

Multilingualism and internationalization, navigating the complexities: A systematic review



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Abstract Multilingualism and internationalization have become integral components of higher education institutions worldwide, shaping the academic landscape and preparing students for success in a globalized world. The coexistence of diverse languages and cultures enriches societies, fosters cooperation, and fuels economic development. In essence, multilingualism facilitates internationalization by bridging cross-cultural communication and understanding. The present study aimed to explore the importance and implications of multilingualism and internationalization in higher education universities, highlighting its role in shaping a more interconnected and prosperous world, with a specific focus on its impact on educational outcomes. The questions guiding this study would be: How does multilingualism imply and influence internationalization in higher education, and what are the implications and influences of multilingualism on internationalization in higher education? Methodologically, it is a qualitative study through a systematic literature review. This methodological approach was selected because it offers the possibility of synthesizing a wide range of research to answer a research question. In addition, the transparency of the procedures reduces the risk of bias, allows for reproducibility, and informs the development of new research by identifying knowledge gaps that exist in a specific area of study. The results highlighted the multifaceted benefits and positive contribution of multilingualism to internationalization by fostering academic excellence, cultural diversity, and the development of global citizenship and linguistic competence.

Keywords: academic excellence, cultural diversity, global citizenship, linguistic competence

1. Introduction

The current study explores the intricate relationship between multilingualism and the internationalization of higher education. Multilingualism and internationalization are closely intertwined concepts, each influencing and shaping the other. In general, multilingualism refers to the ability of individuals, communities, or nations to use multiple languages proficiently. The European Commission (2007) views multilingualism as the ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals to engage regularly with more than one language in their day-to-day lives (Intke-Hernandez, 2023).

Multilingualism is a prerequisite for any aspect related to internationalization (Dima et al., 2023). Multilingualism, the ability to speak more than one language, has long been recognized as a crucial aspect of global communication and interaction. In an increasingly interconnected world driven by globalization and internationalization, the importance of multilingualism cannot be overstated. The coexistence of diverse languages and cultures enriches societies, fosters cooperation, and fuels economic development. In essence, multilingualism facilitates internationalization by bridging cross-cultural communication and understanding (Prado & Luna-Nemecio, 2023).

On the other hand, internationalization involves integrating and interacting with diverse cultures, economies, and societies on a global scale. The internationalization of higher education is referred to as the process of integrating an international or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of education institutions and systems (Knight, 2004). The internationalization of higher education (universities) has a dual role. It is the expression of the international dimension in the university's functions and activities and of the international transference of university capabilities and products (Sebastián, 2005).

The internationalization of higher education has increased student and academic mobility, making the development of solid language skills imperative (Abdeljaoued, 2023). English, in particular, has established itself as the lingua franca in many international contexts. However, studies indicate that, despite foreign language training at earlier educational levels, many students enter higher education with insufficient levels of communicative competence in English (Arroyo-Barrigüete et al., 2022), which can limit their participation in mobility programs and other international opportunities.

In addition to English, promoting proficiency in multiple languages is crucial for inclusive internationalization. Multilingualism enriches educational and professional experiences, allowing for a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and perspectives (Chang, 2022). In school settings, especially in countries with high cultural and linguistic diversity, educational



initiatives have been implemented to combat linguistic and cultural barriers, promoting interculturalism and multilingualism as tools for inclusion and educational enrichment (Fomenko et al., 2019).

Strengthening language skills in teacher training programs is essential to meeting the challenges of multilingual education (Abdeljaoued, 2023). A lack of focus on language skills development in the curriculum can affect students' overall preparation for the contemporary educational environment. Adjusting the curriculum and institutional policies to strengthen the development of these skills ensures that future educators are well prepared to meet the demands of their profession in multilingual and internationalized contexts.

Hence, this study explores the implications of multilingualism and internationalization, highlighting its role in shaping a more interconnected and prosperous world, with a specific focus on its impact on educational outcomes. The questions guiding this study are as follows: How does multilingualism imply and influence internationalization in higher education, and what are the implications and influences of multilingualism on internationalization in higher education? The relevance of conducting this study is that teaching in higher education leads to improvements in individuals' academic and professional training. Therefore, the systematization of the literature in this field highlights the key elements of multilingualism and its implications for the internationalization of universities.

