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# Internationalization in Higher Education: a Systematic Methodological Review

## SUMMARY

According to Chong et al, (2021) a systematic methodological review is an elaborate secondary research process based on synthesis which involves analysis and summarizing of methodological practises used in a specific substantive research topic. As Munn, Stern, Aromataris, Lockwood, & Jordan, (2018) postulates, the process of systematic methodological reviews aims at investigating and analysing any methodological concerns of a give research topic and mostly critiques the design based evidence synthesis, conduct and review of the research. Systematic reviews offer the best method comprehensively collate, examine and synthesize a body of literature. This systematic review focused on twenty-two articles on Internationalization Strategies and globalization in higher education which were identified through a comprehensive PRISMA process. This review examines the types of research approaches used, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques and summarizes in findings the the most commonly used methodologies in internationalization in higher education research, most preferred method scholars use for research on internationalization in higher education with justifications of choosing one methodology among available options.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, Methodology, Higher education, Systematic Review

**Jel-code:** F22, F55

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars across the world approach research from three common perspectives; quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods where the research questions guide the researcher on the nature of the data required and how to obtain it (Carrie Williams,2007). According to Szentesi (2019) both qualitative and quantitative research, there are advantages and disadvantages. However, the two methods complement each other, so they should be used together during empirical researches. The quantitative method uses statistics or numerical data to create meaning and new knowledge. It uses empirical paradigms (Creswell,2003) and is recommended for surveying and experimentation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). This research approach is ignited by a problem statement, followed by hypothesis formulation, literature review writing, and culminates in data analysis and presentation. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), quantitative research can be broadly considered to be; descriptive, experimental, and causal-comparative.

Guided by the post-structuralism paradigm, qualitative research involves describing, explaining, and interpreting col-

lected data in a holistic approach to facilitate discovery (Carrie Williams,2007). Creswell (2003), appraises the qualitative approach for studies that require the researchers to participate in the natural research setting to document and bring out the outcome from actual experiences. The five categories of qualitative approach are; ethnography, phenomenological study, case study, grounded theory, and content analysis. These five areas are guided by inductive reasoning.

The process of systematic review also referred to as synthesis is a recommendation after concluding that the traditional literature review was bedeviled by subjectivity and biases on the part of authors making the outcome to be unreliable and lacking in reproducibility. Traditional literature reviews also delved into past literature intending to summarize the concepts hence failing to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by uncovering and presenting evidence through data (Aromataris, & Pearson, 2014). Traditional literature reviewers source their literature from; peer-reviewed articles, empirical literature reports as well as theoretical and conceptual literature on the topic under study (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2021).

Traditional literature reviews involve bringing together the current body of knowledge on a particular topic, tracing the development history of the knowledge on the subject, comparing and contrasting available evidence and identifying the gaps, determining whether or not there is a consensus on the topic cross-checking the relationships between concepts and identifying key characteristics as well as justifying the worthiness of the topic for a study (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 2021).

Systematic review offers a comprehensive, exhaustive, and internationally accepted characteristic. To do a comprehensive systematic review, this article started with well-stated objectives and questions to be addressed, provided an explicit inclusion and exclusion protocol, carried out an extensive search of published impact factor articles, engaged in a comprehensive study and appraisal of the included articles, carried out the assessment of the outcome validity check and reporting of any exclusions as a result of not meeting the standards, data extraction and analysis from the included research, presentation, and synthesis of the review findings and finally the presentation of a summary of the methodology and methods used in the review. (Averis, & Pearson, 2003).

To fully uncover internationalization in higher education, a comprehensive and explicit review must be made to not only guide future research on the topic but also give researchers an insight into the previous methodologies, approaches, and paradigms. The general objective of this review was to inves-

tigate the research methodology used by scholars to address internationalization strategies in the higher education system. The specific objectives of the review were; to evaluate the types of research approaches used, to determine data collection methods used, and to evaluate the techniques used for data analysis in the selected articles. The review involved a comprehensive methodological study and analysis of twenty-two selected articles from Scopus and Web of Science databases. The following research questions guided the study;

1. What are the most commonly used methodologies in internationalization in higher education research?
2. Which method do scholars prefer for research on internationalization in higher education?
3. What justifications do scholars give for using the preferred method in studying internationalization in higher education?

