ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN TEACHER EDUCATION NETWORK

Towards Transitioning Internationalization of Teacher Education into the Post-Pandemic Era

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the internationalization of teacher education institutions (TEIs) from eight Asian countries, focusing on their strategies and post-pandemic directions. Using a case study design, 14 international relations officers and 14 international students (IS) from 13 TEIs participated in interviews, and the data was analyzed using the strategic management model. Findings revealed that the shift to online modalities was a key internationalization strategy. Internationalization at home, which includes prioritizing well-being, integrating international dimensions into curricula, and investing in human resources and technology infrastructure, was highlighted. Post-pandemic, institutions see opportunities in expanding online and blended mobility, offering flexible program delivery, credit transfer schemes, and strengthening collaboration for recovery. These findings provide policy development insights to enhance ITE in the post-pandemic context.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, internationalization, mobility, teacher education

ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Introduction

Over the last 20 years, most higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide have pursued internationalization to enhance their university profiles, international student diversity, international cooperation, education initiatives, national policy-making, and strategic agenda (de Wit & Altbach, 2020; de Wit & Altbach, 2021). Internationalization highlights lifelong learning, inclusive education, social competencies, critical thinking, multiculturalism, intercultural and linguistic understanding, academic integration of global issues, and academic exchanges have become internationalization highlights. It is a way to create a 'global community of scholars' to advance the knowledge and consciousness of the world and improve education quality, research, and service (de Wit, 2019; Jibeen & Khan, 2015).

Internationalization has two dimensions: internationalization abroad and internationalization at home (IaH) (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Internationalization abroad includes the necessity to travel and mobility as a critical component. IaH involves the internationalization of the curriculum, teaching and learning process and outcomes, and international and intercultural integration (de Wit & Altbach, 2021).

UNESCO (2022) reported 235 million HEI students enrolled globally in 2020, compared to 100 million in 2000. Among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2003), International Students (IS) comprises 5% of bachelor's enrollment, 14% at master's level, and 24% at doctoral level. Undergraduates represent 57% of all mobile students, with 80% concentrated in Australia, Indonesia, Japan and Korea. Despite rising mobility, data from Asia and Southeast Asia remain a gap, and there is a need for more focused research on the region's internationalization because of its diverse educational system and culture (Leutwyler et al., 2017; Marangell & D'Orazzi, 2023).

Internationalization of Teacher Education (ITE)

ITE has evolved significantly with the exchange of educational ideas during colonial periods. UNESCO's establishment in 1945 highlighted global cooperation, scholarship programs, and cross-cultural exchanges for teachers. In the 1970s-1980s, increased globalization and the formation of international networks emphasized comparative education and cultural competence. In the 2000s, mobility programs enhanced teachers' international experiences. The digital transformation in the 2010s advanced collaboration and professional development, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Nowadays, ITE commitments are commonly aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4, promoting inclusive and equitable quality education. Internationalization now focuses on developing teachers' global and intercultural competencies (Guo & Guo, 2020).

In Southeast Asia, TE has been on the agenda of international networks and organizations, such as the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), underscoring their priority of revitalizing teacher education. It promotes inclusive TE programs, digital transformation, and partnerships for professional development, practice-based reforms, and a shared teacher competency framework (SEAMEO, 2020). ASEAN also recognizes the importance of TE in various policy documents and initiatives to improve the quality of education through regional cooperation. The ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025 underscores the need for innovative teaching methods and

continuous professional development to equip educators with the skills required in the 21st century (ASEAN, 2021).

For Koh et al. (2022), there is no standard way of internationalizing TE as it needs to be context-specific. It requires responsiveness to the local needs and national anchors while incorporating the international dimension and global competencies (Bamberger & Morris, 2023; DeCuir, 2017; Kurup et al., 2021; Leutwyler et al., 2017). TEIs need to do away with 'mainstream internationalization' that is commercial (Leutwyler et al., 2017). Strategies include studying abroad experiences, internationalizing the curriculum by integrating intercultural content and exploring pedagogical strategies like collaborative online international learning (COIL) and field experiences abroad (Abraham & Brömssen, 2018; Wilwohl, 2017). TEIs must be able to hone student teachers' intercultural competence through multicultural and global citizenship education to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners and assist in instruction and academic success (Goodwin, 2020; Larsen, 2016; Lee, 2015; Mikulec, 2014). Moreover, pre-service teachers benefit from mobility programs focusing on practice teaching to improve their pedagogical knowledge, intercultural understanding, and English language proficiency (Agustin & Montebon, 2018).