2. Materials and Methods

To achieve the objective of this study, a systematic literature review was chosen (Page et al., 2021). This methodological approach was selected for the following reasons. First, it offers the possibility of synthesizing a wide range of research to answer a research question. Second, the transparency of the procedures reduces the risk of bias and allows for reproducibility. Third, it can inform the development of new research by identifying the knowledge gaps that exist in a specific area of study. To ensure the quality of this work, the recommendations established in the protocol of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement were followed (Page et al., 2021).

2.1. Search strategy

The literature search was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, the Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, and ERIC databases were selected. These electronic repositories group a large collection of scientific journals, especially in the field of education. In the second stage, a list of keywords was constructed, and Boolean operators were defined. After several attempts, the following search equation was chosen: "(multilingualism OR "multiple languages" OR multilingual OR "multilingual education" OR "foreign language" OR "foreign languages" OR "global language" OR multilingual) AND internationalization AND (university OR universities) AND "higher education" AND academic". In the third stage, to refine the admission of documents appropriate for this study, search filters were applied as inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1).

Table 1 Eligibility criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Type of document	Published empirical research article.	Early access article, literature review, conference proceedings, protocol, book chapter, and/or thesis.
Year of publication	From 2014 to 2023.	Before 2014.
Language of publication	English & Spanish.	Language other than English or Spanish.

2.2. Selection strategy

The selection of articles was carried out in three stages (see Figure 1). To ensure the thoroughness of these procedures, at least two of the authors of this work participated in each stage. First, an electronic database search was performed in the identification stage. This procedure was carried out between June 17 and 19, 2024, and 190 documents were identified in WoS, 107 in Scopus, and 115 in ERIC. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were subsequently applied, and 25 duplicate articles were eliminated. Second, the screening stage took place between June 24 and 28, 2024. Two of the authors independently read the titles and abstracts of 133 documents, which allowed a preliminary selection of 77 articles. Third, the inclusion phase was carried out between July 1 and July 15, 2024. In this stage, the complete document of each of the articles was read by the whole team, and it was verified that each was significant for this study. Finally, 42 articles were included in this literature review.

2.3. Strategy analysis

The data analysis was carried out in two stages, and at least two of the authors of this paper participated in each of the procedures to mitigate interpretative bias. First, between July 15 and August 15, 2024, a descriptive analysis of the main characteristics of the articles included was performed. In the second stage, a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) of the articles was subsequently conducted between August 15 and October 30, 2024. This type of analysis offers the possibility



of identifying relevant themes in qualitative data through a process of coding and category construction that is flexible and iterative. The NVivo-14 program assisted each of these procedures, and the findings were organized and systematized in tables and figures.

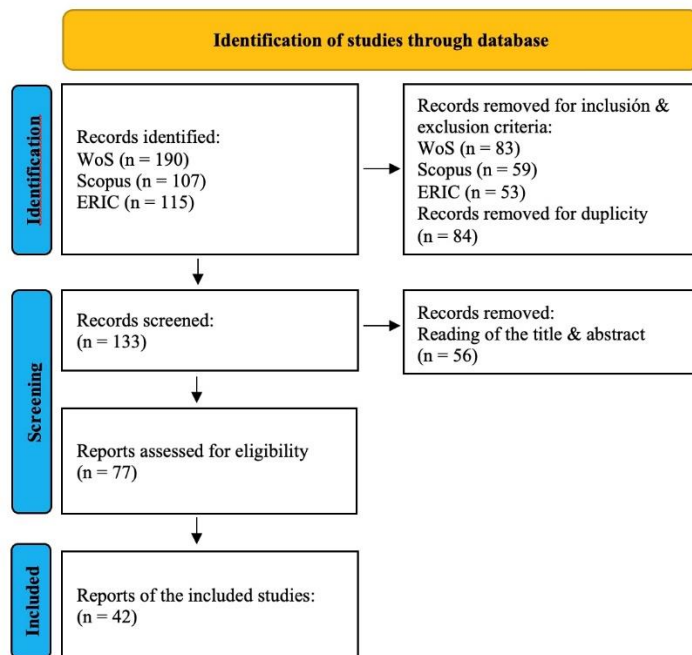


Figure 1 PRISMA flow diagram. Source: Page et al., 2021.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Characteristics of the studies

In this systematic literature review, 42 scientific articles were analyzed. Sixty-nine percent (n = 29) of the studies were published between 2019 and 2023, whereas the remaining 31% (n = 13) were published between 2014 and 2018. Most studies are indexed in the WoS database (n = 27), and the rest are found in Scopus (n = 12) or ERIC (n = 3). In methodological terms, 21% (n = 9) of the included articles were developed from a mixed approach, a figure that is repeated for quantitative studies (n = 9), whereas 58% (n = 24) adopted a qualitative perspective. In accordance with the institutional affiliation of the first author of each of the articles, most of the studies were conducted in Europe and Asia, specifically in Spain (n = 8), China (n = 5), and the United Kingdom (n = 4). However, Figure 2 shows that studies have also been reported in Central and South American countries.