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this systematic review was to satisfactorily respond to the research questions. This systematic review was backed by narrative analysis (Hodgkinson & Ford, 2014). This was reflected in the step-by-step review process as summarized in the review summary chart, designed according to recommendations by Transfield et al., (2003). This robust process involved the formulation of the research hypotheses and questions, a comprehensive literature searches to identify scholarly articles on the topic of research, a careful selection of the relevant studies to be reviewed, data extraction, analysis, and the process of data synthesis statistical methods like meta-analysis or qualitative methods such as narrative summary, documentation and reporting of the results (Magarey, 2001, Petticrew & Roberts 2008).

### Research Findings

Research findings indicate that on the type of methodology used, 82% were empirical while 18% consisted of literature reviews. From the empirical category, 64% were qualitative, 18% quantitative, and 18% studies. On quantitative type, 91% were descriptive studies, 5% Quasi-experimental and 4% were correlational/causal-comparative studies. For qualitative studies, findings indicate that 41% were case studies, 23% surveys, systematic reviews 9%, phenomenology 4.5%, Theoretical analysis 4.5%, Secondary data analysis 4.5%, Content analysis 4.5%, narrative inquiry 4.5% and quasi-experimental 4.5% studies.

## CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

Studies on internationalization and globalization are broad and wide in scope thus relying on the scientific method which consists of a variety of research approaches, tools, and techniques. Researchers, therefore, use qualitative and quantitative data, statistical analysis, experiments, field surveys, case research, and systematic reviews among others (Bhattacharjee, 2012). This review highlights the importance of a multi-faceted approach toward digging deeper into current trends

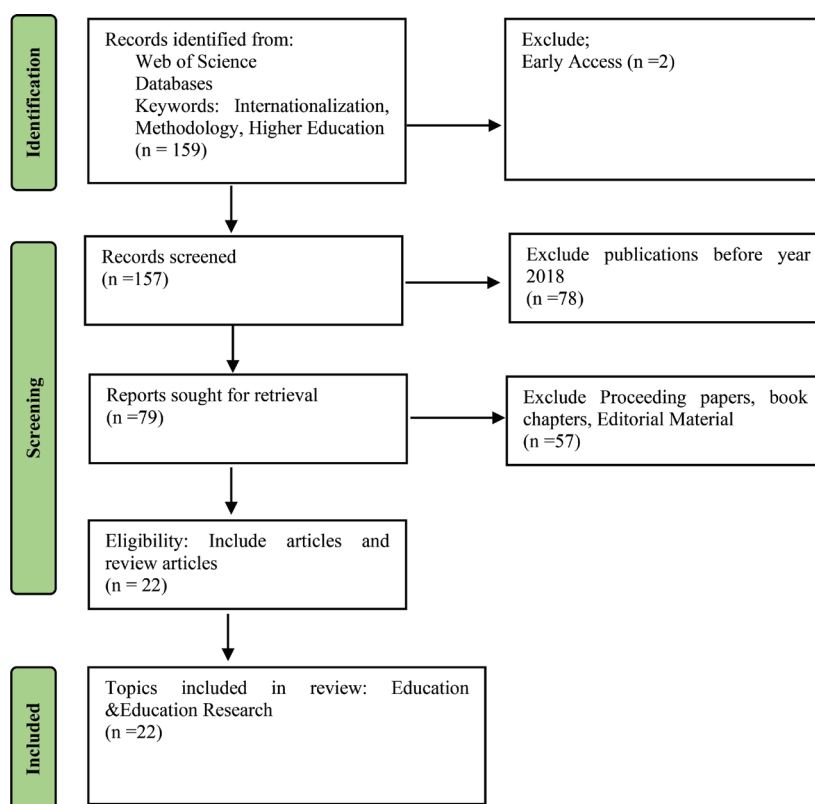


Figure 1.0

The PRISMA (Page, McKenzie, Bossuyt, Boutron, Hoffmann, Mulrow, et al. (2021).  
**Research Methodology Summary**

