The Role of International Office at Open University: A Comparative Analysis of Best Practices and Organizational Learning Strategies

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Abstract. *This study investigates the role of international office in promoting institutional excellence at open universities. Through a qualitative case study and comparative analysis of twelve open universities in China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Vietnam, the research identifies areas for improvement and explores strategies to foster organizational learning. Key findings include the need for enhanced initiatives, addressing challenges, strengthening internal collaboration, and measuring the impact of internationalization efforts. Recommendations focus on implementing best practices, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and integrating learning outcomes into international affairs initiatives. This study provides actionable insights for open universities to advance their internationalization agendas and achieve excellence.*

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, there is an increase in higher education institutions recognizing internationalization as a strategic imperative. Open universities, with their flexible learning models and global reach, are

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particularly well-positioned to play a significant role in fostering cross-cultural exchange, knowledge sharing, and global citizenship (Grad & van der Zande, 2022). By expanding their international presence and engaging with diverse student populations, open universities can enhance their reputation, attract top talent, and contribute to developing a global knowledge society.

International office (IO) is a crucial hub for facilitating internationalization efforts within open universities. It plays a pivotal role in coordinating various activities related to student exchange, faculty mobility, international partnerships, and cultural exchange programs. A well-functioning IO can significantly contribute to the success of an institution's internationalization initiatives.

Despite the growing importance of internationalization, open universities often face challenges in effectively implementing and managing their internationalization strategies. Factors such as limited resources, cultural differences, and changing geopolitical landscapes can hinder progress. To overcome these obstacles and achieve sustainable internationalization, open universities need to assess their current practices and identify areas for improvement continuously.

While there has been a growing body of research on internationalization in higher education, studies focusing on open universities and their IOs are relatively limited. Existing research often concentrates on general trends and challenges in internationalization without delving into open universities' unique characteristics and strategies. Additionally, there is a lack of empirical studies that explore the relationship between organizational learning and the success of internationalization initiatives in open universities. This study is unique because it specifically examines internationalization in open universities—an area often overlooked in higher education research—by using a comparative case study. Unlike traditional studies, it integrates organizational learning theory to highlight how IO adapt and drive institutional excellence through continuous improvement. It also offers a practical "Model of Excellence" framework that maps the dynamic interplay between IO initiatives, internal collaboration, challenges, and measurable impact. Through rich qualitative data and regionally diverse perspectives, the

study provides actionable insights and policy-level recommendations tailored to the distinct context of open and distance learning environments.

This study investigates the role of the International Office (IO) in promoting institutional excellence at open universities by conducting a comparative analysis of best practices in IOs of open universities worldwide. By examining successful strategies and identifying areas for improvement, the study seeks to provide valuable insights for open universities seeking to enhance their internationalization efforts. Furthermore, the research explores the role of organizational learning in facilitating effective internationalization, highlighting how open universities can adapt to changing global dynamics and continuously improve their practices.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to understand complex and contextual phenomena in internationalization at Open University (OU). The choice of qualitative methods is guided by previous studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Edwards & Holland, 2023; Leavy, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018), which emphasize the strength of these methods in exploring the dynamics of internationalization through open-ended interviews and document analysis, capturing nuanced, context-specific insights. Since internationalization in Open Universities is influenced by cultural, institutional, and regional factors, this approach enables flexibility and adaptability through iterative data collection and analysis processes. A case study approach is adopted within this framework, facilitating a comprehensive examination of internationalization practices across several Asian Open Universities, including Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Guangdong Open University, Universitas Terbuka, and Anadolu University. By performing comparative analysis across cases, this study reveals commonalities and differences among universities and provides insights into how cultural and regional factors shape internationalization practices. Through this case study approach, the research aims to establish a framework of best practices and strategies for enhancing internationalization at Open Universities in Asia,

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offering more profound insights into the organizational learning processes within OU contexts.

The objective of the interviews in this study was to gather in-depth insights into the role and impact of the IO in advancing the OU's internationalization goals. Specifically, the interviews aimed to explore how the IO contributed to the university's overall success and global standing, assessed challenges, and proposed solutions for improvement. The interviews also investigated strategies for collaboration with other departments, efforts to attract international students, support for faculty in research partnerships, contributions to campus diversity, adaptation to global education trends, and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of internationalization efforts. This data collection informed a comprehensive understanding of how the IO could enhance the university's international profile and address evolving global demands.