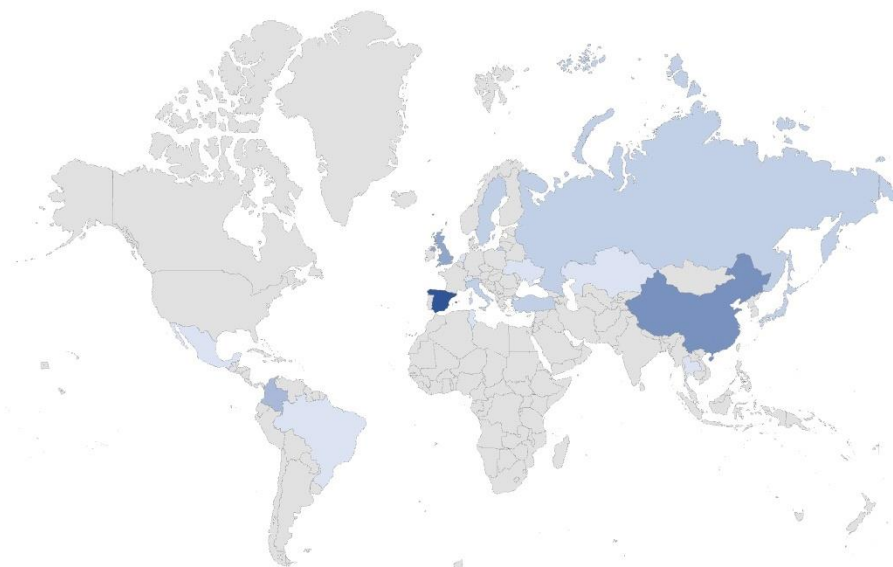


Figure 2 Distribution of articles by country.

Table 2 summarizes the background of the 42 analyzed articles included in this systematic literature review, including the author(s) and year of publication, country, objective of the study, methodological approach, and main findings.

Table 2 Articles included in the study.

N°	Author(a) & year	Country	Objective	Method	Main findings
1	Abdeljaoued (2023)	Tunisia	To explore Tunisian students' attitudes toward teaching in English (EMI) and analyze current EMI practices in the classroom context.	Mixed	Students recognize the importance of English for research, technology, mobility, and employment. Teachers employ translanguaging to promote understanding of academic content. Students face difficulties in oral and written comprehension and expression in English in the academic context.
2	Annous & Nicolas (2015)	Lebanon	To determine university professors' perceptions of their students' English communication skills, and assess whether they consider the development of these skills to be part of their academic responsibilities.	Qualitative	Despite recognizing the importance of communication skills, especially in written English, the teachers did not consider the development of these skills to be part of their academic responsibilities, nor did they have the time or expertise to foster their students' English communication skills.
3	Archila & Truscott (2017)	Colombia	To explore the Bilingual Teaching Practices (BTP) of science teachers and their beliefs about this type of practice in a Colombian university.	Quantitative	A high number of participants expressed positive beliefs about the key role of bilingualism and English. The results highlight the need to help teachers understand the potential of bilingualism as a resource in the science classroom.
4	Archila et al. (2021)	Colombia	To determine the relationship between the academic performance of university students in a Spanish-English bilingual Biology module and the type of high school they attended at secondary level	Quantitative	Students who attended monolingual high schools scored slightly lower on quizzes and tests than those who attended bilingual or trilingual schools. However, no statistically significant differences were found between students in bilingual and trilingual schools.
5	Archila et al. (2023)	Colombia	To provide evidence that the creation of bilingual scientific argument podcasts can be used as a springboard to foster undergraduate bilingual scientific argumentation	Quantitative	The student-created BSAP effectively enriched participants' skills to produce arguments and rebuttals in Spanish, and they also benefited from formative assessment practices such as instructor feedback and peer feedback.
6	Arroyo-Barrigüete et al. (2022)	Spain	To analyze the impact of the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) on the academic performance of college students.	Quantitative	The results suggest that the language of instruction does not have a relevant impact on the academic performance of students in the university studied.
7	Atabekova et al. (2016)	Russia	To identify the linguistic challenges Russian universities face and to map changes and adjustments in their language policies that could increase their international academic visibility.	Qualitative	The university language policy should adopt a holistic approach and consider the needs and requirements of various internal university stakeholders, specifying the levels, skills, and formats of foreign language communication needed.
8	Borsetto & Bier (2021)	Italy	To evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the "Academic Lecturing" program, designed to	Qualitative	Program evaluation identifies areas for improvement, such as greater collaboration between language and content specialists. It seeks to encourage a

