

Enhancing Global Engagement Strategy: A Comprehensive Framework for Internationalizing Iraq's Higher Education System

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ABSTRACT

In order to improve Iraq's international competitiveness and to contribute to the country's overall growth, the purpose of this study is to build a framework for maximizing internationalization methods in Iraqi higher education institutions (HEIs). "This study utilized survey questionnaires administered to administrators and faculty from major Iraqi universities in order to assess the current state of internationalization and the barriers these institutions face." in addition, the study identifies major challenges, such as limitations on resources, concerns regarding security, and the requirement for curriculum reform. According to the findings, even if certain educational institutions have implemented internationalization initiatives, there are still substantial gaps in relation to the training of faculty members and the technology infrastructure. The study provides recommendations that can be put into practice to improve research collaborations, increase faculty capacity, and broaden student mobility programs. This study offers a customized framework for higher education institutions (HEIs) located in regions that are affected by conflict. It also provides insights that are essential for the educational and economic development of Iraq.

Keyword: International Management, Internationalization, Higher education internationalization, Iraqi universities, Comprehensive framework

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization in higher education has turned out to be a strategic priority for institutions worldwide, driven by the need to enhance academic quality, foster global collaboration, and increase international visibility. In developing nations, particularly those experiencing socio-political challenges, internationalization plays an even more critical role in modernizing educational systems, supporting economic development, and promoting social progress (Knight, 2022; de Wit and Hunter, 2023). For Iraqi higher education institutions (HEIs), the post-conflict reconstruction phase presents unique challenges and opportunities. Decades of political instability, resource scarcity, and security concerns have significantly hindered the development of Iraq's education system, particularly in aligning with international academic standards. However, in recent years, Iraqi universities have begun recognizing the necessity of adopting internationalization strategies to rebuild and strengthen their academic infrastructure. By engaging with global academic trends and forming international partnerships, these institutions are seeking to improve academic quality, expand research opportunities, and contribute to national development goals (al-Ali and Younis, 2022; Jasim, 2023). This study examines the internationalization strategies implemented by Iraqi HEIs, exploring how they are navigating the complexities of global engagement in a post-conflict environment. It seeks to understand both the opportunities and challenges faced by these institutions in enhancing academic quality, fostering international collaborations, and overcoming barriers such as limited resources, security issues, and the need for curricular reform (Hameed, 2021; Abdullah and Khalid, 2022). Furthermore, this research situates Iraqi HEIs within the broader context of internationalization in conflict-affected regions, offering a comparative analysis with other developing nations (el-Hassan and Saleh, 2021). By doing so, it aims to provide a comprehensive framework for how Iraqi universities can optimize their internationalization strategies to enhance their global competitiveness and contribute to sustainable national development. This research enhances the broader conversation on the role of internationalization in higher education systems inside conflict-affected regions (Hilliard and Yamada, 2022), providing a comprehensive knowledge of the distinct context in which Iraqi higher education institutions function. This study investigates the challenges faced by higher

education in Iraq concerning internationalization through case studies and comparative analyses with other developing nations (El-Hassan and Saleh, 2021), and offers a framework for how Iraqi institutions can optimize internationalization to improve their global competitiveness and support sustainable national development.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRAQ

Internationalization has been an crucial part of the Iraqi higher education system since its emergence, founded on the British model of the early 20th century. From this theoretical framework emerged methodologies for setting up educational standards, fundamental parts of all knowledge created worldwide in many scientific disciplines and in the governance of institutions of higher education. Therefore, the great focus was found being placed upon international issues being infused into the curricula of studies of all disciplines. Post-war universities in Iraq were instituted during the last two decades of the last mid-century; it was in 1957 that the University of Baghdad was ultimately founded by integrating several component colleges. The decades of the 60s saw the creation of five universities, the University of Technology, and Al-Mustansirya, both in Baghdad, as well as other institutions found in Basrah, Mosul, and Sulaymaniah. The growth of higher education in Iraq was marked by the establishment of technical institutes, meeting the high demand for skilled workers spurred by the growth of the oil sector. However, strengthening strategy , modernizing with optimizing frameworks in Iraqi higher education can foster innovation, align graduates with strategic economic goals, and drive Iraq's transition to a knowledge-based, globally competitive economy Al-Shawaf, (A. M. K., & Yasmin, T. 2021).The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research oversees all post-secondary education, which also extends to the management of technical education and research institutions in Iraq. In 2023, the MHESR administered 34 governmental institutions and about 90 technical institutes and private universities comprising approximately 250 colleges, with a total of 1,000 departments and 30 research centers. The total number of students was 400,000 at the undergraduate level, 20,000 at the postgraduate level, and a teaching staff of about 35,000 persons on all campuses throughout the country. Universities are, for the most part, focused on teaching in the fields of education, arts, and law, as well as social sciences and administration; they also have departments of economics and natural sciences, engineering and technology, medical sciences,

