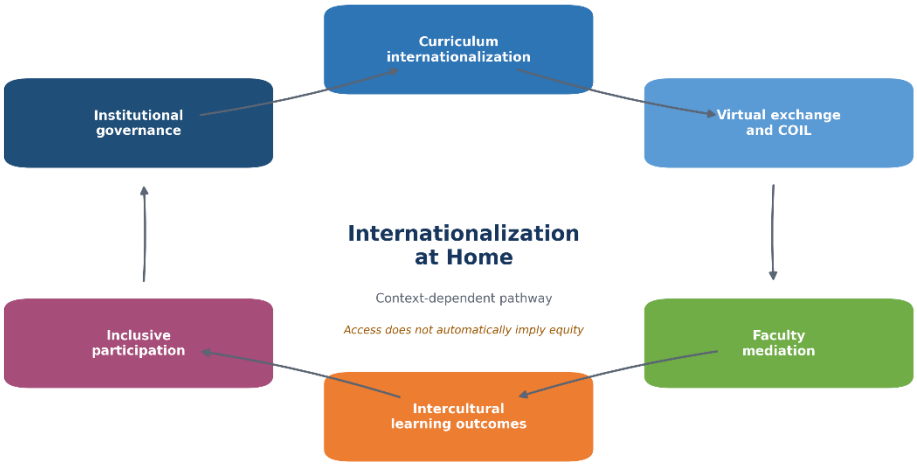
IaH may widen participation when international learning forms part of regular courses. Equity still depends on who participates, how the activity is designed, and what is assessed. The claim that internationalization is an educational right is a normative argument, not an empirical result of this review.

Adopting IaH requires more than an online connection or a culturally diverse classroom. Universities need explicit learning objectives, prepared staff, student support, curricular recognition, and appropriate assessment.

A useful IaH model needs to relate governance, curriculum, digital collaboration, teacher mediation, intercultural learning, and participation. Individual studies address these components but seldom analyze them together.

Figure 12 organizes the five thematic axes into six connected dimensions: institutional governance, curriculum internationalization, virtual exchange/COIL, faculty mediation, intercultural learning outcomes, and inclusion. Governance concerns policy, resources, and continuity. Curriculum integration places IaH within regular learning, while digital collaboration provides opportunities for interaction. Faculty mediation influences the activity, assessment documents learning, and inclusion depends on access to these conditions. This framework summarizes the relationships identified in the 54 articles; it has not yet been tested as a causal model.

Figure 12. Provisional analytical framework for Internationalization at Home derived from the integrative synthesis.



Source: Prepared by the authors based on the five thematic axes identified in the review.

5. Conclusion

This review examined 54 articles on Internationalization at Home in higher education published between 2020 and 2025. Descriptive bibliometrics, systematic

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selection procedures, and integrative thematic synthesis were applied to the same corpus to distinguish publication patterns from substantive findings.

Publication counts reached their highest value in 2022, but the quasi-Poisson model, Mann–Kendall test, and Theil–Sen estimate did not support a sustained temporal trend. The timing overlaps with the expansion of digitally mediated teaching during the COVID-19 period, but the data does not allow that peak to be attributed to the pandemic.

The bibliometric and integrative analyses revealed three central dimensions of the field: digital mediation, especially through virtual exchange and COIL; the development of intercultural competencies; and the internationalization of the curriculum. These dimensions show that IaH is no longer a peripheral or supplementary practice, but a strategic pathway for embedding international and intercultural experiences into everyday academic life. In this sense, IaH contributes to expanding access to internationalization for students who may not participate in traditional mobility programs.

The literature is conceptually heterogeneous and relies mainly on qualitative and descriptive designs. Evidence remains limited for long-term outcomes, institutional governance, disciplinary differences, and cross-country comparison. No formal risk-of-bias instrument was applied. Citation counts were unavailable, but gap identification was based on study content rather than citation visibility. Country metadata were unavailable for eight studies, and DOI-based coupling was limited to the 33 reference lists containing extractable DOIs. Some classifications relied on titles, abstracts, and keywords rather than full texts.

For institutions, the evidence favors coordinated implementation: explicit learning objectives, prepared faculty, curriculum integration, reliable technological support, and formal recognition of IaH activities. Local projects can be useful, but continuity depends on institutional policy, staffing, resources, and evaluation.

For Brazilian higher education institutions, IaH may widen participation where mobility is constrained by financial, linguistic, institutional, or regional inequalities. This potential is not automatic: equitable implementation requires accessible digital infrastructure, faculty development, inclusive language policies, balanced international partnerships, curricular recognition, and assessment of who participates and benefits. The four Brazilian country-affiliation occurrences in the corpus are insufficient for generalization across the national system and point to the need for regionally and institutionally diverse studies.

Future research should deepen the analysis of IaH implementation in different institutional and national contexts, with particular attention to the Global South. Comparative and longitudinal studies are also needed to assess the educational impacts of IaH initiatives, especially regarding intercultural competencies, global competence, student engagement, and curricular transformation. By addressing these gaps, future studies can contribute to the consolidation of IaH as both a theoretical framework and a strategic policy for more inclusive internationalization in higher education.

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