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The Impact of Educational Internationalization on Economic Growth: A Systematic Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of educational internationalization on economic growth through a systematic literature review. The research objectives include addressing the main theories on how educational internationalization affects economic growth, its theoretical framework, specific impact pathways, and future research directions. By analyzing 37 articles, the study summarizes current research on educational internationalization and economic growth and constructs a relevant theoretical framework. The results indicate that educational internationalization significantly positively impacts economic growth in terms of policy support, student mobility, education quality, human capital accumulation, and technology transfer. Effective government policy implementation, the direct economic benefits and cultural exchange brought by student mobility, the establishment of high-quality education systems, and the enhancement of human capital and technological innovation are all crucial factors driving economic growth. This study provides a new perspective on understanding the complex mechanisms by which educational internationalization affects economic growth and offers important guidance for future research. Future studies should compare the educational internationalization strategies of different countries, explore their impact on regional economic inequality, and investigate their interaction mechanisms with technological innovation to provide empirical support for policymakers and promote the coordinated development of global education and the economy.

Keywords: Education Internationalization, Economic Growth, Student Mobility, Education Quality, Human Capital Accumulation

Introduction

The rise of educational internationalization has become a critical force in shaping global economic development. As globalization accelerates, international educational exchange and cooperation have emerged as key drivers of innovation, knowledge sharing, and economic integration. Educational internationalization enhances human capital, supports technological advancement, and fosters global economic competitiveness, making it an essential element in addressing globalization's challenges and opportunities.

By cultivating skilled workers and innovators, education has historically played a central role in driving economic growth. For instance, inventions like Watt's steam engine improvements highlight the intersection of education, innovation, and industrial progress(Mokyr, 1990). Today, educational internationalization builds on this legacy by facilitating cross-border collaboration, boosting productivity, and creating a globally competitive workforce. Through international programs, study abroad opportunities, and cross-cultural training, educational internationalization not only enhances individual capabilities but also strengthens global partnerships.

In the context of globalization, internationalization serves as a means to address pressing issues such as economic inequality, environmental challenges, and labor market disruptions. Multilateral cooperation, such as through the United Nations and the Paris Agreement, demonstrates the importance of joint efforts in tackling global problems (Keohane & Nye, 2020). Similarly, international educational initiatives promote mutual understanding, cultural diversity, and the sharing of knowledge, benefiting both developed and developing nations (Altbach & Knight, 2007; De Wit, 2009). By providing developing countries access to advanced education systems and research collaborations, internationalization supports sustainable economic growth and technological progress.

This paper examines the role of educational internationalization in fostering economic development, focusing on its short-term effects on trade and long-term contributions to technological advancement. The study explores key questions to better understand the relationship between educational internationalization and economic growth:

What are the main theories linking educational internationalization to economic growth?
What is the theoretical framework for analyzing this relationship?
How does educational internationalization influence economic growth, and in what ways?
What future research directions can deepen our understanding of its economic impacts?
By summarizing existing practices and theoretical frameworks, this paper aims to clarify how educational internationalization can serve as a tool for addressing globalization challenges and advancing global economic development. Enhanced global educational cooperation will play a pivotal role in shaping sustainable economic growth and fostering the shared progress of human civilization.

Methodology

Search Strategy

This study employs a systematic literature review to explore how education, through internationalization, contributes to economic growth within the globalization process. Systematic literature reviews enable the comprehensive collection and analysis of existing research findings, providing a thorough understanding of the current state, causes, and impacts of educational internationalization and economic growth in the context of globalization. This approach integrates existing knowledge, offering a comprehensive perspective that aids in understanding the multidimensional impacts of educational inequities on economic growth. It also identifies gaps and under-researched areas in current studies, guiding future research directions (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). Moreover, systematic literature reviews emphasize rigorous research design and methodology, ensuring the reliability and validity of included studies. This provides strong evidence to support decision-

makers in developing effective strategies to alleviate educational inequities and promote balanced economic development (Gough et al., 2012). By integrating research findings across disciplines, systematic literature reviews reveal the complexity and diversity of issues, leading to more effective solutions (Cooper, 2015).