veterinary medicine, and agriculture. The distribution of academic staff, which comprises 35,000 employees of the universities and colleges, is 55% male and 45% female; 43% of the teaching staff is based at the University of Baghdad. The student-to-staff teaching ratio stands at 14:1, which is better than that at neighboring countries, such as Jordan, which has a ratio of 30:1, as well as Saudi Arabia, with a 20:1 ratio. A master's degree is required to work as a lecturer at a higher education institution in Iraq. By 2023, 33% had a PhD, 40% had a master's, and 27% had a bachelor's degree and were working as faculty members. This shows that efforts are actively being made to improve the qualifications of faculty at higher education. (source: UNESCO, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education has become increasingly internationalized, which has developed as a transformative strategy for academic institutions all over the world, particularly in regions that are afflicted by conflict and a lack of resources, such as Iraq. Internationalization is a crucial process that enables developing countries to gain access to global knowledge networks, boost the reputation of their institutions, and propel their efforts toward modernization (Knight and De Witt, 2023). The research that has been done on internationalization in higher education places a strong emphasis on the significance of strategic alliances, the incorporation of technical advancements, and the reform of curricula in countries that are experiencing conflict. Internationalization presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the Higher Education Institution of Iraq (HEIS). This opportunity necessitates a sophisticated understanding of the local context as well as a dedication to overcome constraints such as those connected to resources and structures. For the purpose of enhancing Iraqi universities' global participation and providing support for national development, this analysis stresses the necessity of conducting additional research on the specific tactics that Iraqi universities can follow. According to de wit and hunter (2023), internationalization in higher education often involves the alignment of curricula with global standards, mobility of both students and faculty, cooperation across international borders, and the utilization of digital learning technologies that are available. According to Al-Hassan and Saleh (2021), these processes serve as avenues for developing nations to integrate into global knowledge economies and increase the competitiveness of their institutions. As a result of the pandemic caused by the COVID-19

virus, the usage of digital platforms has increased, which has opened up new prospects for online education and worldwide interactions. Nevertheless, discrepancies in technical infrastructure continue to present substantial obstacles, particularly in locations that are afflicted by conflict (Al-Dulaimi, 2024). In post-conflict settings, higher education institutions of higher learning (HEIS) frequently employ internationalization tactics that extend beyond academic goals and serve as instruments for national reconstruction, peacebuilding, and capacity development. According to Abdullah and Khalid (2022), Iraq's decades of violence have resulted in a significant loss of intellectual capital, deterioration of infrastructure, and ongoing political instability, all of which have made it more difficult for the country to connect with the international community. In spite of this, new government measures have been made with the intention of reducing the impact of these issues by providing financial incentives for international collaborations, research partnerships, and faculty exchanges (Hameed 2020). The study that has been conducted on internationalization after a crisis has brought to light the significance of strategic collaborations with institutions located in more stable regions. These partnerships have the potential to provide essential assistance in the process of reconstructing academic programs and enhancing research capacity (Al-ali and Younis, 2022). On the other hand, the reliance on external money can sometimes cause local goals to be misaligned (Rahman, 2023). For example, relationships with European universities have contributed to a forty percent increase in the amount of research output produced by institutions of higher education in Iraq. Iraqi higher education institutions (HEIs) have a number of challenges when it comes to fully interacting with global academic trends, despite the increased interest in internationalization. Limitations in resources, notably in terms of money and technological infrastructure, continue to be important obstacles to the successful implementation of internationalization policies (Hameed, 2021). In addition, security concerns provide a significant obstacle, since 72 percent of the leaders of institutions have identified security concerns as a major obstacle to international collaboration (Abdullah and Khalid, 2022). In addition, there are significant deficiencies in the competence and training of faculty members, particularly with regard to the standardization of curricula with international standards and the implementation of innovative instructional strategies such as blended learning (Jasim, 2023). Despite the fact that certain educational institutions have begun implementing English-medium programs and competency-based curricula in an effort to enhance student mobility, these

initiatives are still in their preliminary phases, and the development of faculty continues to be an essential requirement (Salman, 2022). In spite of these obstacles, a number of very potential chances for internationalization in Iraq have been discovered. According to Al-Dulaimi (2024), the incorporation of technology through the use of online platforms and virtual collaborations has the ability to overcome some of the obstacles that are posed by worries over security and limited mobility. Furthermore, internationalization offers Iraqi higher education institutions the opportunity to broaden their funding sources, better the quality of their academic programs, and raise their standing in the worldwide community (Al-Mahmood, 2021). Frameworks for curriculum internationalization, which place an emphasis on conflict resolution and global citizenship, provide Iraqi institutions with new chances to make important contributions to the academic discourse that is taking place around the world (Hilliard and Yamada, 2022). This allows Iraqi higher education institutions to more closely align themselves with international best practices while also addressing the specific socio-political context in which they operate. This is made possible by the adoption of such frameworks. Research that compares Iraqi Higher Education Institutions (HEIS) to other countries that have been affected by conflict sheds light on both the shared issues and the specific characteristics that determine the effectiveness of internationalization initiatives. Particularly, countries such as Afghanistan and Palestine, who are confronted with comparable challenges in terms of security and resources, have made tremendous progress by implementing focused internationalization strategies. These policies include engaging the diaspora and forming research partnerships that span international borders (el-Hassan and Saleh, 2021). The Iraqi institutions who are looking to establish internationalization plans that are more effective and sustainable will benefit greatly from the insights provided throughout these case studies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a comprehensive approach to investigate the internationalization strategies of Iraqi higher education institutions (HEIS). The methodology is designed to capture a broad range of perspectives from institutional leaders, faculty members, and staff involved in the implementation of internationalization initiatives. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to gain a holistic understanding of the internationalization processes in Iraqi HEIs. A structured survey

questionnaire was developed to gather quantitative data on the current state of internationalization efforts, while in-depth interviews were conducted to provide qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by these institutions.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

The survey questionnaire was designed based on an extensive review of the existing literature on higher education internationalization, with a particular focus on post-conflict regions. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections:

1. **Internationalization Status:** This section included questions regarding the degree of internationalization at the respondent's institution, including participation in student mobility programs, research collaborations, and curriculum alignment with international standards.
2. **Challenges and Facilitators:** This section focused on identifying the barriers to internationalization, such as resource constraints, security concerns, and faculty capacity, as well as factors that could facilitate further internationalization efforts.

The questionnaire was pretested with a small group of faculty members and institutional administrators to ensure clarity and relevance. Feedback from the pretest was used to revise and finalize the survey before distribution.

SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANTS

The population for the study included administrators, directors of international offices, faculty members, and staff directly involved in internationalization activities at Iraqi HEIs. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants with relevant experience and knowledge were included. The final sample consisted of representatives from public and private universities across Iraq, ensuring a balanced representation of institutions. A total of 30 survey questionnaires were distributed to senior administrators and key personnel involved in internationalization strategies. The selection of institutions was based on their involvement in international partnerships and programs, ensuring a diverse range of institutions with varying degrees of internationalization.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected using an online survey platform, allowing for efficient distribution and response collection. Participants were invited via email, with follow-up reminders sent to increase the response rate. In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with institutional leaders to provide more in-depth insights into the strategic decisions and challenges related to internationalization. These interviews were conducted via video conferencing and were recorded with the participants' consent for later transcription and analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data collected from the survey responses were analyzed using SPSS software by descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to summarize key trends, such as the prevalence of internationalization strategies, participation in international programs, and perceived barriers. Cross-tabulations were used to examine relationships between institutional characteristics (e.g. public vs private) and the degree of internationalization. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns from the interviews. This approach allowed for the exploration of underlying factors influencing internationalization, including institutional leadership, policy support, and faculty engagement. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides a more nuanced understanding of the current state of internationalization in Iraqi HEIs.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

As shown in table (1) the reliability of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure internal consistency. A value above 0.7 was considered acceptable, indicating that the questionnaire items were reliable in measuring the constructs related to internationalization strategies. The validity of the instrument was ensured through expert review and pretesting, with modifications made based on participant feedback to enhance clarity and content relevance.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.913	.914	6

Table 1 -Total Statistics

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Financial constraints	1.7172	3.960	.627	.654	.916
Political/security concerns	1.8182	3.701	.743	.755	.899
Lack of faculty expertise	2.1717	4.062	.710	.749	.904
Limited technology infrastructure	1.9697	3.581	.833	.748	.886
Bureaucratic challenges	2.0707	3.679	.839	.841	.885
Language barriers	2.1212	3.822	.800	.866	.891

LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study is the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias in terms of participants' perceptions of their institutions' internationalization efforts. Additionally, the sample size, while representative of a diverse range of Iraqi HEIs, is relatively small and may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or contexts. Future research could expand the sample size and explore longitudinal data to assess changes in internationalization efforts over time.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The development of a conceptual framework is central to understanding the multidimensional processes of internationalization in Iraqi higher education institutions (HEIs). This framework is designed to guide the analysis of the various factors influencing the internationalization of these institutions, taking into account the unique socio-political context of Iraq and the specific challenges faced by HEIs in conflict-affected regions.

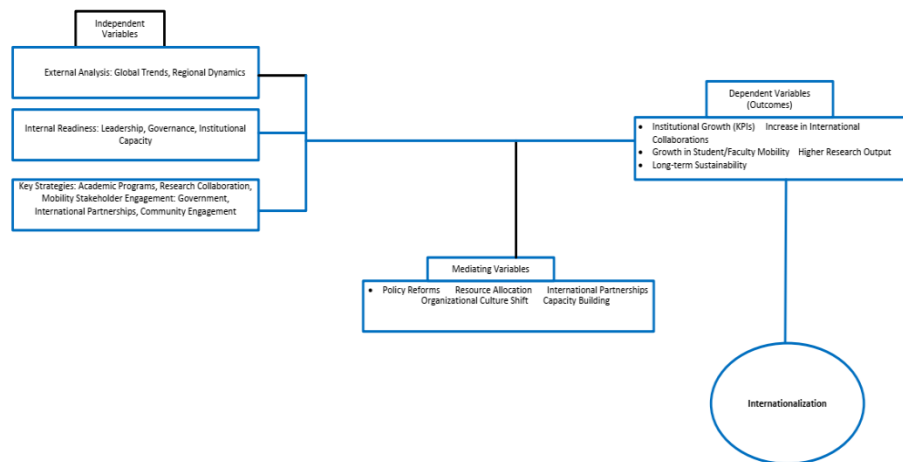


Figure (1) A Comprehensive Framework for Internationalizing Iraq's Higher Education System

The conceptual framework is headquartered on these four key characteristics. When it comes to internationalization activities, each of these dimensions plays a role that is interconnected and contributes to the formation of strategies and outcomes. Both the institutional level, where it may be used to guide the creation of internationalization strategies, and the policy level, where it can be used to inform government initiatives aimed at strengthening the global participation of Iraqi higher education institutions, are both possible applications of the conceptual framework. This all-encompassing strategy ensures that internationalization is not regarded as a stand-alone project but rather as an essential component of broader institutional growth and educational reform at the national level. According to the findings of this study, a conceptual framework is developed that outlines the various aspects and components that have an impact on the globalization of higher education in Iraq. The complexities that are linked

with internationalization initiatives can be better understood with the use of this framework, which offers direction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the survey and interviews, showing major trends and problems in the efforts of Iraqi higher education institutions (HEIS) to internationalize their higher education programs. The results are studied in relation to the conceptual framework that was constructed earlier. This framework investigates institutional capability, external collaborations, curricular change, and technological integration. Result of the Survey The replies to the survey offer insightful information regarding the current state of internationalization across the Higher Education Institutions of Iraq (HEIS). A total of thirty surveys were sent out to top administrators and key staff from a variety of institutions, and eighty percent of those individuals responded to the questionnaires. A summary of the findings may be seen below.