9	Bradford (2018)	Japan	support Italian university professors in teaching their subjects in English. To analyze the challenges facing the effective implementation of English language instruction (ELI) programs in Japanese universities.	Qualitative	more integrated use of language and content in university classes. The excessive focus on the English language prevents the implementation of teacher professional development programs that address crucial aspects such as pedagogical skills and intercultural competence.
10	Chang (2022)	Taiwan	To examine the experiences of Asian international students (ISs) using English as a “multilingual lingua franca” (MLF) in their social and academic interactions.	Qualitative	The findings suggest that TESOL educators should expand students' communicative repertoires and encourage multimediotic language users to facilitate interactions in international contexts.
11	Changyuan et al. (2019)	Russia	Analysis of English teaching patterns in the context of intercultural communication for undergraduate and graduate students.	Mixed	The results confirm the importance of English language learning for graduates, as it is seen as a tool for their producing and sharing, as well as for perceiving and internalizing.
12	Chen et al. (2020)	China	To investigate the linguistic and pedagogical characteristics of English language instruction (EMI) by university professors at a university in southern China.	Qualitative	The Chinese teachers teaching in the EMI classes were more topic-focused than problem-solving, with an emphasis on activating new learning and presenting knowledge through demonstrations.
13	Dafouz & Camacho-Miñano (2016)	Spain	To investigate the impact of the use of English medium instruction (EMI) on the academic performance of college students compared to those who receive instruction in their native language (L1, Spanish).	Quantitative	No statistically significant differences in academic performance were found between students who received instruction in English and those who received instruction in Spanish. The use of EMI did not negatively impact students' final academic results.
14	Dauber & Spencer-Oatey (2023)	United Kingdom	To investigate factors contributing to the development of global communication skills in college students.	Quantitative	To become “global graduates,” students should venture out of their comfort zone and engage with the diverse university community, which requires the guidance and support of universities to maximize the learning benefits of these cross-cultural encounters.
15	Delgado-Algarra et al. (2019)	Spain	To analyze the relationship between pluricultural competence and the positioning of professors to cosmopolitan citizenship models.	Mixed	Professors from both countries (Spanish & Japanese) recognize positioning on the topic and the advantages of cultural plurality in educational environments.
16	Evison et al. (2019)	United Kingdom	To examine the impact of internationalization on the professional identities of university teachers in three international universities in Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia.	Qualitative	Teachers show a pragmatic understanding of the relationship between financially driven internationalization agendas, their own personal belief systems, and the realities of their multilingual pedagogical practices.
17	Fomenko et al. (2019)	Ukraine	To evaluate the experience of Canadian universities in internationalization and its applicability to the context of Ukrainian agricultural higher education.	Quantitative	Canadian internationalization strategies were found to have improved the quality of scientific education and research by fostering international collaboration, academic mobility, multicultural awareness, and integration into the global scientific community.