In addition, a systematic literature review is more than just a summary of theories; it can also identify which strategies for internationalising education are most effective in addressing educational disparities and promoting economic growth by comparing the practical experiences of different countries and regions. By drawing on successful experiences from around the globe, systematic literature reviews provide viable references and lessons for other countries or regions to help formulate concrete implementation strategies and action plans to improve the actual effectiveness of policies and programmes. Such empirical analyses and summaries are of great significance in guiding the actual operation of policy implementation. Finally, a systematic literature review is not a one-time study, but a dynamic updating process that can be continuously updated and improved with the emergence of new studies. Through regular updating of the literature review, sensitivity to the latest research findings is maintained, policies are adjusted and optimised in a timely manner, a feedback mechanism between research and policy is established, and strategies for the internationalisation of education are continually improved and optimised based on actual results and new findings (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). This dynamic updating mechanism ensures continuous policy improvement and long-term effectiveness, and helps to achieve sustainable development in education and the economy.

Data Collection

In this study, the Web of Science database was chosen to systematically review the impact of educational internationalization on economic growth within the globalization process. Web of Science is a prestigious academic database covering a broad range of disciplines and providing high-quality academic literature resources. Specific search terms included "international*," "education," and "economic growth," with searches conducted in abstracts or titles where these keywords appear simultaneously. The wildcard "*" was used to include all variants starting with "international," such as "internationalization." The language was limited to English or Chinese to ensure the readability and broad scope of the literature. Additionally, the document type was restricted to "Article" to exclude reviews and commentaries, ensuring originality and research focus.

The specific search criteria were: TS=(international* AND education AND economic growth) OR TI=(international* AND education AND economic growth) AND LA=(English OR Chinese) AND DT=(Article). Using these criteria, n=285 relevant articles were obtained. Subsequently, the articles were screened based on research fields (education, economics, international relations) and quality (citation frequency and journal impact factor). The screening process involved initial title, abstract, and keyword reviews, followed by full-text reading to determine relevance and quality.

All selected articles were systematically coded and classified according to research themes, methods, and conclusions to analyze the impact of educational internationalization on the economy in the globalization process. The Web of Science database account was provided by the University of Technology Malaysia, and data was exported on June 4, 2024.

Data Cleaning and Extraction

This study aims to explore the impact of educational internationalization on economic growth. To enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings, the researchers meticulously reviewed the titles of the 285 retrieved papers, categorizing and coding their relevance to the research theme. This classification method provided a clear literature foundation for subsequent in-depth analysis, ensuring the scientific rigor of the study. The researchers carefully examined the titles of these papers and categorized them into four groups based on their relevance to the research theme. The classification process was as follows:

Papers directly related to educational internationalization and its impact on economic growth were categorized as "relevant," totaling 25 papers.
Papers discussing economic growth or international education without directly addressing their intersection were categorized as "semi-relevant," totaling 52 papers.
Papers with ambiguous titles or uncertain relevance, totaling 32 papers, were categorized as "possibly relevant," requiring further reading to determine their specific relevance.
The remaining 176 papers, which showed no apparent connection, were categorized as "irrelevant" and excluded from further analysis.