Statistics

Q1_Institution_Type

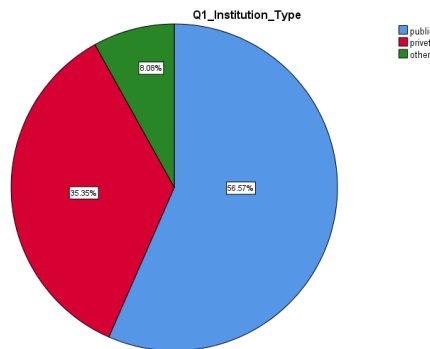
N	Valid	99
	Missing	7

Table (2) Institution Type

Q1_Institution_Type

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Public	56	52.8	56.6	56.6
	Privet	35	33.0	35.4	91.9
	Other	8	7.5	8.1	100.0

Total	99	93.4	100.0	
Missing System	7	6.6		
Total	106	100.0		



Data on the types of institutions revealed that public institutions made up the majority (56.6%), followed by private institutions (35.4%), and then other institutions (8.1%). The proportion of respondents who did not provide responses was relatively low (6.6%); however, the fact that the distribution was skewed toward public institutions may have an impact on the generalizability of the findings, particularly in situations where private or alternative institutions are often used .Data on the types of institutions revealed that public institutions made up the majority (56.6%), followed by private institutions (35.4%), and then other institutions (8.1%). The proportion of respondents who did not provide responses was relatively low (6.6%); however, the fact that the distribution was skewed toward public institutions may have an impact on the generalizability of the findings, particularly in situations where private or alternative institutions are often used. For the purpose of categorizing institutions according to the number of students enrolled, the majority of the institutions (45%) fell into the range of 1,000–5,000. Smaller institutions (less than 1,000) and larger institutions (more than 10,000) each made up 15% of the sample. This distribution indicates that the focus was on institutions of a medium size, which may have an impact on the extent to which the findings may be generalized to settings that are either extremely small or very large.

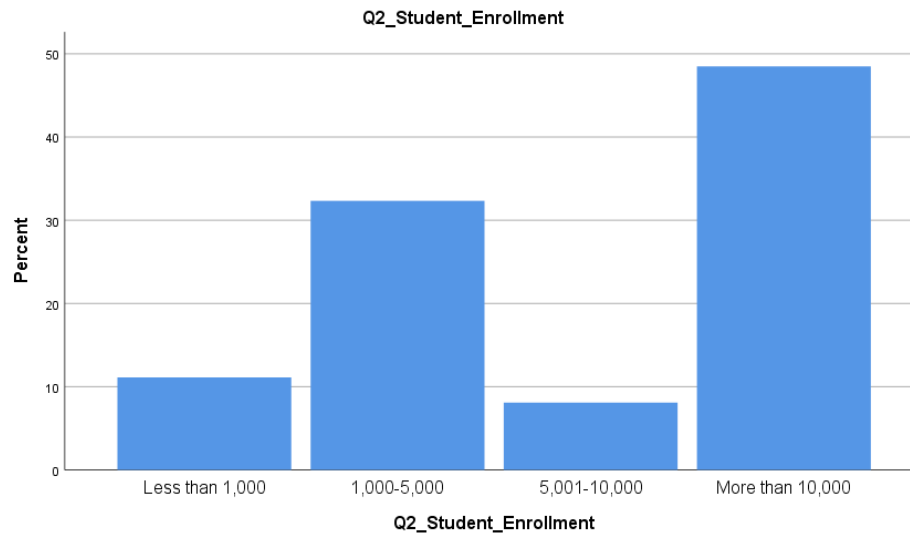


Figure (2) student Enrollment

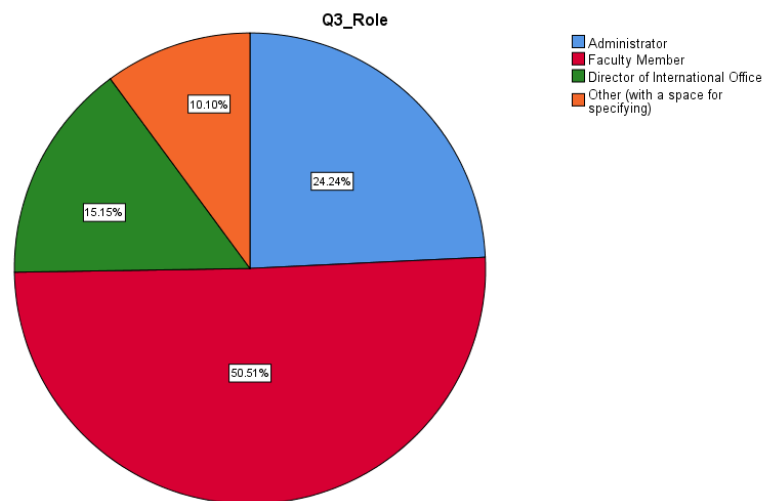
The majority of respondents held the position of Faculty Member (50.5%), followed by Administrators (24.2%), Directors of International Offices (15.2%), and occupations that were not stated (10.1%). Although the percentage of missing data was very low (6.6%), the fact that the distribution was slanted toward academic viewpoints may have an impact on the extent to which the findings can be applied to administrative or specialized jobs.

Table (3) Role

Q3_Role

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Administrator	24	22.6	24.2	24.2
	Faculty Member	50	47.2	50.5	74.7
	Director of International Office	15	14.2	15.2	89.9

Other (with a space for specifying)		10	9.4	10.1	100.0
Total		99	93.4	100.0	
Missin g	System	7	6.6		
	Total	106	100.0		



Although just 29.3% of institutions have reported having a formal internationalization strategy, 40.4% are currently in the process of establishing one. This indicates that the status of strategies is concerning. Significantly, 30.3percent of the institutions surveyed stated that they do not have any strategy at all. According to the fact that many institutions do not have codified strategies, it appears that internationalization is not yet a priority for a large number of Iraqi higher education institutions (HEIS). The institutions that have formal strategies are typically larger and have stronger resources, which enables them to pursue global engagement in a more effective manner.