The university participants include Directors and staff from the IO of selected Asian Open Universities. The criteria aim to capture various perspectives and experiences relevant to the study's objectives (Kara et al., 2021; Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria are as follows: 1) employed in the International Affairs department of an OU in Asia; 2) hold a crucial role or responsibilities related to international collaborations; and 3) possess a minimum of three years of experience in global affairs. The participants of this studies are Guangdong Open University (The People's Republic of China), Shanghai Open University (The People's Republic of China), The Open University of China (The People's Republic of China), Yunnan Open University (The People's Republic of China), Hong Kong Metropolitan University (Hong Kong), Universitas Terbuka (The Republic of Indonesia) The Open University of Japan (Japan), Korea National Open University (South Korea), Open University Malaysia (Malaysia), University of the Philippines Open University (The Republic of the Philippines), The Open University of Sri Lanka, The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Anadolu University (The Republic of Türkiye), Hanoi Open University (The Socialist Republic of Vietnam)

The study's participant selection involves identifying Directors and staff from IOs at Asian Open Universities using professional networks and

conferences to find qualified candidates. Profiles are reviewed to ensure alignment with study criteria, and personalized invitations are sent, emphasizing the value of their insights. Diversity in geography, institutional size, and cultural context is prioritized to represent internationalization practices comprehensively across the region.

The primary data collection instrument is semi-structured interviews designed to explore best practices and organizational learning strategies from various international open universities. Interviews are conducted with key stakeholders, including internationalization managers, academic staff, and international students, to understand policies, implementation processes, and challenges in internationalization efforts. The interview guide is developed based on a thorough literature review to ensure alignment with the research objectives. The researcher serves as the main instrument, posing questions, actively listening, and probing for deeper insights as the conversations unfold. This approach enables the collection of rich, contextualized data about experiences and practices related to internationalization (Patton, 2015).

1. How do you perceive the IO's role in contributing to OU's overall performance and success?

2. In your opinion, what specific initiatives or strategies could the IO implement to enhance OU's global reputation and competitiveness?

3. Can you identify any challenges or barriers the IO might face in promoting internationalization, and what solutions or improvements do you envision?

4. How does the IO collaborate with academic departments and other administrative units to integrate international perspectives seamlessly into the curriculum and overall university experience?

5. In your view, what impact does the IO have on student recruitment efforts, and how can its role be further optimized to attract a diverse and qualified international student body?

6. How does the IO support faculty and staff in developing and fostering international research collaborations, partnerships, and exchange programs?

7. To what extent do you believe the IO contributes to OU's cultural diversity and inclusivity, and what measures can be taken to enhance these aspects further?

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8. In your experience, how does the IO navigate and adapt to changes in global education trends and policies, and how can it stay abreast of such developments?

9. How does the IO assess and measure the impact of its activities on the university's internationalization goals, and what indicators or metrics are currently in place?

In this study, validity ensures that the data collected through in-depth interviews accurately reflects the experiences, strategies, and challenges faced by stakeholders involved in internationalization. Triangulation can be achieved by comparing data from different sources, such as interviews with Directors and staff of international affairs, and reviewing institutional documents on internationalization. To ensure validity through triangulation, the study incorporates multiple data sources, including Directors and staff of International Offices, and academic staff involved in international collaborations. Participants were selected using purposive sampling strategies to reflect a diversity of institutional roles and perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Directors and IO staff were chosen based on their leadership roles and minimum three years of experience in international affairs. Academic staff were identified through institutional recommendations, prioritizing those actively engaged in internationalized curricula and research partnerships (Hende & Riezebos, 2023). Member checking involves sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm their accuracy. Reliability is ensured by maintaining a consistent interview process using a well-designed guide and detailed documentation of procedures. All participants were asked the same core questions to maintain uniformity, while flexibility was allowed for follow-up questions to explore responses in depth. The researcher also documented each stage of the data collection process in detail, including interview settings, timing, and recording procedures. This approach reduced potential researcher bias and enhanced the transparency and replicability of the study, thereby increasing its trustworthiness. These measures ensure the findings are trustworthy and can provide valuable insights for enhancing internationalization efforts at open universities (Yin, 2018).