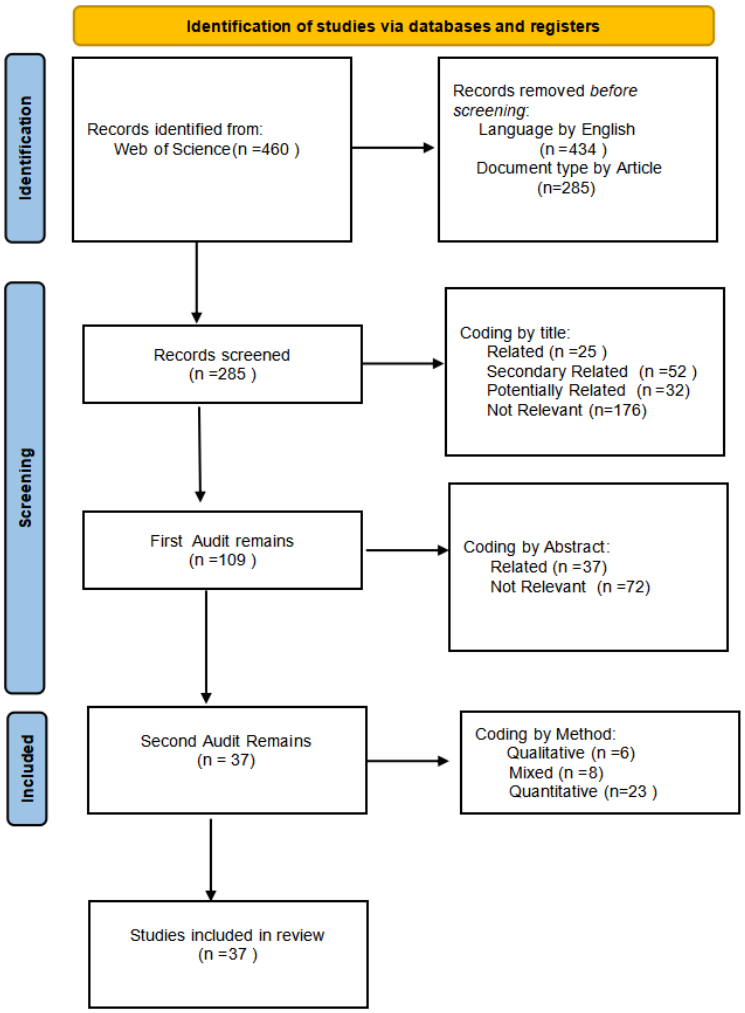

Figure 1. Flowchart for selecting articles for a systematic review of the impact of internationalisation of education on economic growth.

By analyzing the paper titles, the authors coded the papers and excluded those unrelated to the theme. They then thoroughly reviewed the abstracts of the 109 papers deemed related (25 relevant, 52 semi-relevant, and 32 possibly relevant) to ultimately determine a sample size of n=37 papers that were pertinent to the theme. This classification and secondary review method ensured the accuracy and scientific rigor of the classification, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the research findings. This classification method provided a clear literature foundation for subsequent in-depth analysis, ensuring the scientific rigor of the study.

Research Results

The 37 target articles related to the theme are all research papers, with 6 using qualitative methods, 8 employing mixed methods, and the remaining 23 using quantitative methods. Research on the impact of educational internationalization on economic growth began as early as 1996, and there has been an upward trend in publications related to this topic in recent scientific research.

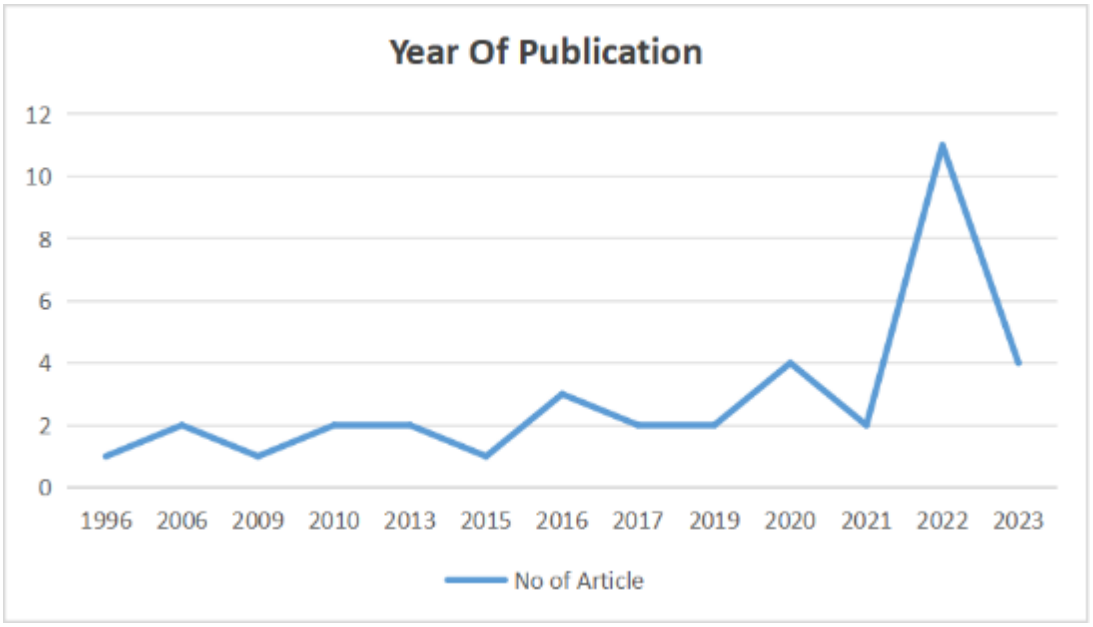

Figure 2. Publications related to factors affecting economic growth due to the internationalisation of education

