



Research beyond borders: Internationalization strategies for faculty researchers

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Abstract: The trends in the internationalization of higher education are not only in aspects such as student mobility, curriculum development, linkages, accreditation/certification, and establishment of impact rankings, among others. This also covers the critical part played by faculty researchers, who carry the dual function of knowledge generation and dissemination along with their various tasks (instruction, production, and extension or community engagements). As the primary actors in this process, faculty researchers play a crucial role in advancing the research agenda globally in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are responsible for fostering international collaborations and enhancing the academic reputation. This editorial focuses on the contemporary approaches to internationalization, highlighting strategies that faculty researchers can employ to internationalize their activities. In addition, challenges and future directions are discussed.

Keywords: *global standards, higher education, quality education, research culture, sustainable development*

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Building International Research Collaborations

Faculty researchers can apply a few general strategies, including collaboration with scholars from other nations. These engagements can be collaborative research (co-authorship) or participation (as a presenter or observer) in international research conferences. International collaborative research improves knowledge and practice and broadens perspectives by bringing together researchers from different countries to share best practices and research interests, conduct studies, and disseminate findings for better field effect and applicability (Yao, 2021). It entails studying and engaging in problems from diverse viewpoints, gaining better access to relevant data sets, and expanding access to research funding. Institutions can facilitate this cooperation by holding international research conferences and arranging international interactions (partnerships) with other institutions or scholars. Indeed, collaboration provides opportunities for the international presence of the individual faculty and the institution and improves its programs and priorities aligned with the global agenda. In some cases, collaborations can happen by serving as editor/peer-reviewer and evaluator of research papers submitted to international journals and conferences. Other faculty researchers may serve as panel members or advisors to international students (Yuan et al., 2023), some engaged in joint study programs (Vashchenko et al., 2020).

Challenges. International research collaborations offer valuable opportunities for faculty researchers to expand their academic research agenda and global efforts, but they also come with distinct challenges. For instance, cultural differences (varying work structures/environments) and communication styles (or language barriers) may hinder the clarity of ideas and objectives. Faculty researchers face conflicting organizational and cultural prospects and customs (Dusdal & Powell, 2021). Despite personal (individual differences), faculty researchers are bound by the environment where they come from and where they are stationed. There are norms (i.e., cultural restrictions, professional ethics, academic standards, institutional policies) set before them that they must consider before pursuing partnership or collaborative research projects. Additionally, resource disparities can cause imbalances, mainly when some (developing) countries need more financial support for international projects. Other institutions have strict compliance with procurement regulations that hampers faculty researchers from partnering with other researchers or institutions abroad. Geographical distance and time zone differences often slow down coordination, complicating real-time collaboration and the ease of communication. Distance and geographical location continue to be limitations to research collaboration (Csomós et al., 2020), frequently resulting in poor productivity. Though

electronic mail and online meeting tools are now available, providing stable (fast, strong, and economical) internet connectivity is a significant concern in some localities. Moreover, administrative and academic standards, such as differences in research ethics and data-sharing regulations, add complexity to these partnerships. Rigorous paperwork and numerous procedures disrupt collaborative efforts, which is even the reason why projects get delayed or declined.

Future Directions. Despite the challenges, the future of international research collaborations looks promising with the right strategies. Globalization has made it vital for faculty researchers from varied cultures and countries to connect and collaborate (Aririguzoh, 2022). Strengthening the profile of the faculty researchers and the institutions would greatly help the intercultural ideation of research projects relevant to addressing the global community's needs. Investing in capacity-building efforts, such as cross-cultural communication training and language skills development, can bridge the gaps between researchers. Given that communication in various languages (verbal or nonverbal) is definitely in demand for researchers, capacitating them would provide more opportunities for collaboration, not only with fellow researchers but with funding agencies and other collaborators. Technology can also enhance collaborations, allowing seamless virtual teamwork through advanced communication platforms and digital research environments. Sourcing funds for technological resources is necessary to support and sustain the institution's collaborative research initiatives. Sustainable funding models, with long-term grants and global partnerships, will help ensure continued support for international research efforts. Institutions can perform a crucial role by providing flexible administrative policies, offering grants, and fostering global research networks. However, the key to maximizing the impact of these collaborations lies in aligning international research agendas with global challenges and current issues. This alignment will ensure that the outcomes are meaningful and widely applicable, enhancing the relevance and impact of international research collaborations and making researchers feel purposeful and impactful in their work. By aligning research agendas with global challenges, researchers can ensure that their work addresses pressing issues and impacts the global community meaningfully.