Table (4) Institution Type * Q4_Strategy Crosstabulation

Q1_Institution_Type * Q4_Strategy Crosstabulation

		Count			
		Q4_Strategy			
		Yes, a fully developed strategy	In the process of developing a strategy	No formal strategy currently	Total
Q1_Institution_Ty pe	public	29	27	0	56
	privet	0	11	24	35
	other	0	2	6	8
Total		29	40	30	99

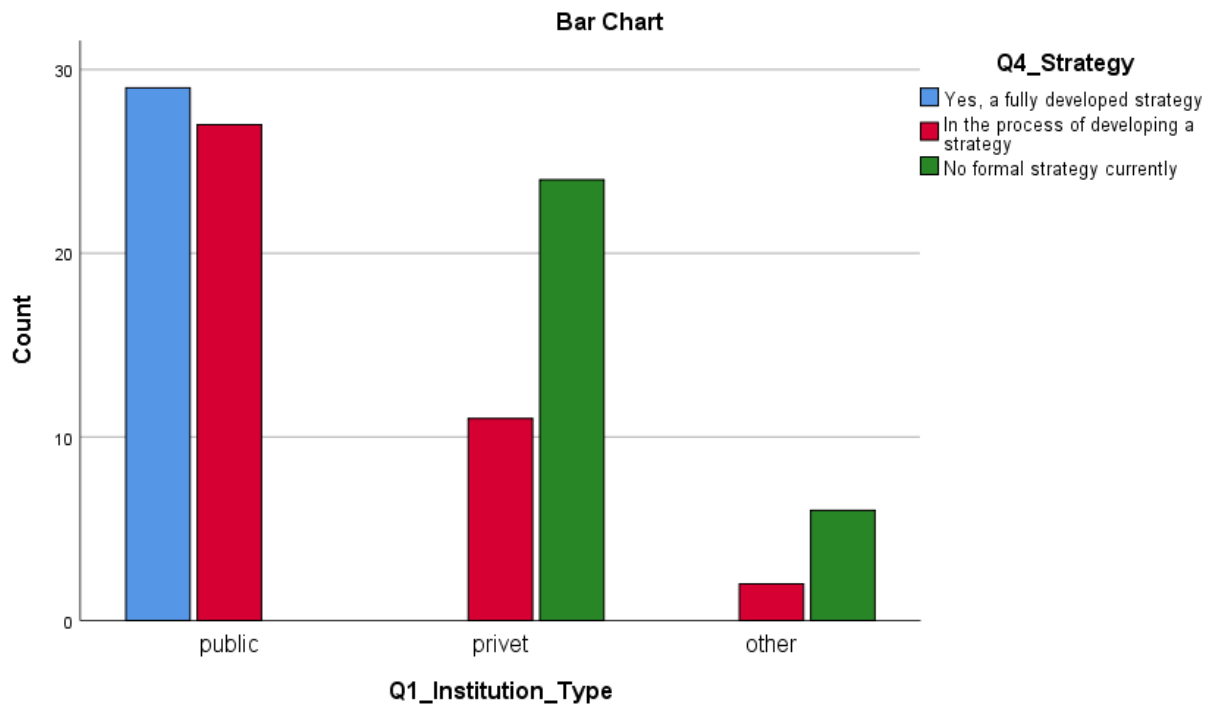


Figure (2) Institution type Vs strategy

Table (5) Resource limitation

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Q7_Resource_Limitations * Q8_Barriers	99	93.4%	7	6.6%	106	100.0%

Public institutions are significantly more advanced in their internationalization efforts compared to private and other institutions. Private and smaller institutions show more room for growth in terms of developing formal internationalization strategies. The data suggests a divide between institution types, with public universities being leaders in internationalization, while

private and technical institutes lag behind. More attention may be needed to support these institutions in formalizing their global engagement strategies.

The results of the Chi-Square tests shown in table (7) indicated that there was a statistically significant correlation between the variables (α 2 level). This equals 63.44, which is: $p < .001$ $\chi^2(4) = 63.44$, meaning that the significance level is $p < .001$). According to the test assumptions, however, 33 percent of the cells had predicted counts that were lower than 5. The findings should be interpreted with caution, and it is recommended that future research take into consideration the possibility of combining categories or using alternative statistical approaches.

Table (6) Chi-Square Tests

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	63.440 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	85.216	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	51.363	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	99		

a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.34.

It was found in table 7 that the most significant obstacles to internationalization were financial limits (65.7% of respondents) and political/security concerns (55.6% of respondents). On the other hand, a lack of faculty competence (20.2% of respondents) and language hurdles (25.3%) were found to be less widespread. The significance of these findings lies in the fact that they

highlight the necessity of focused financial and policy initiatives in order to solve systemic difficulties in higher education institutions.

Table (7)Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimu m	Maximu m	Mean	Std. Deviation
Financial constraints	99	.00	1.00	.6566	.47727
Political/security concerns	99	.00	1.00	.5556	.49943
Lack of faculty expertise	99	.00	1.00	.2020	.40355
Limited technology infrastructure	99	.00	1.00	.4040	.49320
Bureaucratic challenges	99	.00	1.00	.3030	.46191
Language barriers	99	.00	1.00	.2525	.43667
Valid N (listwise)	99				

As shown in table (8) the dataset that was used to investigate the connection between the type of institution (Q1) and the help provided by faculty (Q9) was found to be completely comprehensive. One hundred percent of the 99 cases provided correct replies, and there were no entries that were missing. The validity of following studies is improved by this comprehensive dataset, which guarantees an objective investigation into the possible links between the characteristics of the institution and the perspectives of the faculty about support.