18	Gallego-Balsá & Cots (2018)	Spain	Explores how teachers and students manage plurilingual resources while learning Catalan during study abroad.	Qualitative	The results show how using Spanish allows the students to reach a greater level of complexity and challenges the teacher's position in class as perhaps less of a plurilingual speaker than the students.
19	Galloway et al. (2020)	United Kingdom	To examine how macrolevel education policy about EMI is both implemented and conceptualized at the institutional and classroom level in Chinese and Japanese universities.	Mixed	The results highlight contextual constraints that hinder policy implementation. Therefore, further research on this growing trend and evaluation of curricula are needed to identify context-sensitive ways to implement the EMI policy.
20	García-Ponce & Mora-Pablo (2023)	Mexico	To assess how students perceive the academic benefits of learning English and how they face challenges in preparing for the test and accessing academic resources provided by the institution.	Qualitative	Students recognize the academic benefits of learning English, such as improved employability and career mobility. However, they face challenges in the use of language, which does not always coincide with the internationalization and intercultural strategies proposed by the institution.
21	Garret & Gallego (2014)	United Kingdom	To investigate the perception and implications of university internationalization in bilingual contexts, specifically in minority languages.	Mixed	The results highlight the difficulties in reconciling the vitality of minority languages with the forces and priorities of internationalization.
22	Gurel & Aslan (2022)	Turkey	Analyze the effects of internationalization, through the Erasmus program, on teacher training programs.	Qualitative	The results reveal that there is a significant improvement in students' social and cultural skills.
23	Han et al. (2020)	China	Examines how local students and faculty make sense of their engagement with international students at three Chinese universities.	Qualitative	The thematic analysis's findings revealed that language barriers, cultural assumptions, and academic conventions of the host institutions deeply conditioned international students' engagement in learning.
24	Hildeblando et al. (2022)	Brasil	Analyze the potential of the COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) approach for the internationalization of higher education.	Mixed	The findings report that COIL has several potentialities, and invites to reflect on challenges such as planning according to the academic calendar of the institutions involved, choosing compatible technology, and ensuring adequate institutional support.
25	Holmes (2021)	Suecia	To investigate the communication practices of three administrative staff members, focusing on how they manage the challenges of complying with language policies while communicating ethically in an internationalized work environment.	Qualitative	The data show that the participants' language work is carried out ethically before any specific language is considered. Ethical work is carried out despite the lack of sufficient support from the institution.
26	Itoi & Mizukura (2023)	Japan	To investigate the experiences of Japanese university students on translingualism in their academic learning who took courses in English in Taiwan and South Korea.	Qualitative	Students used multiple languages and linguistic resources to understand, communicate, and learn in the classroom. Some peers and instructors may perceive exchange students' use of translanguaging

27	Kirkgöz et al. (2023)	Turkey	To explore the functions and effects of emergent language practices of situated interactions in English language instruction (ELI) settings in Turkey.	Qualitative	negatively, which can lead to social and academic marginalization. Most students and teachers use translanguaging strategically to varying degrees and for varying functions, depending on the nature of the disciplinary needs.
28	Kuteeva (2014)	Sweden	To examine how the parallel use of languages in Swedish higher education impacts expectations and standards of English proficiency, specifically whether it promotes “nativeness” as a benchmark.	Qualitative	The results suggest that in the context of parallel language use, the need to develop academic skills in English is often confused with the need to achieve native-like proficiency.
29	Larrinaga & Amurrio (2015)	Spain	To analyze the impact of internationalization in higher education in multilingual contexts, specifically the consequences for the professional identities of academics working in a minority language.	Qualitative	Key trends in professional roles through generational change were identified, highlighting the emergence of strong strategic orientations in the design of academic careers.
30	Lin (2019)	Taiwan	To examine language practices in international higher education (HEI) in non-English speaking countries, focusing specifically on language choice and negotiation in engineering and science laboratory meetings among culturally and linguistically diverse students and faculty.	Qualitative	Teachers addressed the linguistic diversity among national and international students through two approaches: English was established as a compulsory language, and the use of different languages was allowed.
31	Llurda et al. (2014)	Spain	To identify the opinion of university administrative personnel, professors, and students regarding the concept of an international university and a multilingual university.	Mixed	The results show that an international university is characterized by incoming mobility, the presence of English as a third academic language, and academic excellence. A multilingual university has more advantages than disadvantages, and most of them are related to the internationalization of the institution.
32	Méndez & Casal (2018)	Spain	To provide a series of caveats that can help universities make linguistic, academic, and policy decisions toward quality implementation of ICLHE.	Qualitative	The findings highlight the key categories and subcategories necessary for ICLHE to be effective, addressing aspects such as institutional conditions, program structure, linguistic and pedagogical competencies of teachers and students, and methodological considerations.
33	Naka & Spahija (2022)	Republic of Kosovo	To highlight the importance of English as a foreign language (EFL) and its role in the professional and academic development of university teachers, as well as in the development of higher education institutions (HEIs) in non-English speaking countries.	Qualitative	The study highlights the need to increase motivation to improve the level of English among academic staff, considering this skill an essential human capital in higher education institutions and internationalization.
34	Ou et al. (2021)	China	To analyze how EALF has been interpreted and negotiated in university policies and local practices	Mixed	A tension between English as a vehicular language and other coexisting languages is evident, both in educational language policies and in the perceptions and