Theories Related to the Impact of International Education on Economic Growth

Endogenous Economic Growth Theory

Traditional economic growth models primarily analyze the marginal efficiency of factors, considering technology and knowledge as exogenous variables. In the 1980s, Professor Romer from the University of California treated technology and knowledge as endogenous variables, meaning they not only promote economic growth themselves but also positively affect the growth returns of other factors such as capital. Continuous investment in education is the foundation for the continuous development of technology and knowledge, thus establishing a close relationship between educational services trade and economic growth. Chowdhury et al. (2022) pointed out that educational internationalization has a positive and significant impact on economic growth. Their theoretical framework is based on human capital theory and endogenous growth theory. Human capital theory posits that education enhances

individual skills and productivity, thereby promoting economic growth. Endogenous growth theory asserts that economic growth is mainly driven by endogenous factors such as technology, innovation, and knowledge, which are significantly influenced by education (Chowdhury, 2022).

Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory was first proposed by Adam Smith in "The Wealth of Nations," suggesting that human talent is as important a production means as any other kind of capital (Smith, 1776). With the development of economy and technology, scholars have increasingly focused on human capital (Becker, 2009; Rees, 1965). Romer's theory emphasized that the accumulation of capital can increase specialized knowledge, and that knowledge has spillover benefits that raise the overall knowledge level of society (Romer, 1986). Lucas further developed this theory, proposing that the accumulation of specialized human capital is crucial for economic growth (Lucas Jr, 1988). New economic growth theory places more emphasis on the role of human capital in production, especially in emerging industries where the comparative advantage of human capital significantly affects production and exports.

Keynesian Theory

Keynesian theory, also known as Keynesianism, was proposed by British economist John Maynard Keynes in the 1930s(Keynes, 1937). This theory primarily focuses on macroeconomics, especially short-term economic fluctuations and government intervention in the economy. Keynes's core view is that total demand determines the total output and employment level of an economy. Total demand includes consumption, investment, government spending, and net exports. Kemal, Hale, and Husam (2020) argued that endogenous growth models neglect the importance of government in the growth process. They combined Keynesian growth theory with new growth theory to form an evolutionary growth theory. By empirically investigating the long-term and causal relationships between international tourism, higher education, and economic growth in the small island economy of Northern Cyprus, they found a significant long-term positive relationship between higher education and economic growth (Soyer et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework of the Impact of Educational Internationalization on Economic Growth

Educational internationalization, as a multi-dimensional process, involves the international exchange and cooperation of educational resources, students, teachers, curricula, and research. Educational internationalization not only enhances the quality and level of education but also promotes economic growth through various pathways(Qiang, 2003). Keynesian theory emphasizes the role of total demand in determining economic output and employment. Educational internationalization can increase total demand by promoting consumption, spending, and investment, thereby stimulating economic growth. Neoclassical growth theory emphasizes capital accumulation, labor input, and exogenous technological progress as the main drivers of economic growth(Solow, 1956). Educational internationalization promotes these drivers by enhancing human capital accumulation, fostering technological progress and innovation, and increasing capital mobility. Endogenous economic growth theory highlights the endogeneity of technological progress and knowledge accumulation, and the key role of human capital in economic growth. Within this framework, educational internationalization promotes economic growth through knowledge spillover effects, increased human capital investment, and the promotion of R&D and innovation. In

summary, educational internationalization drives economic growth by increasing total demand, promoting human capital accumulation, accelerating technological progress and innovation.