In-depth interviews with Directors and staff of international affairs at Open Universities in Asia were a key component of data collection, enabling a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives. Participants were selected based on defined criteria using purposive sampling to ensure diversity and representativeness, thus capturing a broad spectrum of regional internationalization practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These interviews provided detailed insights into the challenges, strategies, and impacts of internationalization efforts within their institutions. Additionally, *document analysis* was conducted on internationalization policies, strategic plans, reports, news of IO to add contextual depth to the study. The data from the Open University website was used to give additional information from interviews. The process began by defining the scope and objectives and identifying relevant documents from internal and external sources that reflected diverse practices across Open Universities. The collected documents underwent a comparative analysis, highlighting similarities and differences in internationalization approaches and outcomes, thus offering insights into the broader landscape of strategies employed across various Open Universities in Asia.

This study employs cross-case analysis to systematically analyse data collected from multiple Open Universities, identifying commonalities, differences, and patterns in internationalization practices (Yin, 2019). The process begins with data organization, compiling transcripts, documents, and related materials from each case. A comparative analysis then highlights how each university approaches international affairs and organizational learning, pinpointing best practices that prove consistently effective, such as collaborative initiatives and communication strategies. Contextual factors, such as cultural differences and institutional structures, are also considered to understand influences on strategy implementation. Additionally, word cloud analysis visually represents term frequency, emphasizing prominent themes and phrases within the dataset.

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RESULT & DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings of the study, which explores the role of IOs in enhancing the internationalization of open universities across Asia. Drawing from qualitative data collected through interviews, institutional documents, and comparative case analysis, the results are organized thematically to highlight how IOs contribute to strategic goals such as student recruitment, faculty collaboration, cultural inclusivity, and adaptation to global educational trends. Each theme is discussed in relation to the existing literature, offering both empirical insights and theoretical reflections. The discussion also considers the practical and policy implications of the findings, emphasizing the dynamic role of IOs as catalysts for organizational learning and global engagement within open and distance education systems. Through this analysis, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how open universities can strengthen their internationalization agendas in a rapidly changing global landscape.

A. The Role of International Offices in Open Universities

The findings of the data divided from the analysis led to the following articulations, from establishing the role of IO to creating a matrix of impacts. The study summarizes the finding of IO based on response of participants as Table 1. A robust IO is crucial to achieve global excellence and enhance OU's international competitiveness. The IO is the internationalization engine, driving initiatives that elevate OU's global profile. From attracting a diverse student body and fostering faculty collaborations to developing globally relevant programs, the IO's multifaceted approach strengthens OU's academic standing and positions it as a global education leader. By effectively serving as an administrative hub, facilitating partnerships, and promoting knowledge sharing, the IO empowers OU to compete effectively on the international stage. A study on the critical role of IO in driving initiatives that elevate a university's global profile emphasizes the importance of attracting a diverse student body, fostering faculty collaborations, and developing globally relevant programs to enhance international competitiveness (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Table 1. The Role of International Office

No	Participants	The Role of the International Office
1	A	1. Supporting OU's global engagement 2. A *"bridge"* between OU and the rest of the world
2	B	1. Manages administrative procedures 2. Organize of international conferences 3. Facilitate administrative processes 4. Prepare for future international expansion
3	C	1. Connect the university with other OU 2. Supporting associated networks and associations
4	D	1. enhance the overall performance of the OU 2. Integrating advanced international experience and practices
5	E	1. Recruitment of overseas students 2. Collaborations in programs.
6	F	1. Fostering global collaboration 2. Facilitating international partnerships 3. Promoting a diverse and inclusive learning environment 4. Engaging in the development of programs and projects.
7	G	1. Supporting unit to teacher and students' development 2. The focal point for all kinds of international activities
8	H	1. Connecting with other schools and institutions 2. Enhancing the global reputation and competitiveness
9	I	1. Provides expert advice and guidance to the university 2. Establishment of formal relationships and partnerships 3. Make strategies and country-specific recommendations 4. Facilitates the development of Agreements and MOUs 5. Coordinate and promote international collaborative 6. Secure opportunities for staff 7. Assist staff. 8. Provide opportunities for staff and students. 9. Facilitate student exchange programs. 10. Facilitate graduates. 11. Provide necessary assistance 12. Assist international students and staff. 13. Promote programs and partnerships. 14. Attracting and supporting international students 15. Providing guidance and support to students. 16. Coordinate relations with key partners.