			in China's internationalized higher education.		practices of multilingual students in the local communicative context.
35	Sánchez & Salaberrí (2017)	Spain	To analyze the teacher training needs of teachers participating in a plan for the promotion of multilingualism and to describe the teacher training program in multilingual teaching methodologies implemented at this university.	Quantitative	The results suggest a positive evolution in the implementation of the multilingual plan, also the indicators show progress in terms of the development of a clear strategy to promote multilingualism, leading to internationalization.
36	Snodin (2019)	Thailand	To understand the challenges and potential of increasing international recruitment and enhancing the teaching and learning experience in Thai higher education.	Qualitative	The availability of scholarships, personal recommendations, and geographical and cultural proximity to their home country appear to be important factors attracting international students to Thailand.
37	Song (2019)	China	To examine the epistemic practices of international and Chinese students in English-taught master's degree (EMI) programs at a top-ranked university in Shanghai, China.	Qualitative	The EMI curriculum establishes an implicit hierarchy among students based on proficiency in English, knowledge of Americanized academic norms, and discipline-specific knowledge. Students develop different levels of awareness of these power dynamics.
38	Tajik et al. (2023)	Kazakhstan	To investigate the perceptions and experiences of graduate students and professors of English language teaching in three purposively selected universities in Kazakhstan.	Qualitative	Teaching in English is generally seen as a prestigious and high social status, a passport that facilitates entry into universities and job markets around the world, and a pedagogical tool.
39	Triki (2022)	Italy	To examine multilingual language policies at the University of Turin, exploring how they are manifested in the curriculum, internationalization strategies, and external communication.	Mixed	The manifestations of multilingualism in the university are grouped into three key themes: a multilingual curriculum with an emphasis on foreign language skills; internationalization policies that promote quality education, mobility, employability, and networking; and an external communication strategy to increase the university's visibility globally.
40	Xing & Zixin (2019)	China	Analyze the existing problems within the framework of the current internationalization program for exchange students.	Quantitative	The analysis identified problems in the current program framework and resulted in proposals for countermeasures and suggestions for developing a broader and more meaningful cooperation model in the context of internationalization.
41	Yanaprasart & Lüdi (2017)	Switzerland	Explore how a multilingual academic and scientific program contributes to the creation of an inclusive environment in academic settings to address international mobility and linguistic diversity.	Qualitative	The results suggest the need to find a balance between the use of an "academic language" in English and the promotion of multilingual academic and scientific cultures. They also highlight the importance of hybridity and multimodality in the processes of knowledge construction in an internationalized context.
42	Zijlmans et al. (2020)	Netherlands	To investigate in depth the role of language proficiency in the academic success of German students at a Dutch university, specifically those with a high dropout rate.	Qualitative	Three main language-related problems were identified: difficulties in listening and speaking in discussion groups, problems in writing tests and papers, and the negative impact of language proficiency on grades.

3.2. Categories

Table 3 shows each of the items distributed in each of the categories. The results are presented below, and the findings for each of the categories are discussed.

Table 3 Categories with authors.

Categories	N° of article
Academic excellence	1 -3- 4-5-6-7-10-17-23-29-34-39.
Cultural diversity	10-11-17-22-34.
Global citizenship	14-15-21-25-26-29-36-38-40.
Linguistic competence	2-6-8-9-12-16-18-19-20-21-27-28-30-31-32-33-35-37-38-40-41-42.

3.2.1. Academic excellence

One of the main benefits of multilingualism and internationalization in higher education is its contribution to academic excellence. Research by Archila et al. (2023), Dewaele & Wei (2019), and Larrinaga & Amurrio (2015) suggests that multilingual students demonstrate better cognitive abilities, linguistic competence, and critical thinking skills than their monolingual counterparts do. Exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives enriches the learning environment, fostering intellectual curiosity and creativity among students (Arroyo-Barrigüete et al., 2022; Norton & Toohey, 2017).

Multilingualism improves educational outcomes by enhancing cognitive ability, language proficiency, and academic achievement. Studies have shown that students who receive instruction in multiple languages demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and academic success (Archila et al., 2017; Atabekova et al., 2016). Multilingual education fosters language proficiency in both the mother tongue and other languages, equipping students with valuable communication skills for success in a globalized world (Ou et al., 2021; Wei, 2018).

Research suggests that multilingualism confers cognitive advantages, such as improved problem-solving skills, enhanced creativity, and delayed cognitive decline in old age. Archila et al. (2021) and Bialystok (2017) highlight the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, noting that it strengthens executive functions and improves brain plasticity, leading to superior cognitive performance. In addition, internationalization initiatives, such as incoming/salient international students, international project partnerships, student and faculty mobilities, foreign language summer schools (Chang, 2022; Dima et al., 2023), and international collaborations, offer all participants unique opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and research (Han et al., 2020; Leask, 2015).