Beltran (2024) identified factors influencing ITE, such as infrastructure, mobility, resources, professional development, standards, curriculum, and research partnerships. Barriers include unclear policies, inadequate organizational structures, and curriculum discrepancies, which hinder faculty and student participation. Additionally, varying national priorities shape internationalization efforts, affecting resource allocation, alignment with global initiatives, and regulatory frameworks (Sharma & Rajesh, 2019).

Internationalization Challenges in the Global Context

Internationalization has been criticized for benefitting only a few students, and there is a lack of inclusivity and access to mobility programs. Challenges arise in aligning the core functions of higher education, such as instruction, research, and service.

Internationalization in SEA promotes cultural exchange, quality improvement, and economic benefits. However, it faces challenges such as resource limitations, unequal access, and language barriers, especially in non-English-speaking regions (Khalid & Ali, 2018). Kanmodi et al. (2024) discussed the multidimensional challenges from the individual to the societal level. At the individual level, these challenges include cultural adaptation, lack of trust, limited resources, family issues, and essential needs. At the institutional level, poor communication strategies between students and staff, insufficient information on immigration policies, lack of safe spaces within universities, and varying curriculum and teaching standards hinder the integration of IS. Intercultural management issues include cultural sensitivity, poor remuneration, limited career development opportunities, overwhelming workloads, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Limited capacity to pursue research collaboration also hinders effective internationalization. At the societal level, challenges extend broader in the social and environmental contexts, such as the prevalence of sociocultural, language, and academic difficulties. The cultural norms and attitudes toward diversity also shape the experiences of international students (IS) and faculty.

Internationalization in the Pandemic and the Post-Pandemic

The pandemic brought concerns as several universities have relied on mobility and cross-border programs (Leask & Green, 2020). Programs were affected by health hazards and government policies like border and immigration restrictions. Institutions were forced to reimagine students' international experience without physical mobility and with emerging technologies (Rizvi, 2020). Critical concerns also include well-being, disruption of academic activities, proper health information, and social support (Amoah & Mok, 2020). Sustainable solutions are needed to ensure disruption-proof programs.

The pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technology using online and digital tools to develop internationalization activities, strengthen collaborations, and attract IS (Guidi et al., 2023). They should also diversify student profiles from disadvantaged groups and different cultural backgrounds (de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Marangell & D'Orazzi, 2023). Marangell (2023) has made calls to make internationalization more socially responsible, inclusive, and equitable. Meanwhile, traditional mobility programs were disrupted, prompting a shift towards online modalities. A more inclusive and equitable approach to internationalization is emphasized to benefit more students and integrate diverse intercultural experiences into the home institution. Socially responsible and sustainable internationalization aligns with evolving needs and has become important in internationalization initiatives.

The literature provides insights into the current and future situation of internationalization. In ASEAN, while policies push for education quality, specific agenda and priorities about TE remain implicit despite TE's unique role. These trends triggered the need to assess internationalization and calibrate to fit in the current context. Institutions must examine and evaluate internationalization in terms of purpose and intended outcomes (Jibeen & Khan, 2015; Leask & Green, 2020) and the pandemic. The literature gaps suggest the need for policies for ITE, inclusivity, and equity in internationalization programs. Strategies must be responsive, sustainable and resilient. Students' intercultural experiences in the home curriculum remain an area that requires focused attention.

Knight's (2008) internationalization cycle is used to understand the systematic approach to internationalization. It consists of stages like awareness, commitment, planning, operationalization, and review of international dimensions, institutional structures, and processes. Global Competence Theory underscores efforts to equip students and faculty with skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to thrive in globalization, emphasizing the role of intercultural communication and competence as key outcomes of internationalization (Deardorff, 2006, Hunter et al., 2006). These theories provide direction to the inquiry in this paper.

Research Questions

This study aimed to assess the internationalization programs of select TEIs, their experiences during the pandemic, and the outlook for ITE in the post-pandemic period. Specific research questions are:

1. What are the TEIs' internationalization programs, practices, and experiences coping with the pandemic?

2. What are the challenges experienced by TEIs in implementing internationalization programs?

3. What are the priority areas and post-pandemic outlook of TEIs about ITE?

Methodology

The study used a qualitative case study design, allowing ITE to be analysed. This design allows for contextual explorations of ITE during the pandemic and facilitates a detailed understanding of how TEIs adapt to challenges and opportunities during and after crises.

A 10-item interview guide was developed to discuss practices during the pandemic, challenges and opportunities, priorities, and their view of post-pandemic internationalization. Some questions included: "What are the internationalization activities conducted during the pandemic? What are the major concerns and challenges in implementing internationalization programs? What are the priority areas that your institution is pursuing in response to identified challenges?