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No	Participants	The Role of the International Office
10	J	1. Support university targets 2. Staff exchange/student exchange 3. Protocol 4. Top management's official trip abroad 5. International students' mobility programs.
11	K	1. Facilitating global engagement and educational experience 2. Fostering a global perspective 3. Promoting cultural exchange 4. Ensuring the quality and relevance of education
12	L	1. Guiding and processing information and enhancing performance 2. Disseminating information to the partners 3. Look beyond the national boundaries
13	M	1. Promoting cooperation and exchange 2. Promoting the establishment of cooperative relations with partners 3. Enhancing the international vision of teachers and students 4. Improving the visibility of the school 5. Promoting international influence.

The findings on IO initiatives (Table 2) across various open universities reveal a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to advancing internationalization. These initiatives include expanding student and faculty exchange programs, organizing international conferences, events, and forums, and developing joint degree programs and cooperative academic agreements with global partners. IOs are also actively involved in targeted international student recruitment, creating online learning platforms, and building strong global networks. Efforts are made to enhance the university's global reputation through strategic marketing, alumni engagement, and publication in international journals. Additionally, IOs support faculty through technology transfer, international research collaboration, and cultural exchange opportunities, while also fostering inclusive campuses by offering intercultural training, language support, and advising services. The initiatives emphasize adaptability through continuous assessment of trends, ensuring relevance and competitiveness in the evolving global academic landscape.

This finding confirm and add the previous study that through initiatives that build strong partnerships, enhance student and faculty mobility, cultivate a global reputation, attract diverse talent, and foster knowledge exchange, the IO paves the way for OU to become a recognized leader in the international education landscape (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021).

Table 2. The Initiatives or Strategies of the International Office

No	Participants	Specific Initiatives or Strategies of the International Office
1	A	1. Establishing more student exchange programs 2. Organizing international conferences and events 3. Providing intercultural training for faculty and staff 4. Increasing international student recruitment 5. Developing joint degree programs with universities abroad.
2	B	1. Initiative to deliver courses to international students 2. Establishing academic agreements
3	C	1. Promote the university's work 2. Enhance the university's global reputation 3. Connecting scholars with external partners
4	D	1. Hosting international conferences 2. Publishing significant academic works in international journals
5	E	1. Identify the latest trends in the global academic landscape 2. Filling the gaps in educational needs 3. Excelling some aspects among relevant institutions internationally. 4. Involves meeting the talent needs of relevant communities
6	F	1. Facilitating opportunities for faculty members 2. Promoting global networking 3. Supports the transfer of technology and know-how
7	G	1. Hold international activities 2. Create a platform for exchanges 3. Promote the characteristics of the university 4. Find potential collaborative opportunities 5. Collaborate with a partner 6. Promote universities via partner's channel.

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No	Participants	Specific Initiatives or Strategies of the International Office
8	H	1. Hosting international conferences, forums, or activities 2. Creating opportunities 3. Carry out cooperation programs 4. Build an online teaching platform and resources
9	I	1. Improving the global reputation and competitiveness 2. Seeking and cultivating strategic partnerships 3. Establish joint projects, programs, and agreements 4. Implement targeted marketing campaigns 5. Consider scholarship programs a. Enhanced Online Presence b. Develop and maintain an international section c. Leverage social media platforms and digital marketing d. Global Alumni Engagement e. Foster strong relationships with international alumni f. Utilize alumni success stories g. Actively promote and support faculty h. Participate in global networks and conferences i. Expand cultural exchange programs j. Organize international events, workshops, and forums k. Offer language support services l. Provide language courses or workshops m. Conduct targeted recruitment tours n. Participate in international education fairs. o. Attract and retain international faculty members p. Maintain high academic standards q. Showcase the university's commitment r. Enhance support services. s. Foster a welcoming and inclusive campus. t. Engage in initiatives. u. Implementing a combination of initiatives v. Regular assessment and adaptation of strategies
10	J	1. Expansion of partnerships 2. Focuses on supporting international network
11	K	1. Facilitating collaborations and partnerships 2. Developing and managing international programs 3. Organizing and overseeing international programs, 4. Providing support and guidance for exchange students,