The structures listed above, the units organized or the exceptional strategies brought together for the complex purpose of internationalization, would have no chance of success without the intensive and compulsory use of foreign languages. To speak of an added international dimension to the educational institution and process automatically and implicitly forces us to speak of the use and opportunity to use foreign languages.

3.2.2. Cultural diversity

Multilingualism and internationalization in higher education promote cultural diversity and intercultural understanding, which are essential components of well-rounded education (Gurel & Aslan, 2022). Studies by Byram (2018) and Chang (2022) emphasize the importance of integrating intercultural competence into higher education curricula, preparing students to navigate complex cultural landscapes and meaningfully engage individuals from diverse backgrounds. Multiple education programs, including language courses and cultural exchange activities, foster mutual respect and appreciation for different cultures, enriching the college experience for all students (Arasaratnam-Smith & Evans, 2020; Changyuan et al., 2019). In addition, studies by Norton and Toohey (2017) underscore the transformative potential of cultural diversity in shaping students' identities and worldviews. Exposure to diverse cultural perspectives challenges students in critically reflecting on their own beliefs and assumptions, fostering intellectual growth and personal development.

The main advantages of multilingualism are amplified by its ability to promote cultural understanding and empathy, crucial components of well-rounded education. Research by Gurel & Aslan (2022) and Smith (2015) suggests that people who are proficient in multiple languages show greater cultural sensitivity and appreciation for diverse perspectives, skills that are essential for global citizenship. Multiple education programs, such as bilingual schooling and language immersion initiatives, enable students to engage with different cultures and worldviews, fostering mutual respect and tolerance (Chang, 2022; García, 2019). Fomenko et al. (2019) and Wei (2018) emphasize that multilingualism enables individuals to navigate cultural nuances and communicate effectively across cultural boundaries, promoting intercultural understanding.

3.2.3. Global citizenship

Higher education plays a crucial role in fostering global citizenship by instilling values of social responsibility, ethical leadership, and cross-cultural empathy among students. Research by Andreotti (2014) and Dauber & Spencer-Oatey (2023) highlights the transformative potential of internationalization initiatives to foster a sense of global citizenship and solidarity



among students. The author argues that higher education institutions are responsible for preparing students to become informed, engaged, and ethically responsible global citizens. Multilingualism enhances students' ability to communicate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries, empowering them to actively participate in a globalized society (Delgado-Algarra et al., 2019; Kanno & Norton, 2016). By embracing diversity and promoting intercultural dialog, higher education institutions contribute to developing socially conscious and globally aware citizens (Deardorff, 2018; Garrett & Gallego, 2014).

Inevitably, globalization is such a driving force, understood as the broadening, deepening, and acceleration of global interconnectedness (Held et al., 1999) and increasing interdependence and convergence. Globalization affects higher education in a variety of dynamic ways (Itoi & Mizukura, 2023). The inevitability of this impact has been underscored in various ways: "Not all universities are (particularly) international, but all are subject to the same processes of globalization—in part as objects, victims even, of these processes, but in part as subjects, or key agents, of globalization" (Holmes, 2021).

3.2.4. Linguistic competence

Language competence, understood as a person's ability to communicate effectively in one or more languages, is a fundamental pillar in the development of comprehensive education, especially in a globalized world where multilingualism and internationalization play key roles in the academic and professional training of individuals (Llurda et al., 2014). English, in particular, has established itself as the lingua franca in many international contexts. However, studies indicate that despite foreign language training at earlier educational levels, many students enter higher education with insufficient levels of communicative competence in English, which can limit their participation in mobility programs and other international opportunities (Annous & Nicolas, 2015; Arroyo-Barrigüete et al., 2022; Lin, 2019).

The internationalization of higher education has increased student and academic mobility, making the development of strong language skills imperative (Evison et al., 2019). Multilingualism enriches educational and professional experiences, enabling a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and perspectives (Bradford, 2018; Sánchez & Salaberri, 2017). In school contexts, especially in countries with high cultural and linguistic diversity, educational proposals have been implemented that seek to combat linguistic and cultural barriers, promoting interculturality and multilingualism as tools for inclusion and educational enrichment. From an educational perspective, linguistic competence is not limited to the learning of foreign languages but encompasses the development of comprehension and production skills in different languages, which allows students to access information from different sources and actively participate in international academic scenarios (Naka & Spahija, 2022). In this sense, the internationalization of higher education has promoted the teaching of content in multiple languages, increasing student mobility and strengthening academic cooperation between countries.