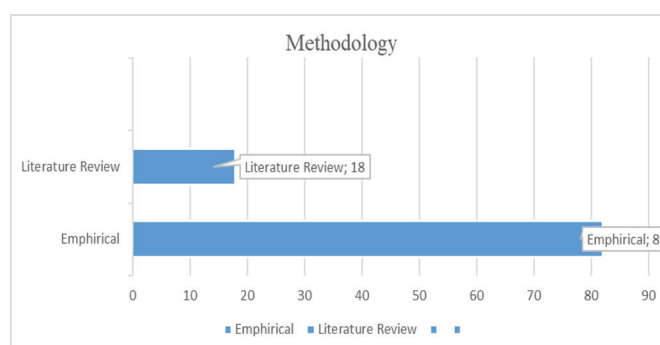


Figure 1.1

Source: Researcher (2023)

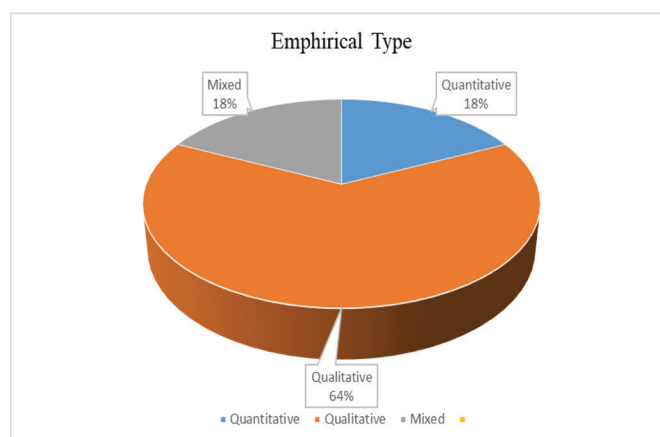


Figure 1.2

Source: Researcher (2023)

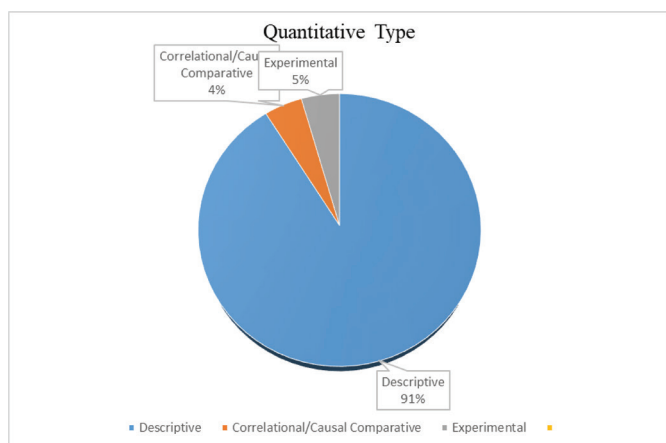


Figure 1.3

Source: Researcher (2023)

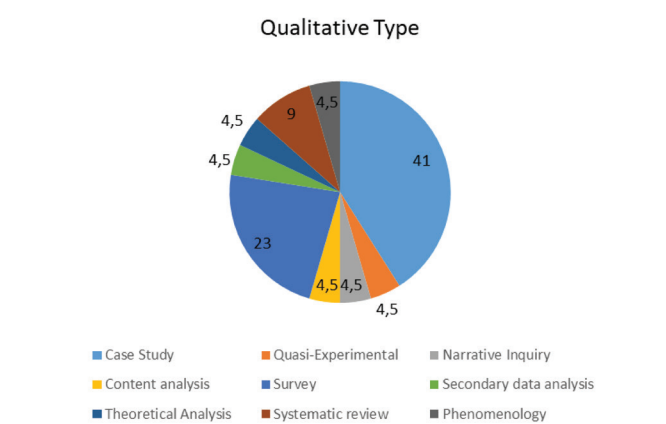


Figure 1.4

Source: Researcher (2023)

on the topic. This is possible through the use of diverse methodologies and more importantly by bringing forth emerging issues as the intervening variables. These include modern technology, global pandemics such as Covid-19, and man-made disasters such as wars, among others, which may tilt the scale of internationalization and Globalization in higher education.

The multi-faceted approach includes diversity in research methodology, which is why it may be worthwhile to use netnographic research. In the framework of qualitative primary research, Földi, Török & Szakács (2023) conducted a netnographic data analysis on Google, Facebook (in groups) and applications (Semrush, Keyword Surfer) on information sharing and searching in the online space.