Maximizing Technology for Global Research

With the rapid advancement of modern technologies, the barriers to collaboration among faculty researchers within and across countries have significantly diminished. Emerging technologies have revolutionized how researchers from various areas and fields collaborate on similar projects, from conceptualization to dissemination of research outputs. Digital environments enable faculty researchers to collaborate on their research initiatives and data-sharing processes and to engage in immediate and direct communication with other experts, regardless of their geographical location. Virtual and online research facilities, cloud data storage opportunities, and collaboration applications have transformed international work. By leveraging these technologies, faculty members can continue working together, overcoming geographic barriers and increasing the visibility and impact of their research. The role of technology in facilitating international collaborations is crucial, and its continued advancement will further enhance the global reach of research efforts, empowering researchers to overcome geographical limitations and feel more empowered in their work.

Challenges. While technology has undoubtedly enhanced global research collaborations, several challenges remain. The digital divide is a significant issue, where access to fast internet and advanced digital tools is inadequate across countries, particularly in developing areas. Per Soomro et al. (2020), "Digital divide centers on access to various attributes of information and communication technology including physical access, motivation, skills, and actual usage of digital technologies" (p. 1). Data Security and Privacy concerns also result from sharing sensitive research data across borders, especially when different countries have varying data protection regulations. Indeed, sharing and recycling data contest privacy and confidentiality, among other ethical concerns (Sariyar et al., 2015). Technical compatibility can further be a barrier, as researchers may use different software, platforms, or digital systems that are not easily interoperable. Other faculty researchers have limited background and insufficient knowledge to use or operate these technological tools. At the same time, time zone differences still pose challenges for synchronous communication, even with advanced communication tools, making coordination across continents difficult. This challenge is even prompted by unwanted disasters that slow down or cut connections.

Future Directions. Institutions and researchers can focus on several key strategies to fully maximize technology for global research. First, there should be a push towards more significant investment in digital infrastructure in under-resourced regions to bridge the digital gap and ensure inclusive access to technological tools (Pentang, 2021). Enhanced cybersecurity measures must be adopted to address data privacy concerns and ensure secure international collaboration. This extensively provides confidence among faculty researchers who share data online and earn the trust of international collaborators who do the same. Regarding software, fostering standardized platforms and tools for research collaborations would improve technical compatibility and ease data-sharing processes. Still, faculty researchers need to be capacitated to ensure that they effectively, efficiently, and ethically utilize these tools. Lastly, researchers could adopt asynchronous communication strategies, such as video updates or shared project management platforms, to mitigate the difficulties posed by time zone differences, allowing for

more flexible and productive global collaborations. Asynchronous media has worked well between teachers and students; thus, faculty researchers and collaborators abroad can also adopt this platform.

International Research Funding and Grants

Securing funds and grants for international research is essential for faculty researchers to conduct research at the global level. Knowing the options available regarding the funding source, including some international agencies, is crucial. It is suggested that faculty researchers should be encouraged and even assisted in making proposals for these grants, and institutions should offer grant writing seminars, assistance, and even role modeling. Securing international funding benefits the institution as it increases research capacity and global recognition.

Challenges. Securing international research funding presents various hindrances, like obtaining local or national research and development grants or financial aid. Grant competition can be demanding, with many academics and scholars competing for limited funding opportunities worldwide. This makes it harder for faculty researchers to acquire funding, especially if they come from smaller schools and have less grant-writing experience. Funding agencies even consider the personal profile of the proponent, making it more challenging for faculty researchers with no or limited research experience to secure financial support. Navigating complex application processes is another problem, as different international funding sources have varied needs and expectations, which may be time-consuming and difficult. The lack of training and mentoring makes it challenging for budding faculty researchers. Furthermore, differences in legal, financial, and administrative rules between countries make cross-border collaboration for joint financing bids problematic. Supporting sustainability is also an issue, as many short-term grants make it easier to sustain long-term research initiatives with ongoing support.

Future Directions. To overcome these challenges, institutions and researchers can focus on several strategies moving forward. Capacity building in grant writing is essential, with institutions offering regular workshops, mentorship programs, and adequate resources to help faculty craft strong proposals. It would be better if this support system is part of the institution's strategic plan and will be part of the individual development plan of the faculty researcher. Developing strategic partnerships with international organizations and funding bodies can also increase access to grant opportunities and improve success rates. Additionally, simplifying the administrative process for international collaborations through more transparent policies and support mechanisms can encourage more faculty members to engage in global projects. Institutions should focus on creating sustainable funding streams through multi-year partnerships with international agencies to support long-term research projects. Lastly, utilizing technology to identify and apply for grants globally can streamline the process and ensure faculty researchers know all available funding opportunities.