Content validity and reliability were ensured through expert validation and piloting to a few participants to align the questions with the research questions. The researchers communicated with various institutions to invite participants. Individual online interviews lasted 1-2 hours with each international relations officer (IRO) and IS. Participants were given the freedom to select their online interview schedule. The study was also subjected to institutional ethics review to ensure compliance with research ethics.

Participants

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, particularly expert sampling. Institutions invited were chosen from countries within Asia (Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Singapore). IROs and IS participants were nominated by their respective institutions. The researchers ensured that the participants had experienced the implementation of internationalization of their respective institutions. Participants were 13 IROs and 14 IS from 13 TEIs. IROs were selected as they are at the forefront of internationalization, while IS were also included as crucial stakeholders of TEIs.

The study adhered to research ethics guidelines to protect participants' rights. Informed consent was obtained, which clearly explained the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Confidentiality was maintained by data anonymization, protecting participants' identities, and securing data storage. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw without consequences. Institutional research protocols for studies involving human subjects, as well as international and cross-cultural contexts, were followed.

Data Analysis

The Strategic Management Model (Johnson et al., 2009) was utilized to provide an analysis framework, including strategic management (understanding the current landscape), strategic choice (selecting the best path forward), and strategic action (recommended actions). It facilitates the evaluation of institutions' integration of international perspectives. Rudzki's (1998) study highlighted the internationalization in the UK due to the need for a straightforward

strategic approach. The researchers found the internationalization activities of the institutions, international environment, opportunities and threats, the priority areas and options, and formulated recommended actions.

The coding process followed Merriam's framework (Yazan, 2015) by analyzing interview data to identify themes. Data were organized and reviewed to gain familiarity. Initial codes were assigned to data segments that reflect significant patterns. These codes were grouped into subthemes and themes. This iterative approach allowed for a detailed and context-specific understanding of the data. Member checking was done to ensure the accuracy and validity of data and the result.

Findings

The study assessed how TEIs from eight Asian countries implemented their internationalization during the pandemic. It was observed that TEIs became reliant on national policies to accommodate IS and mobility programs. Border and immigration policies affected IS, who were forced to go back to their home countries, and those who stayed in their host country. Either way, it caused stress and financial burden.

TEIs focus on shifting to an online modality to ensure learning continuity for local and IS students. However, this exposed certain problems, such as lacking infrastructure and resources to cater to students' academic needs and support mechanisms. It has also challenged the faculty's competencies in delivering courses online. Conversely, TEIs realized that online modalities increase the opportunity to widen their reach and collaborate more with other universities. For them, internationalization has become more

accessible and inclusive as it lessens the high cost of mobilizing faculty and students offshore.

The emergence of online platforms presents potential challenges to traditional student mobility. While these platforms offer new avenues for exchanges, they could also reduce the necessity for physical mobility. Students may opt for online courses, which provide flexibility and lower costs, thereby decreasing the need to travel abroad and the demand for traditional exchange programs, especially for those prioritizing convenience and accessibility. This shift may also impact institutions relying on inbound students for cultural exchange, tuition, and sustaining international collaborations. Table 1 presents the findings as the result of coding and theme analyses.

TEIs adapt and strategize in their internationalization efforts during and after the pandemic. The key themes suggest that institutions engage in environmental scanning and capacity building, as highlighted by the strategic management model's phases—such as planning, implementation, and evaluation—which are cognizant of Knight's (2008) cycle.

TEIs identified online learning and blended mobility as crucial modalities for future internationalization. Due to this, human capital, infrastructure, and other resources are being aligned with these trends while addressing external challenges like reduced mobility during the pandemic. Additionally, institutions prioritize IaH and well-being, which reflect their alignment with institutional directions under the global competence framework. By infusing international dimensions into the curricula, TEIs ensure that students develop global competencies and intercultural skills crucial for future teachers. This approach of TEIs subscribes