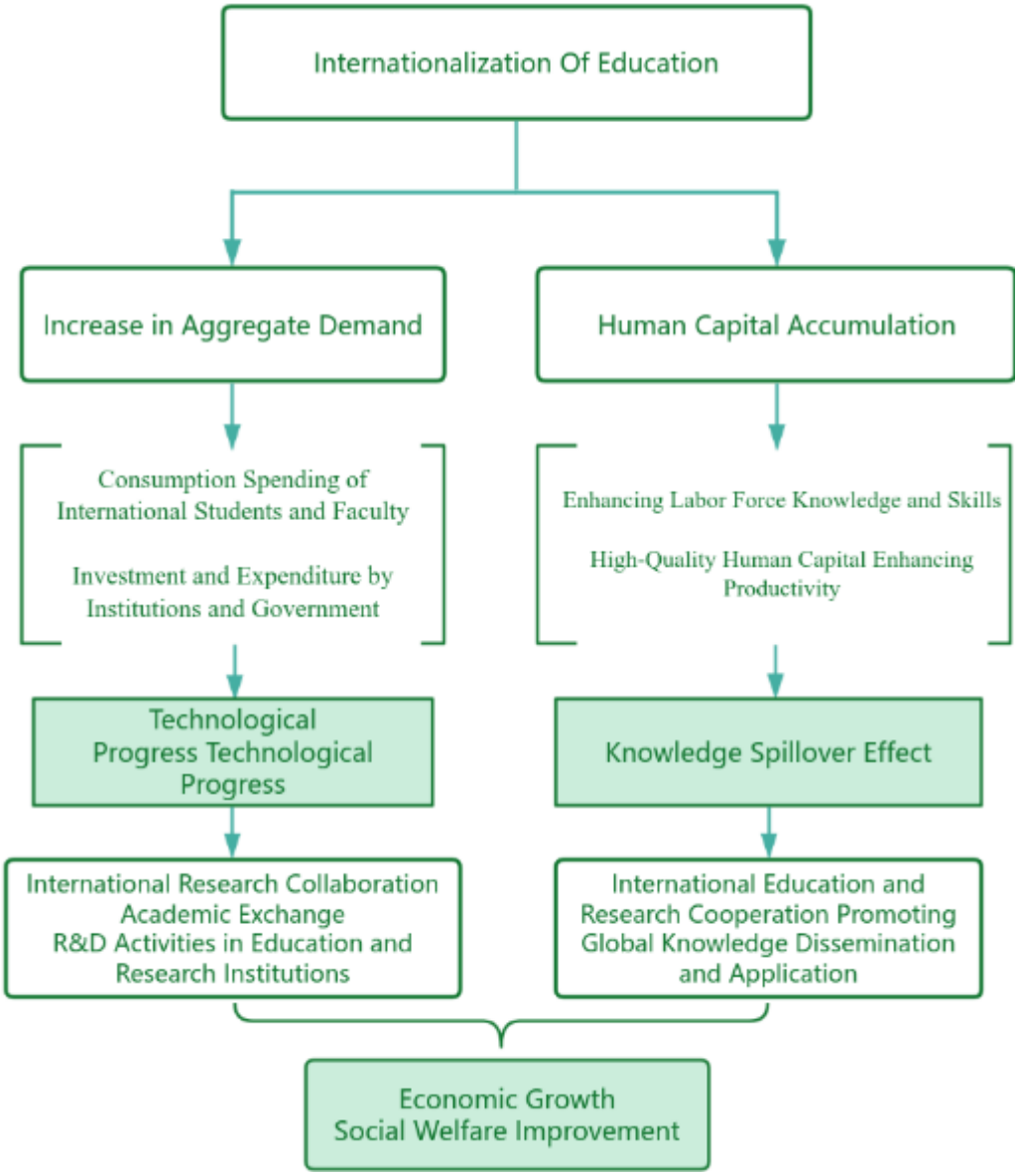

Figure 3. A framework for comprehensive analysis of economic growth in Internationalization of education

Results Analysis

This study analyzed 37 articles on the impact of educational internationalization on economic growth, covering case studies, quantitative analyses, and qualitative analyses from different countries and regions. Through systematic review and synthesis of these articles, we found that the impact of educational internationalization on economic growth mainly focuses on the following aspects: policy impact, student mobility, education quality, human capital accumulation, and technology transfer. The following sections will detail the main findings and present key data through charts.