Enhancing Global Research Visibility

Internationalization is also a way of enhancing the recognition and dissemination of their research work worldwide. Strategies include writing in high-impact international journals, presenting results at international forums, and being part of the global academic and research community. Institutions can support such efforts by encouraging and rewarding the faculty researcher for international publications, offering funds for registering and traveling to conferences, or engaging in international scholarly organizations. Global research visibility also positively impacts the institutions of faculty researchers as it increases prestige through recognition.

Challenges. Enhancing global research visibility presents several difficulties for faculty researchers. Language barriers limit the ability of non-English speakers to publish in high-impact international journals, where English is often the primary language. As to Canestrino et al. (2022), "the growth in international partnerships and the increasing number of various teams affect knowledge sharing because individuals participate in daily activities in a language they are not native speakers" (p. 1). Publication bias may also pose difficulties, as researchers from emerging or smaller institutions and developing countries might struggle to get their output accepted in prestigious journals or conferences. Niner and Wassermann (2021) mentioned that "international conferences are an important element of the professional agenda of researchers in many fields, and are valued as opportunities to establish, create and foster networks, wellbeing, and knowledge" (p. 1). However, funding limitations can hinder participation in international meetings or global academic communities, especially when travel and conference fees are prohibitive. Additionally, the increasing emphasis on metrics and rankings can pressure researchers to focus on high-impact publications rather than locally relevant or innovative research, potentially narrowing the scope of their work (Ramassa et al., 2024). This even leads to faculty researchers publishing in predatory journals and paid services to get their work published. At the same time, some fall into predatory conferences, which is evident in numerous emails and social media promotions.

Future Directions. Institutions and researchers can adopt multiple proactive steps for better global visibility of research work. This includes support for multilingual publications and collaborations that can break down language barriers and incentivize academic faculty to publish in international journals (to create a global impact) while keeping

checks on local and national relevance. Researchers using indigenous or local languages may disseminate their output in journals and conferences that accept languages other than English medium. It would be better for them to make translations to the English language for more comprehensive visibility, especially in the global context. Institutions can offer training on writing scholarly works, such as participatory action research [see Cornish et al. (2023)], and the submission process so that researchers benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of the publication journey. Funding to attend international conferences and be a part of scholarly organizations should be broadened with a specific emphasis on early-career researchers. Also, open-access platforms and digital repositories to publish research can make it more available internationally by expanding its reach. They should also consider recognizing a variety of research outputs, such as reputable publications, partnerships, public engagement, and international policy discussions so that they have an impact far beyond the walls of academia.

Cross-Cultural Research Competence

Researching across international landscapes involves recognizing cross-cultural relations and their pros and cons and learning about possible ethical issues. Faculty researchers should have adequate intercultural competency to handle most global collaborative research problems (conflict of interests, unprofessional practices, personal biases). Intercultural competencies are potential drivers of international research collaboration in higher education (Guillén-Yparrea & Ramírez-Montoya, 2023) and other areas. Institutions can avail themselves of tutorials on cross-cultural relationships, issues of ethical consideration when conducting research in different cultures, and culturally sensitive research techniques. Acquiring such competencies protects the operations of faculty researchers and permits them to interact jointly and in international partnerships with research participants.

Challenges. Faculty researchers are challenged to strengthen cross-cultural research skills. Varieties in social norms, values, and ways of communication can exist culturally, creating the possibility for misunderstandings between researchers and participants to emerge that may influence both processes with research data interpretation (Gopalkrishnan, 2019). Stemming from this, researchers face differing ethical standards and practices worldwide, especially concerning consent, privacy, and handling of research participants. Many emerging faculty researchers are unfamiliar with research ethics, while some institutions have not established their research ethics committees and policies. Even senior faculty researchers neglect ethical standards and do not declare them in their research. Research design and results are also subject to inherent partiality and cultural assumptions, resulting in biased findings that need to reflect the sociocultural backdrop appropriately. International research projects may struggle or fail without training in cross-cultural research competencies—surprisingly, few resources are available to researchers at any level—and understanding best practices across cultural contexts. This is particularly true when considering ethical and methodological measures for cross-cultural research initiatives (Brosch et al., 2020).