Researchers prefer empirical studies because they offer a clear way of testing the relationship between variables and testing the theoretical concepts to determine the extent to which they match with observations made during the research. As an inquisitive methodology whose focus is describing, understanding, and predicting the research sample (Woodside 2010). Case studies give the researchers room to treat cases as configurations of variables, rather than seeking partial correlations among specified variables. Through case studies, researchers can investigate, identify and show complex relationships between variables, which however comes with challenges when

Table 1.

Methodological Features	Frequency	Percentage(%)
<b>Type</b>		
Empirical	18	82
Literature Review	4	18
Other	–	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Empirical Type</b>		
Quantitative	4	18
Qualitative	14	64
Mixed	4	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Quantitative Tradition</b>		
Descriptive	20	91
Correlational/Causal Comparative	1	4.5
Experimental	1	4.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Qualitative Type</b>		
Phenomenology	1	4.5
Case study	9	41
Grounded Theory	–	
Narrative Inquiry	1	4.5
Ethnography	–	–
Content analysis	1	4.5
Historical study	–	
Survey	5	23
Secondary Data Analysis	1	4.5
Quasi-Experimental	1	4.5
Theoretical Analysis	1	4.5
Systematic Review	2	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Researcher 2023.

dealing with contingent research issues. (Bennett, 2004). It is advisable to use case studies for both descriptive and empirical studies because it enables researchers to describe situations exactly as observed. (Krusenvik,2016.)

Cope (2015), acknowledges that case studies offer researchers a flexible methodology for investigating social science topics. Case studies offer a rare opportunity for researchers to engage and investigate real-life situations as they document the unfolding events. (Flyvbjerg 2006). Many researchers consider case studies as fit for qualitative analysis, although they can be used for quantitative studies to a smaller extent. The study is mainly viewed and used as a qualitative research method, even though it can also include quantitative analysis and historical data. According to Krusenvik (2016) of all the social science research methods the case study has the least attention and support, due to its lack of a well-defined protocol.

Case studies are highly recommended because they are non-prejudicial and they suitable for a good method for creating hypotheses. (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, (2014). that inform and shape future research endeavors(Merriam, &

Tisdell, 2009). Other merits include the ability of case studies to provide contextual and deep analysis of multiple variables and casual processes (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster 2000).

Yin (2009) is of the contrary opinion that case studies lack the quality of being detailed, careful, and complete, while Garger (2010) cautions that researchers may manipulate the results by subconsciously tailoring the results to fit their predictions in what Flyvbjerg, (2006) refers to as Self-fulfilling prophecy. Case studies have been known to increase the workload for researchers (Herreid, 2011).

Survey research as a research method involves the process of gathering information from a sample of individuals (Scheuren, 2004), while a survey is a research tool used in collecting data. This research method can be used to gather demographic data, generate information from respondents in a large population, and are the most inclusive in the types and number of variables under investigation. (Glasow, 2005). Survey research is vulnerable to biases and can only produce estimates but not precise measurements (Glasow, 2005). Despite the popular notion that surveys are easy to conduct for quick results, survey research needs extensive planning, time, and effort. (Jones, Baxter & Khanduja, (2013). Researchers preferred to use more case studies (41%) as compared to a survey (23%) because the topic of internationalization requires actual participation and close observation that can only be offered by case studies.

Phenomenology offers the researchers the opportunity to explore the life experiences of the study population, with detailed outcomes on sample dynamics and their contradictions (Creswell, 2015). The other research methodologies (systematic reviews 9%, Theoretical analysis 4.5%, Secondary data analysis 4.5%, Content analysis 4.5%, narrative inquiry 4.5% and quasi-experimental 4.5% studies) are rarely used in social science studies such as the topic on internationalization and globalization but can be valuable in other research fields.

### Recommendation

This study recommends further research on the best approaches to investigating the topic of internationalization and globalization in higher education, especially using other literature review methods such as scoping reviews and more collaborative approaches like the evidence-based Campbell collaboration. Littell, J. H., & White, H. (2018). Further studies should also revolve around comparative reviews on internationalization and globalization.

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