No	Participants	Specific Initiatives or Strategies of the International Office
		5. Promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity.
		6. Organizing events.
		7. Attract and recruit international students.
		8. Providing support to prospective international students
		9. Offering comprehensive advising to international students,
		10. Assisting students
		11. Encouraging and supporting collaborations and joint projects.
		12. Facilitating the exchange of innovative teaching methodologies
		13. Building and maintaining a solid network
		14. Participating in international forums.
12	L	Ensuring compliance with international regulations and standards
13	M	1. Establishing cooperative relations
		2. Hold online international conferences to discuss a particular topic
		3. Cooperate with foreign universities
		4. Jointly organize overseas study center
		5. Carry out cooperation in education

The findings reveal that internationalization efforts at open universities face a wide range of challenges, including budget constraints, regulatory barriers, language and cultural differences, administrative inefficiencies, faculty resistance, staff turnover, and technological or infrastructure limitations. Additional obstacles include visa and immigration issues, recognition of qualifications, global health risks, and time zone difficulties, all of which hinder effective global engagement. To address these barriers, participants proposed a variety of solutions: securing external funding, offering scholarships and financial aid, enhancing language and intercultural training, implementing targeted recruitment and on boarding programs, strengthening cross-cultural communication, and leveraging technology for project management and remote collaboration. Institutions also emphasized the importance of establishing clear policies, creating dedicated international affairs units, and building internal capacity through staff development and change management strategies. Collectively, these responses underscore the

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need for a systematic, well-supported, and adaptive internationalization strategy to thrive in a complex and dynamic global higher education environment.

This finding confirm and add previous study that external factors like pandemics, political instability, and economic fluctuations also introduce uncertainties (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2024). By effectively addressing these challenges, the IO paves the way for OU to achieve its internationalization goals and solidify its position as a globally engaged and competitive university (Mai et al., 2024). The findings also show that IOs collaborate with academic departments and administrative units in varied and increasingly strategic ways to advance internationalization within open universities. Common approaches include integrating global perspectives into curricula, inviting international speakers, and developing joint academic programs. IOs also support faculty development through training, workshops, and guest lectures, while facilitating interdisciplinary research and student exchange programs. Many institutions establish formal mechanisms such as committees, task forces, and regular coordination meetings to ensure alignment with academic goals and strategic plans. Collaboration extends to student services, including language support, academic advising, and credit recognition for international exchanges. IOs also promote international events and cultural activities that engage both students and faculty, while some participate in quality assurance and accreditation efforts. Notably, IOs contribute to strategic planning by identifying global trends, securing external funding, and building platforms for joint research and faculty exchange. These findings highlight the IO's evolving role as a facilitator of institutional integration and global academic engagement.

This finding supports previous studies of the IO's role in fostering collaboration across university sectors to create a holistic approach to internationalization (Kirloskar & Inamdar, 2021). The involvement of academic staff in curriculum internationalization and the challenges they face are essential as International Offices facilitate collaborative efforts to integrate global perspectives into university curricula (Hende & Riezebos, 2023; Taalas & Grönlund, 2020).

The findings demonstrate that the impact of IOs on student recruitment varies across institutions, but many play a strategic role in attracting diverse and qualified international students. Key contributions include promoting the university abroad, streamlining admissions and visa processes, and targeting high-potential markets through digital marketing and global branding efforts. Some IOs collaborate with academic departments to develop programs aligned with international demand, while others support recruitment indirectly through content sharing, partner engagement, and alumni networks. Notably, successful institutions employ a multi-channel approach that includes online presence, virtual tours, education fairs, scholarships, and cultural inclusion initiatives. Several universities emphasize the importance of building partnerships, offering multilingual administrative support, and investing in digital and joint program delivery to broaden reach and accessibility. Although some IOs are not directly involved in recruitment, their supporting roles in program development, international relations, and student services significantly enhance global visibility and appeal.

Previous study, reveal that the IO is pivotal in attracting a diverse and qualified international student body, a key factor in OU's global competitiveness. From directly recruiting students and collaborating on program development to providing vital support for marketing and student experience, the IO fosters a welcoming environment. This comprehensive approach attracts international talent, enriches the campus community, and positions OU as a leader in global education (Karuhanga, 2015).