Future Directions. To address these challenges, institutions should prioritize developing comprehensive cross-cultural training programs and offering tutorials and workshops on intercultural communication, ethics, and culturally sensitive research methods. Incorporating ethical frameworks that account for the diversity of cultural contexts can help researchers navigate complex moral issues and ensure that they conduct responsible and respectful research (Merga & Mason, 2021). These activities should be strengthened with the institution's and individual faculty's dual commitment. Institutions should also foster international mentorship programs, connecting researchers with experienced colleagues from different cultural backgrounds who can provide guidance and support. In addition, adopting collaborative research models that actively involve local researchers and communities in the design and implementation of studies can help mitigate bias and ensure more accurate and culturally appropriate outcomes. Finally, institutional policies and incentives should be developed, rewarding faculty researchers who engage in global partnerships and demonstrate a commitment to ethical and culturally informed research practices. These incentive schemes may include financial support, professional recognition, academic promotion, and capacity enhancement, as in Jessani et al. (2020).

Mentorship and Professional Development

Faculty researchers need mentorship and continuing professional development to succeed in their endeavors toward internationalization. There is a need to capacitate emerging (or early career) faculty researchers to sustain global research impact and visibility (Kifor et al., 2021). The senior researchers with prior experience in international collaboration can support the junior faculty by giving them ideas regarding developing global networks, applying for international grants, and understanding cultural differences. As it is, institutions should also consider training and development programs that cover proposal development for international grants, managing cross-boundary projects, and publishing in international journals. This will empower faculty researchers' research self-efficacy, resulting in scientific productivity (Pentang & Domingo, 2024).

Challenges. Mentorship and professional development for faculty researchers face several challenges, particularly regarding internationalization. A key challenge is the need for established mentorship programs emphasizing global research and innovation. This leaves young researchers needing more direction in navigating

international relationships (Talbert et al., 2021). Time constraints also hinder mentorship, as senior faculty often have heavy workloads that limit their time to mentor junior colleagues. Additionally, geographical and institutional barriers can make it challenging to connect with experienced mentors from other regions or institutions who can provide insights into international research networks. The variation in professional development resources across institutions can further disadvantage faculty at smaller or under-resourced universities, limiting their opportunities for training in global research strategies. Though mentoring interactions are an excellent means to stimulate critical thinking and are essential for creating flourishing careers (Ssemata et al., 2017), limited funding for mentorship initiatives and international professional development can prevent researchers from engaging fully in these programs. Opportunities are even limited where some fields are not prioritized.

Future Directions. To address these challenges, institutions can implement structured mentorship programs that pair early-career researchers with senior faculty experienced in international research, creating opportunities for knowledge transfer on global networking, grant writing, and cross-cultural collaboration. Mentorship is a critical component in boosting the research potential of researchers (Brizuela et al., 2023). Institutions better promote a culture of collaborative mentorship, where mentorship is recognized and rewarded, encouraging senior researchers to commit to building the next generation of globally competitive and responsive faculty researchers. These programs can be supplemented by virtual mentorship platforms, enabling connections across institutions and borders, which helps overcome geographical limitations. Institutions should also invest in professional development workshops focusing on proposal development for international grants, managing cross-border research projects, and publishing in high-impact international journals. Steered by online professional development (Rienties et al., 2023), faculty researchers may be exposed to opportunities for growth and collaboration. In terms of funding, creating specific funds for mentorship and global research training can provide faculty researchers with the resources to engage in international development opportunities. Institutions may grant their faculty researchers to go on advanced studies and faculty exchange programs in other academic, industry, or research institutions abroad.

The Way Forward

There is a dire need for international strategies for faculty researchers since they contribute to improving the research agenda at the global level and the rating of higher education institutions. Internationalization has affected educational institutions' emphasis on around-the-world engagement and global competency-based standards (Robiños & Alcazaren, 2023). To this effect, institutions should enhance the following strategic areas: developing partners with international researchers and institutes, joint research partnerships, technology integration, accessing international research grants, increasing visibility of faculty researchers' work globally, enhancing cross-cultural competencies, faculty development, and mentoring in specialized fields but also considering interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary projects, addressing emerging challenges and potential directions for sustainable development. Embracing complexity is critical for adequately understanding and improving research collaboration for global development (Matthews et al., 2020). This allows for viable solutions to the world's pressing concerns. Thus, as faculty researchers increase their level of internationalization, they build knowledge that is not bound by local or national borders but helps solve global problems.

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