Policy Impact

Policy Support and Economic Growth

Most studies consistently suggest that government policy support is a crucial factor in promoting educational internationalization (Deuel, 2022; Khanchaoui et al., 2020). Government policies play multiple roles in promoting educational internationalization. Firstly, by providing financial support and scholarships, governments can reduce the economic burden on students studying abroad, thereby attracting more international students. For example, Australia has attracted many international students through the Colombo Plan and flexible visa policies, making international education its third-largest export industry (Chowdhury, 2022). Secondly, government policies facilitate cooperation and exchange between educational institutions of different countries by formulating and implementing educational cooperation agreements. This not only enhances the international reputation of educational institutions but also promotes innovation in teaching methods and curricula. Nogueiro et al. identified the connection between higher education mobility projects in the Erasmus+ program and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and assessed these projects' contributions to achieving these specific goals (Nogueiro et al., 2022). The results indicate that Erasmus+ mobility projects significantly contribute to improving education quality, promoting gender equality, creating employment opportunities, and fostering economic development (Nogueiro et al., 2022). Overall, the EU, through the Erasmus+ program, has successfully enhanced education quality and gender equality while positively impacting economic development and job creation, highlighting that government support is a vital factor in achieving educational internationalization and promoting economic growth.

Market Diversification and Economic Benefits

Chowdhury (2022) indicated that market diversification can enhance the economic spillover effects of educational internationalization, reducing dependence on a single market and increasing risk resilience. She suggested that education-exporting countries adopt proactive, flexible, and innovative approaches to attract international students to achieve sustainable economic growth. Conversely, over-reliance on students from specific countries may exacerbate economic volatility risks, especially when political or economic environments change (Marginson, 2011). For example, Brexit has created uncertainty about the UK's ability to attract European students, forcing its educational institutions to seek other markets (Knight, 2004).

Student Mobility

Economic Contribution of Student Mobility

Researchers from different countries have empirically demonstrated through various regional studies that student mobility is a key factor in educational internationalization (Amzat et al., 2023; Li & Pu, 2023; Lo et al., 2022; Vovchasta et al., 2022; Yuan et al., 2020; Yuen et al., 2016). International students not only bring direct economic revenue but also promote cultural exchange and knowledge dissemination. However, the actual economic contribution of student mobility may be influenced by various factors, including students' consumption habits, duration of stay, and whether they remain employed locally (Mok et al., 2020). Additionally, the influx of international students may put pressure on the allocation of resources for local students, necessitating a comprehensive consideration of its positive and negative impacts (Fauzel, 2022).

Expansion of Higher Education and Mobility

Lo, Chang, and Chang's study on the relationship between economic factors in Taiwan and student mobility concluded that the expansion of higher education reduces the number of students studying abroad while increasing the number of incoming students from low-income countries, thus affecting regional student mobility. They found that government policy measures significantly influence the expansion of higher education, typically driving an increase in inbound student mobility and impacting outbound student mobility, thereby driving economic growth (Lo et al., 2022). There is a significant relationship between the expansion of higher education and student mobility, with increases in gross enrollment ratio (GER) and growth rate (IR) directly impacting the increase in inbound students and significantly influencing outbound student mobility (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2010). Furthermore, there is a significant correlation between economic growth rate and student mobility, indicating that economic factors play a crucial role in student mobility. However, different countries' education expansion strategies and economic conditions may lead to variations in student mobility, requiring further cross-national comparative studies to validate the generalizability of these conclusions.

Education Quality

The Driving Force of Education Quality on Economic Growth

High-quality education systems significantly drive economic growth (Goczek et al., 2022). Goczek et al. used students' performance in standardized international PISA tests to measure the impact of education quality on economic growth. They found that educational internationalization significantly improves education quality, which not only fosters positive growth but also reduces economic disparities between countries. Lo, Chang, and Chang's empirical study revealed that countries with high-quality education systems exhibit significantly higher economic growth rates than others (Lo et al., 2022). Enhancing education quality increases a country's competitiveness and its attractiveness in the global market (Amzat et al., 2023). Moreover, the standards for measuring education quality may vary across cultures and countries,