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Q1_Institution_Type *	99	100.0%	0	0.0%	99	100.0%
Q9_Faculty_Support						

Report

Q9_Faculty_Support

Q1_Institution_Type	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
public	2.1429	5 6	.67227
privet	3.5143	3 5	.78108
other	4.2500	8	1.03510
Total	2.7980	9 9	1.06885

Depicted in figure (3) It has been determined through preliminary research that public institutions are more likely to report having a limited technology infrastructure (64%) than private institutions (29%). There are greater financial and systemic issues in public sectors, and this inequality correlates with those challenges. Although it is advised that additional statistical testing be conducted to confirm these connections, care should be exercised due to the small

sample sizes in the 'Other' group. It is consistent with the fact that financial restrictions constitute the most significant obstacle in the dataset (mean = 65.7%). This article provides support for the research on resource gaps in higher education systems that have been disrupted by conflict (Hameed, 2021; Al-Ali & Younis, 2022).

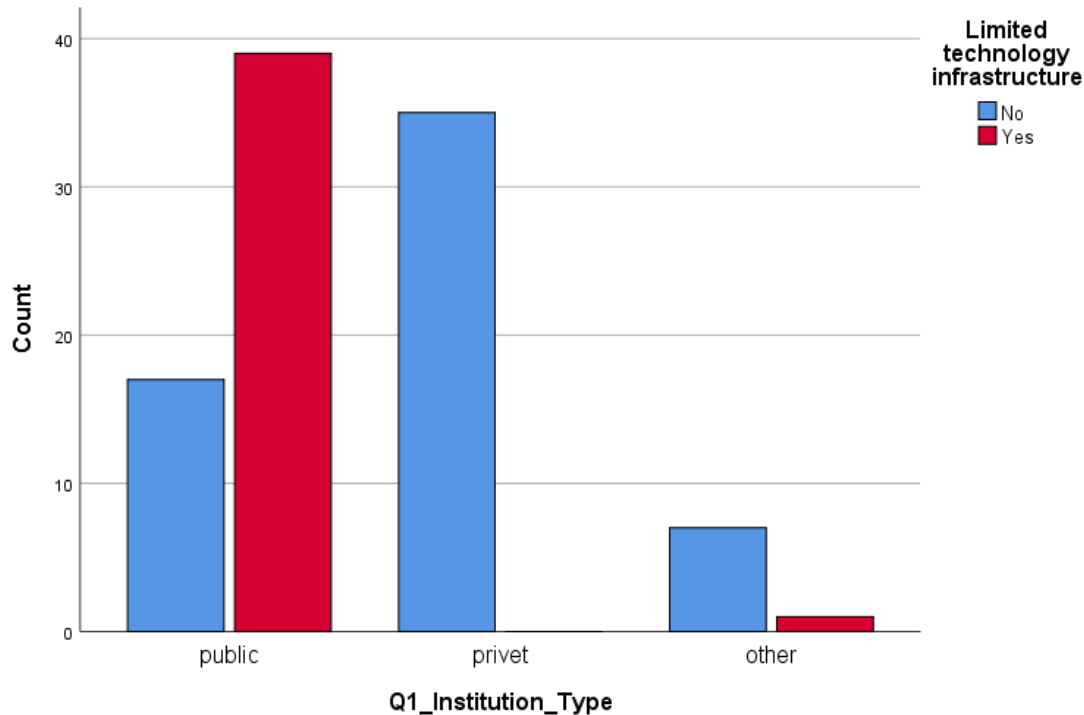


Figure (3) Limited technology infrastructure

In table (9) the Funding shortages (44.4%) and security concerns (16.2%) emerged as the foremost obstacles to international research collaborations. While administrative and expertise-related challenges were less prevalent, systemic issues dominate, underscoring the need for targeted financial and geopolitical interventions to foster global academic partnerships."

Table (8) Research Obstacles

Q15_Research_Obstacles

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Lack of funding for collaborative projects	44	44.4	44.4	44.4
	Difficulty in finding suitable international partners	13	13.1	13.1	57.6
	Language barriers	7	7.1	7.1	64.6
	Administrative or bureaucratic challenges	10	10.1	10.1	74.7
	Lack of faculty expertise in international research	8	8.1	8.1	82.8
	Security concerns	16	16.2	16.2	99.0
	Other (with space for specifying)	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	99	100.0	100.0	