The development of linguistic competence in a multilingual environment contributes significantly to comprehensive education, as it fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to adapt to different cultural contexts (Gallego-Balsá & Cots, 2018). In educational institutions in countries with high linguistic diversity, bilingual and multilingual education programs have been implemented that seek not only the mastery of a second language but also the valuation of linguistic diversity as a resource for learning and social integration (Gallego-Balsá & Cots, 2018; García-Ponce & Mora-Pablo, 2023). Furthermore, strengthening language skills in teacher training at the university level is essential to ensure that future professionals can transmit knowledge effectively in multilingual environments (Kirkgöz et al., 2023). A lack of preparation in this area can limit teachers' ability to serve students from different linguistic backgrounds, affecting educational quality and equitable access to education (Xing & Zixin, 2019).

4. Future Perspectives

Looking toward the future, multilingualism and internationalization in higher education are expected to evolve in tandem with technological advancements, policy reforms, and sociocultural shifts. Emerging tools such as artificial intelligence, intelligent tutoring systems, and virtual reality environments are transforming language learning by offering personalized, immersive experiences that enhance both linguistic proficiency and intercultural awareness (Chen et al., 2017; 2018; Hopp & Thoma, 2021). Additionally, the rise of virtual academic exchanges and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) provides accessible, sustainable alternatives to physical mobility, fostering greater equity in international engagement (Hildeblando et al., 2022). However, challenges such as unequal access to digital resources (Lomicka & Lord, 2019), institutional inertia, and limited teacher training in multilingual pedagogies (Dooly & O'Dowd, 2018) continue to impede progress. Moreover, the dominance of English in academic spaces poses risks to linguistic diversity, highlighting the need for policies that balance global communication with the preservation of minority and indigenous languages (Piller & Cho, 2013; Triki et al., 2022).

Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies assessing the long-term impacts of multilingual education on students' academic success, employability, and global citizenship. Comparative analyses across diverse sociolinguistic contexts can offer valuable insights into how multilingualism is implemented and experienced in various educational systems (Atabekova et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is a pressing need to develop robust assessment tools for measuring intercultural competence and the outcomes of internationalized programs (Deardorff, 2018). Teacher education is another crucial area for exploration,

particularly in understanding how to effectively prepare educators to navigate and lead in multilingual, multicultural classrooms. Initiatives such as professional learning communities and action research may offer promising pathways for sustainable capacity building in this domain. By embracing linguistic diversity and fostering inclusive, interconnected learning environments, higher education institutions can better equip students to succeed in an increasingly globalized world (Tassara & Villalón, 2014).

5. Final Considerations

In a globalized world, multilingualism and internationalization play key roles in the academic and professional development of individuals. The ability to communicate in multiple languages not only expands personal and work opportunities but also strengthens cognitive, social, and cultural skills, fostering more inclusive and diverse education. The articles reviewed highlight that comprehensive education should include strategies that reinforce language teaching and linguistic competence as a transversal axis in the education of students. The incorporation of innovative methodologies, the use of technologies for language learning, and the implementation of educational policies that promote multilingualism will contribute to preparing citizens in the future for an interconnected world where effective communication and intercultural understanding are essential skills for academic and professional success.

In summary, the hypothesis that multilingualism and internationalization in higher education led to improved academic excellence, linguistic competence, cultural diversity, and the development of global citizenship is supported by a growing body of empirical evidence. These elements not only enrich students' education but also promote more inclusive societies that are open to intercultural dialogue. In academia, sharing innovative experiences with multilingual teaching strategies, models of intercultural education, and the impact of language learning on the development of global competencies will strengthen international cooperation and the advancement of education worldwide. The integration of advanced technologies in language teaching, the promotion of academic exchanges, and the development of specialized teacher training programs in multilingual contexts are some of the key innovations that should be shared with the academic community to increase the impact of multilingualism on education and society. By embracing linguistic diversity and fostering global interconnectedness in higher education institutions, institutions can create inclusive learning environments that prepare students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and diverse world. As stated by Tassara & Villalón (2014), "insertion in today's world requires the efficient use of languages, both those that help us build our identity and those that allow us to exchange with other nations, such as foreign languages" (p.278).

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Ethical Considerations

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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