Long-Term Impact of Education Quality

The long-term impact of education quality is reflected in human capital accumulation and technological innovation. Research shows that improving education quality can significantly enhance human capital levels, thereby promoting long-term sustainable economic growth. Particularly, the internationalization of higher education attracts outstanding international students, elevating the host country's educational standards and technological innovation capabilities (Pfotenhauer et al., 2013). Amzat et al. studied the educational quality satisfaction of 1,273 international students from 76 countries at Malaysian public universities and found that higher education quality affects international students' loyalty. They concluded that improving education quality relies not only on better infrastructure but also on enhancing teacher quality and educational service standards (Amzat et al., 2023). However, improving education quality requires long-term investment and sustained policy support. Short-term policies and funding alone are insufficient for significant progress in education quality (Knight, 2004).

Human Capital Accumulation

Economic Benefits of Human Capital

Mok (2019) and colleagues found that students who receive international education perform better in the labor market, contributing to national economic development. The study indicated that international education not only enhances individual knowledge and skills but also improves cross-cultural communication abilities, which is crucial for economic development in the context of globalization (Mok et al., 2020). However, the effect of international education on human capital varies across countries and regions. For example, whether students from developing countries can bring back and apply the knowledge and skills acquired abroad to contribute to their home countries' economic development needs further investigation (Li & Pu, 2023).

Technology Transfer and Innovation

Mohamed (2022) and colleagues pointed out that international cooperation and exchanges promote technological innovation and transfer, directly impacting economic growth. The internationalization of higher education provides a platform for technology exchange and knowledge transfer, helping to elevate the host country's technological standards and innovation capabilities (Mohamed et al., 2022). However, the effectiveness of technology transfer and innovation depends on the recipient country's absorption capacity and innovation environment. Merely introducing technology is insufficient; effective application and innovation require tailored policies and measures (Pfotenhauer et al., 2013).

In summary, the research results indicate that educational internationalization positively impacts economic growth in various aspects, including policy support, student mobility, education quality, human capital accumulation, and technology transfer. These findings provide a solid foundation for the subsequent discussion section. In the next part, we will further discuss the specific implications of these findings, analyze their policy and practical impacts, and propose future research directions.

Through the structured and detailed analysis above, we can comprehensively demonstrate the complex impact of educational internationalization on economic growth, ensuring the research results section is logically clear, data-rich, and well-argued, laying the foundation for publication in high-quality journals.

Conclusion

This study, through a systematic literature review, analyzed the main theoretical foundations and frameworks of educational internationalization's impact on economic growth. By examining 37 target papers, this paper summarizes the impact of educational internationalization on economic growth, specifically in the following aspects:

Policy Impact: The effective implementation of educational internationalization policies plays a crucial role in attracting international students and scholars, thereby driving economic growth. The policies of different countries and regions vary significantly, and the continuity and flexibility of these policies are key to their effectiveness. For example, government investment in education and the sustained implementation of policies significantly affect student mobility and education quality, thereby promoting economic growth.

Student Mobility: Student mobility is a core aspect of educational internationalization and directly contributes to economic growth. International students bring in tuition revenue and promote cultural exchange and knowledge dissemination. However, the actual economic contribution of student mobility is influenced by various factors and requires further research. The impact of student mobility on the economy is multifaceted, enhancing labor market quality, promoting innovation and technology transfer, and driving the development of the education industry, thereby bringing significant economic and social benefits to host countries.

Education Quality: High-quality education systems significantly drive economic growth. Educational internationalization improves education quality through the introduction of international curricula and the promotion of cross-border academic exchanges, enhancing the competitiveness and attractiveness of education systems. Improving education quality leads to increased human capital, which can significantly promote long-term economic growth.

Human Capital Accumulation: Educational internationalization significantly impacts human capital accumulation. Students who receive international education perform better in the labor market, driving national economic development. Research shows that the internationalization of higher education is particularly important, as it not only enhances the skills and knowledge levels of the workforce but also promotes technological innovation and economic competitiveness.

Technological Innovation and Diffusion: Educational internationalization promotes technological innovation and knowledge diffusion, directly driving economic growth. Cross-border research cooperation and the introduction of advanced technologies are key ways through which educational internationalization fosters technological innovation. International education enhances human capital and innovation capacity, providing strong momentum for economic growth.