The findings reveal that IOs play a crucial and multifaceted role in supporting faculty and staff in developing international research initiatives. Key support activities include facilitating connections with international partners, assisting with grant applications, and organizing or promoting international conferences, symposia, and workshops. IOs also help with faculty exchange programs, strategic partnership development, and correspondence or negotiation processes for MOUs and research agreements. Many institutions offer financial, administrative, and visa support for outbound mobility, as well as language services and practical assistance for visiting researchers. Additionally, IOs promote global networking, disseminate information about funding and research opportunities, and provide platforms for collaborative

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workshops and scholarly engagement. Strategic planning efforts are also evident, with some IOs developing structured plans to guide long-term international research collaboration. Overall, these activities demonstrate the IO's expanding role as a facilitator of global academic engagement and enabler of cross-border research excellence.

The findings indicate that IOs significantly contribute to fostering cultural diversity and inclusivity within Open Universities by implementing a range of strategic and practical initiatives. These include welcoming international students and scholars, organizing intercultural events, festivals, and seminars, and encouraging faculty to incorporate global perspectives into their teaching. IOs also facilitate faculty and student exchanges, support curriculum reform to reflect cultural diversity, and provide language and cross-cultural communication training. Several institutions actively recruit diverse faculty and staff, promote inclusive policies, and create support services like orientation and counselling to ease international students' integration. Advanced strategies involve embedding diversity and inclusion into the university's core values and leadership accountability, promoting awareness of bias mitigation, and adopting a "culture add" philosophy that embraces all backgrounds. Through these efforts, IOs help cultivate a multicultural campus environment where global perspectives are celebrated, and inclusivity is woven into academic and social life.

The findings show IOs actively adapt to changes in global education trends and policies through a variety of strategic and responsive practices. Many IOs monitor international developments, attend global education forums and conferences, and build networks with international partners, institutions, and policy bodies to stay informed and engaged. They promote collaborative projects and exchange programs to share best practices and foster innovation. Several offices contribute directly to curriculum design and program development to align with emerging trends such as digital transformation, green initiatives, and inclusive education. Adaptability is further supported by strategic planning, internal evaluations, and alignment with national and international policy frameworks. Some institutions emphasize compliance with international standards, while others integrate global themes like lifelong

learning, equitable access, and educational sustainability. Overall, the IOs demonstrate a proactive and dynamic approach, ensuring that their institutions remain competitive and responsive in a rapidly evolving global education landscape.

Table 3. The Point Descriptions of the Research Finding

| Finding Area	Description of Finding
1. Role of IO	IO acts as a strategic driver in internationalization, managing global partnerships, supporting mobility, and enhancing institutional reputation.
2. IO Initiatives	IO initiatives cover partnerships, student/faculty exchange, branding, and knowledge sharing to drive global engagement.
3. Challenges of IO	IO faces obstacles like limited funding, bureaucracy, cultural barriers, and geopolitical instability.
4. Internal Collaboration	IO collaborates with academic and administrative units to embed international perspectives throughout the institution.
5. Impact on Student Recruitment	IO plays a crucial role in marketing, attracting, and supporting a diverse international student body.
6. Support for Faculty/Staff	IO facilitates research partnerships, grants, networking, and reduces administrative burdens for international collaboration.
7. Cultural Diversity Contribution	IO promotes inclusivity through events, training, and support for international communities, enhancing intercultural understanding.
8. Adaptation to Global Trends	IO actively adapts to trends like digitalization, climate, and geopolitical changes through strategic foresight.
9. Measurement of Impact	IO uses both qualitative and quantitative indicators to evaluate success (e.g., enrollment, partnerships, satisfaction).

The findings indicate that open university International Offices (IOs) use a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure the impact of their internationalization efforts. Common metrics include the number of international students enrolled, faculty and student mobility, global partnerships established, and participation in exchange programs and international events. Several institutions apply Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) tied to institutional goals, covering areas such as research output, global

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rankings, financial impact, stakeholder satisfaction, and strategic alignment. Some IOs incorporate annual reviews, goal setting using SMART criteria, and feedback surveys to track progress and refine strategies. Others utilize task-based evaluations, focus on case reporting, or track inputs, outputs, and outcomes—such as funding levels, activities conducted, and their long-term results. While some rely on structured performance frameworks, others emphasize narrative and qualitative insights, especially for cultural or community engagement impacts. Overall, these varied approaches demonstrate that effective internationalization requires multi-dimensional evaluation methods aligned with both institutional vision and dynamic global conditions.