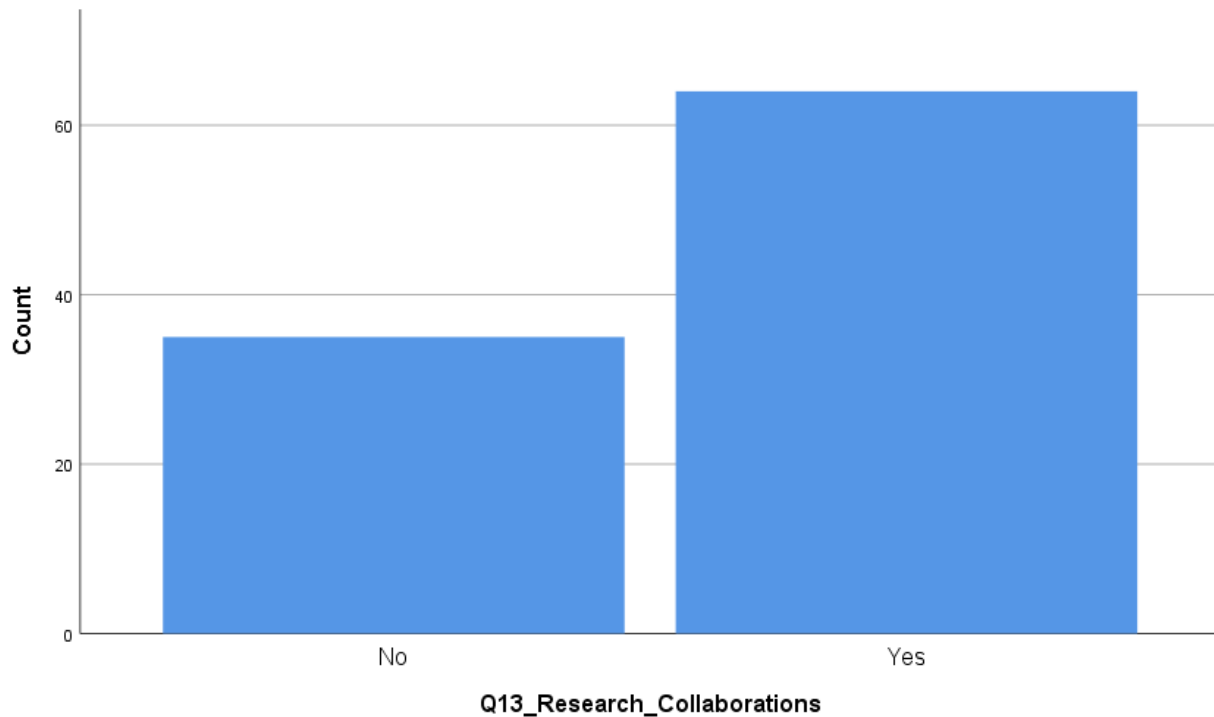


Figure (4) indicated that the Institutional priorities for internationalization place a greater emphasis on securing financing (the highest priority) and strengthening technological infrastructure, whereas government policy alignment and research partnerships receive less attention. Taking this into consideration, it appears that current resource needs are being prioritized over systemic improvements, which may restrict long-term viability. We propose taking a well-rounded approach that includes not only financial investments but also advocacy for public policies and the formation of partnerships.

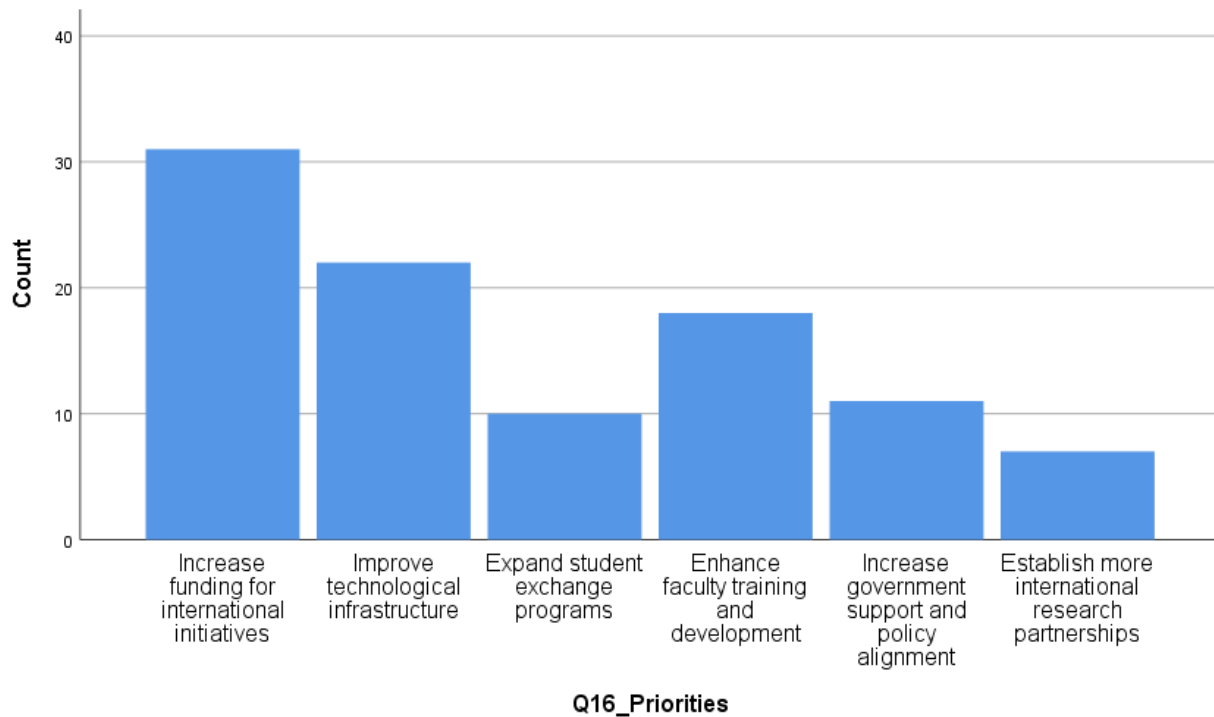


Figure (4) Priorities

a bar chart with a sorted order figure (6) below showed that 80% of respondents rated resource limitations as either significant or very significant, indicating that they are widely regarded as a significant obstacle to any attempt at internationalization. Earlier findings on funding shortages are consistent with this, and it highlights the urgent need for financial interventions and strategic partnerships to address systemic challenges.