Table 1

Theme Analyses of the Study

Codes and Sample Verbatim Responses	Subthemes	Themes	Description
Shift to online on-campus meetings and events, development of on-campus communication infrastructure, webpage for students, faculty and staff, and information dissemination through social media. / *We need to capacitate our faculty and students in English. If we have strong English programs, we can do more internationalization.* / *We have cooperation with other institutions abroad. They train our faculty and staff in educational technology and management.*	Internationalization at Home	**Theme 1: International Environment during the Pandemic (strategic position)**	TEIs recognized the need to reinforce IaH, which focuses on curriculum, faculty competence, and language skills. The pandemic had significant financial impacts on both institutions and IS. Psychological and physical well-being became a global priority. Despite these challenges, post-pandemic internationalization policies remain underdeveloped, leaving room for further action and policy refinement.
Lack of facilities to accommodate faculty and IS, including technology: / *We experienced financial difficulties. We rely on the support provided by our university.*	Impact on delivery of international programs		
Health is a major concern. It adds stress because we still attend to our academics. / *It is stressful to deal with the pandemic while considering our strategy to finish our studies.*	Physical and psychological well-being		
There has yet to be a clear policy on how we can adopt to the and post-pandemic.	Lack of supporting policies for internationalization		
We are redesigning the curriculum so that teaching and learning online will be more interesting for IS. / *Yes, when it is back to normal. So, everything is possible like blending of virtual and offline setting.* / *Cultural immersions can be intensified to allow intercultural exchanges and learn more things aside from academics.*	Emerging approaches for internationalization program delivery	**Trends and Priority Areas for Post-pandemic internationalization (strategic choice)**	Online learning and blended mobility are emerging modalities for teaching and mobility. Cultural immersion remains essential to balance the academic and cultural aspects of international mobility. International ranking systems become relevant to institutional strategies. Cooperation among TEIs plays a significant role, and policies on credit transfer (CT) are needed to revitalize mobility.
Our focus is on international ranking. We focus on meeting the indicators of QS ranking and THE. / *We need to attract more IS and raise our university profile to meet the regional and international standard of TE.*	International ranking and rating systems are among the internationalization drivers.		
Strengthening cooperation with other TEIs for resource and knowledge sharing.	Cooperation and collaboration for post-pandemic recovery		
We need to have credit transfer (CT) policies for TE courses to ensure that exchange programs are inclusive and beneficial for students.	Policies on CT to Revitalize Mobility Programs		

		Theme 3: Recommended actions and inputs to policy development (strategic action)
Our institution needs to inform stakeholders of the internationalization activities and agenda to motivate them to participate actively. *Our institutions should review its international agenda and align directions and make it responsive to post-pandemic demands, VUCA and BANI world.*	Need to assess and recalibrate internationalization frameworks	To adapt the internationalization framework to the post-pandemic landscape, TEIs should emphasize flexible and inclusive approaches, incorporating online, blended, and in-person modalities to ensure broader participation. Policies must facilitate credit transfer in diverse learning environments. Furthermore, institutions should improve student services and physical infrastructure to support the needs of local and international students. Equitable access to mobility programs and innovative approaches must be adopted to enhance ITE while addressing the unique challenges brought by the pandemic.
COIL can be more effective in post-pandemic context. It models cooperative and innovative teaching strategies that can be adopted by pre-service teachers and graduate students. *We consider focusing on programs with online and face-to-face components. This allows more collaborative and inclusive internationalization.* *Innovation should include English programs and TE programs offered in English to make it more attractive to IS and help students become globally competitive.*	Innovative approaches to deliver internationalization programs	
Credit transfer (CT) policies that accommodate online courses. Blended mobility should be considered to make it more fit for the future contexts.	Flexible CT policies	
As IS, we need more resources accessible everywhere like online journals, software, online apps and technologies. *Academic advising, visa processing and liaison, medical assistance and insurance, library, counseling, and mental health services.*	Improvement of student services and facilities	

to Knight's (2008) internationalization cycle, where continuous assessment and adaptation are essential for sustainability and relevance.

TEIs are responding to immediate challenges and embedding internationalization in their long-term strategy by aligning policies, enhancing collaboration, and increasing international mobility. This ensures resilience and competitiveness in the post-pandemic landscape.

Discussion

Strategic Position: International Environment during the Pandemic

The pandemic drastically affected the education landscape. The shift towards IaH became a strategic necessity, aligning with Beelen's (2022) argument that IaH has gained attention as a crucial alternative to cross-border internationalization. With borders closed and student mobility disrupted, TEIs relied on online platforms and virtual tools to continue their international activities. However, this shift exposed the limitations of existing infrastructures and the capabilities of implementers. The need for investments in both technological and human resources to build a resilient internationalization strategy would help institutions to withstand future crises.

Innovative approaches became essential in ITE. Virtual mobility programs became a substitute for traditional exchange programs. These programs allowed students to engage in international learning experiences without needing physical travel, leveraging video conferencing tools, learning platforms, and collaborative digital spaces. Post-pandemic, these virtual exchanges have the potential to complement traditional mobility, offering more inclusive opportunities for students who may not have the means to travel.