Educational internationalization significantly promotes economic growth through policy support, student mobility, education quality improvement, human capital accumulation, and technological innovation. These findings offer new perspectives for understanding the complex mechanisms of how educational internationalization affects economic growth. By analyzing 37 papers on educational internationalization and economic development, this study comprehensively summarizes and distills the multifaceted impacts of educational internationalization on economic growth. The systematic literature review reveals the specific mechanisms through which educational internationalization impacts policy, student mobility, education quality, human capital accumulation, and technological innovation, providing new perspectives for understanding the complex mechanisms of how educational internationalization affects economic growth.

In conclusion, this study makes several contributions to the theoretical understanding and practical implications of the relationship between education internationalisation and economic growth. First, the study provides a comprehensive review of 37 high-quality research articles in both English and Chinese from WOS, building a multidimensional theoretical analysis framework. This framework clearly demonstrates that education internationalisation influences economic growth through five pathways: policy support,

student mobility, improved educational quality, human capital accumulation, and technological transfer. This helps to deepen our understanding of its mechanisms. Second, the study effectively integrates endogenous growth theory, human capital theory, and Keynesian theory, combining education research with economic growth theory and expanding the theoretical scope of education internationalisation. Third, the study employs a replicable literature screening and pathway classification method, enhancing the systematic and scientific nature of the review. This method can be used as a model for future literature studies in this field. Fourth, the study identifies future research areas by summarising the literature and emphasising the importance of examining regional differences, digital trends, and policy sustainability. These contributions lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between education internationalisation and economic growth and provide direction for further research.

Discussion and Future Research Directions

Comparative studies of educational internationalization strategies and their effects in different countries and regions vary. Future research should focus on cross-national comparisons to reveal how factors such as national policies, cultural backgrounds, and economic development levels influence the effectiveness of educational internationalization. Specifically, comparing the strategies of developed and developing countries in educational internationalization and analyzing their different impacts on economic growth will help understand which strategies are most effective in various contexts and provide references for global education policy formulation.

The impact of educational internationalization on economic growth varies with regional economic development levels. Future research should explore how educational internationalization generates different economic benefits in different regions and whether some regions benefit less due to unequal resource distribution. Furthermore, analyzing the different impacts of educational internationalization on developed and developing countries and proposing policy recommendations to alleviate regional inequalities is essential. This will help policymakers develop more balanced educational and economic development strategies.

Future research should focus on the long-term sustainability of educational internationalization policies, particularly their economic, social, and environmental benefits. Analyzing the experiences and lessons of different countries in implementing these policies and exploring how to enhance their sustainability through institutional innovation and policy adjustments is necessary. Using advanced econometric methods to explore the causal relationship between education quality and economic growth and considering more potential growth factors will also be important. National policymakers should focus on improving education quality, not just extending education years, to achieve sustainable economic growth, especially by strengthening investment in primary and secondary education quality rather than solely focusing on higher education expansion. Moreover, the impact of educational internationalization on the labor market is mainly reflected in long-term effects. Future research should focus on the long-term performance of students who receive international education in the labor market, including employment rates, income levels, and career development. This is particularly important in developing countries, where the impact of international education on domestic economic and labor market development needs to be

assessed to provide empirical evidence for evaluating the long-term benefits of educational internationalization.

The rapid development of digital technology has profoundly impacted educational internationalization. Educational internationalization and digitalization can mutually promote each other, advancing global education's development and progress. Future research should explore how online education and virtual international exchanges affect the models and outcomes of educational internationalization. Specifically, analyzing the potential of digital technology to promote cross-border educational cooperation, reduce educational costs, and improve education quality will be crucial. Proposing policies and technical measures to advance educational internationalization in the digital age is also necessary.

Educational internationalization significantly promotes economic growth through policy support, student mobility, education quality improvement, human capital accumulation, and technological innovation. Future research should further explore its strategies and effects in different countries and regions, focus on long-term impacts and sustainability, analyze opportunities and challenges in the digital age, and contribute to the sustainable development of the global economy. By deeply researching these areas, we can more comprehensively understand the multifaceted impacts of educational internationalization on economic growth, providing policymakers with empirically supported decisions to promote the coordinated development of global education and the economy.

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