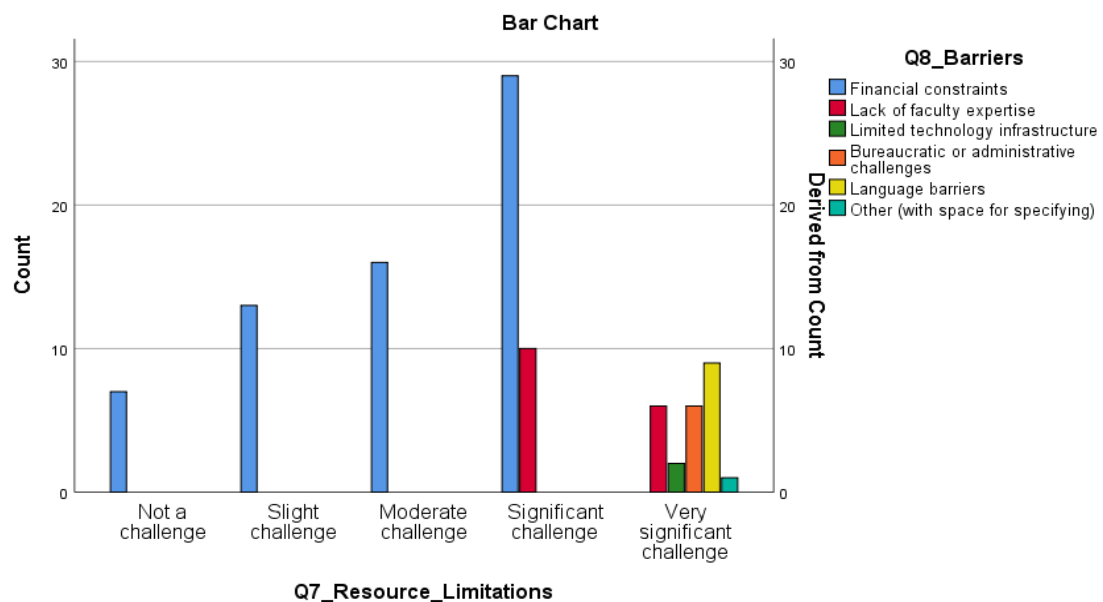


Figure 5 Barriers

CONCLUSIONS

The survey reveals that while internationalization is recognized as important for enhancing academic quality and reputation, many institutions face significant barriers related to funding, security, and strategic planning. Most respondents highlight the need for external support, particularly from the government, to advance their internationalization goals. Future efforts should focus on building stronger partnerships and addressing key challenges like security, language barriers, and limited resources. This analysis offers a structured interpretation of the survey data, highlighting key trends, challenges, and areas for improvement. Let me know if you need more detailed insights or a specific breakdown. The findings reveal that although numerous institutions are advancing in internationalization, a substantial disparity persists between those having formal strategies and those lacking them. prominent schools with seasoned personnel are at the forefront, however smaller institutions have the potential to participate more actively, particularly by utilizing online education and joint global research initiatives. The emphasis on academic excellence and worldwide standing indicates that institutions recognize the wider advantages of internationalization; yet, practical obstacles like resource distribution and strategic planning must be resolved. initiatives to bridge these gaps and assist institutions in their internationalization endeavors could markedly elevate the worldwide stature of higher education in the region. The exploration of internationalization strategies in higher education institutions (HEIs) has revealed critical insights into their implementation and impact. This study highlights the importance of adopting a multifaceted approach to internationalization, which encompasses various strategies such as international partnerships, student and faculty exchanges, and the integration of technology in educational practices. Strategic Importance: The findings underscore that internationalization is not merely an optional enhancement but a strategic necessity for HEIs aiming to remain competitive in the global education landscape. Institutions that effectively implement internationalization strategies are better positioned to attract diverse talent and enhance their academic offerings. Intercultural Competence: The development of intercultural competence among students and faculty is a significant outcome of internationalization efforts. Engaging in diverse cultural experiences fosters a deeper understanding of global issues and prepares participants for success in an interconnected world. This aligns with the need for effective language policies and support systems to facilitate meaningful intercultural interactions. Technological

Advancements: The role of technology in facilitating internationalization cannot be overstated. The integration of digital tools and platforms has expanded access to international experiences, allowing for innovative forms of collaboration and learning. This adaptability is crucial in responding to the evolving demands of higher education. Moving forward, HEIs must continue to refine their internationalization strategies based on ongoing assessment and feedback. Emphasizing the importance of intercultural understanding, language equality, and technological integration will be essential in enhancing the quality of international education. Additionally, fostering strong international partnerships will further enrich the academic environment and provide students with valuable global perspectives. In conclusion, the successful implementation of internationalization strategies is vital for the growth and competitiveness of higher education institutions. By prioritizing these efforts, HEIs can contribute to a more inclusive, diverse, and globally engaged academic community, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and research on a worldwide scale.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Like all research, this study has certain limitations and areas for improvement. One of the primary limitations is that the study focused on a specific geographical context—higher education institutions in Iraq—and the findings may not necessarily be generalizable to other conflict-affected nations or regions with different socio-political environments. Internationalization strategies may vary significantly based on the unique challenges and opportunities present in different cultural or economic contexts. Therefore, the insights drawn from this study should be applied cautiously when considering internationalization strategies for higher education institutions in other regions. Additionally, the study focused primarily on the perspectives of key stakeholders within Iraqi universities. To obtain a more holistic view, future research could expand the respondent base to include faculty members, students, and policymakers from various higher education institutions, both public and private, and across different regions. This would help to capture a more comprehensive understanding of internationalization efforts and the challenges faced in different types of institutions. Another limitation is the use of quantitative methods through surveys, which may not fully capture the complexity of internationalization strategies. Future studies could incorporate qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews or case studies, to gain richer insights into the

experiences, motivations, and perceptions of university staff and faculty regarding internationalization. This would provide a deeper understanding of the underlying factors that influence the success or failure of internationalization strategies in conflict-affected regions. Moreover, future research could also aim to confirm the findings of this study by expanding the research scope to a wider range of contexts, including higher education institutions in other conflict-affected or developing countries. This would allow for a comparative analysis across different regions, enabling researchers to identify common challenges and unique factors that contribute to the success of internationalization efforts in different settings. A particularly valuable direction for future research would be to explore how **trust** and institutional commitment influence the success of internationalization strategies. By examining how trust between institutional leaders, faculty, and international partners impacts international collaborations, researchers could gain insight into how to foster a supportive environment for internationalization. Additionally, future studies could investigate how higher education institutions in Iraq can incorporate these insights into strategies for cost reduction, resource allocation, and sustainability in international partnerships. In summary, future research could benefit from expanding the scope beyond Iraq, incorporating qualitative methodologies, and investigating additional factors such as trust and institutional commitment, which could provide a more nuanced understanding of how to successfully implement internationalization strategies in conflict-affected and developing nations.

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