The findings of this study significantly advance the theoretical understanding of internationalization in open universities by highlighting the centrality of IOs as engines of institutional learning and global engagement. Drawing from Altbach and Knight (2007), who emphasized the multidimensional nature of internationalization in higher education, this study empirically demonstrates how IOs function not merely as administrative units but as strategic hubs that shape global visibility, research collaboration, and cross-cultural integration. The research builds upon organizational learning theory by showing that open universities can adapt to dynamic global trends through iterative practices, stakeholder feedback, and data-informed planning (Grad & van der Zande, 2022). Additionally, the cross-case comparative analysis across twelve Asian open universities supports the assertion that cultural, regional, and institutional contexts mediate how internationalization is understood and practiced (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021; Kirloskar & Inamdar, 2021). This reinforces the need for localized, context-sensitive models of international engagement that are both adaptive and inclusive. By integrating strategic planning, internal collaboration, and continuous assessment into the IO's operations, the study provides a framework for how open universities can align their internationalization goals with broader global agendas, such as UNESCO's SDGs, thereby contributing both to theory and practice in the field.

B. The internationalization policies to support the university's excellent (Model of Excellence IO)

The IO serves as the central hub for OU internationalization efforts, propelling the university towards prominence on the global stage. Figure 1 illustrates the multifaceted approach the IO employs, highlighting the key strategies, focus areas, and impactful outcomes contributing to OU's competitiveness and success in achieving its internationalization goals.
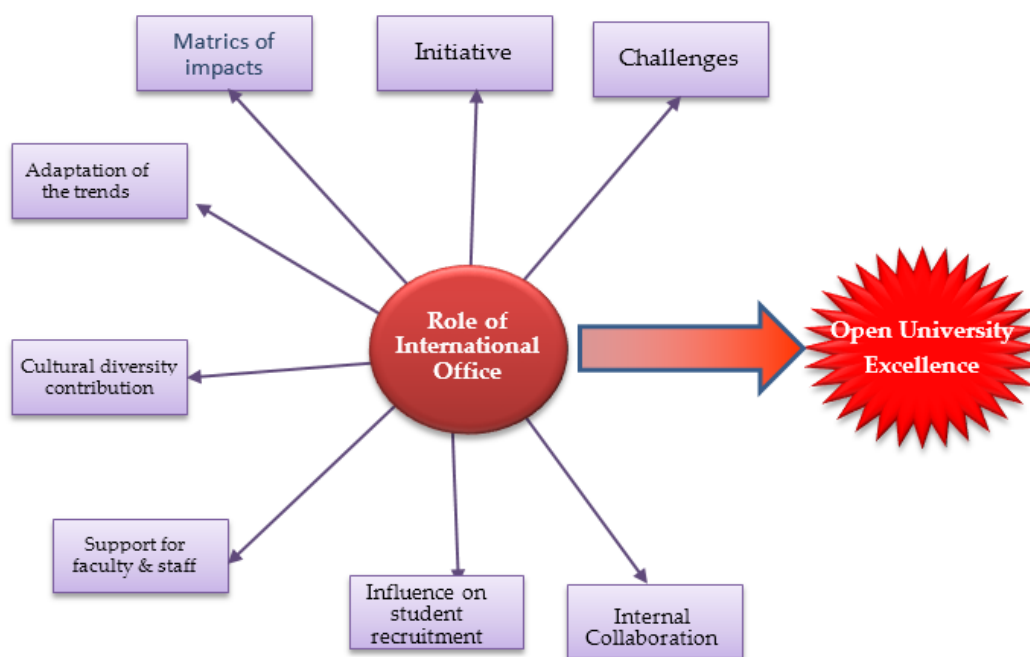
Figure 1. Model of Excellence of IO

This Figure depicts the excellence of the IO as a central hub for OU's global engagement strategy. It illustrates a cyclical process where the IO's initiatives address challenges, foster internal collaboration, and ultimately lead to positive impacts. These impacts are measured through a variety of metrics to ensure continuous improvement.

The core role of the IO include manages international partnerships, supports international students and staff, develops international programs, and fosters a diverse and competitive university. Meanwhile, for surrounding circles include the IO Initiatives and strategies, such as building strong partnerships, enhancing student and faculty mobility, cultivating a global reputation, attracting diverse talent, and fostering knowledge exchange.