TEIs will soon need to adapt to artificial intelligence, which can enhance personalized learning pathways, assist faculty and students, and improve student outcomes. Through these innovative approaches, TEIs can enhance their internationalization strategies and make education more accessible and resilient to future disruptions.

Offering English programs was also vital for attracting IS and preparing local students and faculty to participate in academic exchanges and international collaboration. This aligns with the goal of IaH, as emphasized again by Beelen (2022), and de Wit and Hunter (2015) pointing out that language competence is critical to effective engagement in internationalization.

Strategic Choice: Trends and Priority Areas for Post-Pandemic Internationalization

As TEIs transition to post-pandemic, new trends and priorities have emerged. Rizvi (2020) opined that innovation through emerging technologies supports internationalization, a shift this study supports by elaborating on the institutions' plans to adopt online learning, blended mobility, and COIL as key modalities for international engagement. Pre-service teachers perceive COIL as a useful and collaborative approach. These modalities provide flexible and inclusive platforms to enable participation in international programs without physical mobility (Naicker, 2021; Quintana-Ordika et al., 2024). Cultural immersion integration into the traditional and emerging modalities ensures that programs remain holistic – addressing academic and cultural mobility objectives and intercultural

competence development among students (Boonen et al., 2021).

International ranking and rating standards have become important among TEIs. Ruiz et al. (2023) and Teixeira and Picinin (2024) claimed rankings influence institutional strategies, including curriculum, faculty training, research, and student services to enhance global standing. The pursuit of higher rankings increases pressure on TEIs to engage in international activities and excel in measurable and recognized ways globally. In hindsight, such practice may bring some risks of being misaligned with their true mission – to respond to their national contexts and do away with mainstream internationalization (Leutwyler et al., 2017).

Strategic Action: Recommended Actions and Inputs to Internationalization Policies

The post-pandemic presents opportunities to reassess and recalibrate TEIs' policies and practices. Flexible and responsive policies are more necessary. Flexible credit transfer (CT) policies are crucial to revitalizing mobility programs, ensuring students' international experiences gained from emerging modalities are recognized. While there is a literature gap on effective, flexible credit transfer schemes, this potential innovation to policy aligns with new realities and future competitiveness (Jibeen & Khan, 2015; Leask & Green (2020).

The enhancement of services and facilities for local and international students was also emphasized. For Amoah and Mok (2020), TEIs are expected to provide comprehensive services, including academic advising, visa processing, mental health and well-being support, and online resources, which are essential as they directly impact students' well-being and academic

performance. Udah et al. (2024) emphasized the need for resilience and well-being strategies to support them.

Post-pandemic ITE presents critical priority areas, such as enhancing institutional capabilities, aligning internationalization goals with the local context and global standards, and adapting to new realities. The insights gained from this study guide the development of robust and sustainable internationalization strategies.

Implications

This study provides insights for TEIs on the potential direction of post-pandemic internationalization and their agenda. It implies the need for policy calibration to address the evolving needs and challenges with a more inclusive and resilient framework. Specifically, TEIs must adopt flexible credit transfer policies that accommodate various learning modalities to allow students to gain international experiences and broaden access to international opportunities.

The study recommends that policymakers prioritize funding and capacity-building efforts to enhance TEIs. Strengthening collaboration with partner universities can assist in harnessing resources, knowledge, and the ability to cope with global demands. Well-being, through comprehensive student services, is central to internationalization policies. These implications provide inputs and guidance for TEIs towards locally and globally responsive internationalization strategies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed critical challenges and strategic actions of TEIs for post-pandemic and

future directions for internationalization. TEIs need to focus on IaH, enhance their capacity to offer various learning modalities and support flexible and accessible student engagement without heavy reliance on physical mobility.

For sustainable and resilient internationalization, both high-capacity and low-capacity institutions should recognize online and blended learning experiences through flexible credit transfer (CT) policies. Such policies ensure equitable access to mobility programs and allow students to participate regardless of physical mobility and constraints. Strategic collaboration among TEIs through shared resources, joint research, and co-development of programs would help bridge the gap between institutions with varying capacities. Policymakers and education leaders should also strengthen faculty development programs to enhance curriculum delivery, research, and student well-being programs and services.

Post-pandemic internationalization is reshaping how TEIs deliver programs using traditional models. Collaboration, rather than competition, has become more important. Internationalization frameworks need to be flexible and scalable to promote equity and resilience.

The study is limited to the data from the participants' experiences. The effectiveness and impact of the strategies discussed were not measured. An analysis of the post-pandemic internationalization agenda may be done for further research. A study that focuses on the trends in student mobility in the post-pandemic may be explored.

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