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There are some obstacles of the IO overcomes that include resource constraints, regulatory and legal hurdles, internal resistance, operational challenges, and external factors (e.g., pandemics). For internal collaboration shows how the IO works with other university units, like joint curriculum development with academic departments, communication and feedback mechanisms, collaboration with language departments and student services.

There are some the IO's activities to influence and attracts student recruitment, such as direct involvement in recruitment (marketing, partnerships), collaboration on program development, and indirect support through marketing materials and student experience. Meanwhile, to empower and support the Faculty and Staff, the IO plan some activities include faculty development and engagement workshops, cross-cultural communication training, and building a diverse faculty and staff.

To foster fosters inclusivity in cultural diversity contribution the IO hold several events to promote intercultural engagement (events, seminars), support international students (services, training), and celebrate cultural diversity (events, festivals). The IO always respond to adapt to the trends by having continuous learning and knowledge sharing, monitoring global trends and policies, strategic planning and agility, and alignment with global priorities. To measure the success impact of its activities, the IO apply several metrics such as quantitative measures (enrolment, partnerships), qualitative measures (stakeholder satisfaction), and assessment and continuous improvement.

The arrows in the model emphasize the interrelated nature of these elements. The IO's initiatives address challenges, and successful initiatives require internal collaboration. This collaboration ultimately positively impacts student recruitment, faculty support, cultural diversity, and adaptation to trends. These impacts are then measured to inform future initiatives and ensure continuous improvement.

C. Practical and Policy Implications

The practical and policy implications of this study offer strategic guidance for strengthening the role of IOs in open universities. These recommendations

aim to improve institutional readiness, foster global engagement, and ensure long-term success in internationalization efforts. *First,* the International Office (IO) should be treated as a key leader in the university, not just as an admin unit. It should be involved in important decisions and have its own budget and authority to manage international programs. *Second,* IOs need clear plans for internationalization. This includes student and staff exchange, partnerships, online learning, and building the university's global image. Policies should require yearly plans and clear steps for joint programs and global networking. *Third,* to overcome challenges like lack of funds or cultural differences, universities should offer training and tools, and create teams to help with visas and documents. Policies should make it easier to work with international partners by simplifying rules and setting up legal support.

Fourth, IOs should work closely with other departments. This can be done through regular meetings and shared projects. Policies should ask that international topics be added into courses and programs. *Fifth,* for student recruitment, IOs should use social media, online events, and alumni help to attract students. Institutions should provide scholarships and improve the visa process to support this effort. *Sixth,* IOs should help faculty and staff join international research, get funding, and attend global events. Schools should provide money and support, and recognize international work in performance reviews. *Seventh,* to support cultural diversity, IOs should organize events, provide cultural training, and offer services for international students. Policies should promote diversity and include it in university rules and training programs. *Eighth,* IOs must stay up to date with global education trends like digital learning and sustainability. They should attend international events and adjust plans when needed. Policies should support this by reviewing trends yearly and aligning with global goals like the SDGs. *Ninth,* universities should measure the success of their international work. This means setting clear goals and using data like student numbers or satisfaction surveys. Policies should require regular evaluation and connect funding to results.

CONCLUSION

The IO plays a pivotal role in positioning OU as a competitive leader in international education. Acting as the central hub for global engagement, the

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IO's multifaceted initiatives—ranging from managing partnerships and enhancing student and staff mobility to fostering a culturally diverse campus—enable OU to attract international talent and promote a global reputation. Despite resource limitations and cultural differences, the IO's commitment to collaboration, adaptability, and continuous learning has fortified the university's capacity for overcoming these barriers. By implementing targeted recruitment strategies, supporting faculty and staff in international collaborations, and embracing global trends, the IO drives OU's growth as an inclusive and dynamic institution. Moreover, the IO's balanced approach to measuring impact with quantitative and qualitative metrics ensures its contributions are impactful, measurable, and aligned with OU's mission to lead in international education.

Future research should explore the long-term impact of IO initiatives on institutional performance, student success, and academic reputation in open universities. Comparative studies across different global regions—beyond Asia—would help identify context-specific and transferable strategies. Additionally, quantitative research could complement these qualitative insights by measuring the effectiveness of internationalization indicators such as enrolment trends, partnership outcomes, and faculty mobility. Investigating the perspectives of students and faculty more deeply could also provide a holistic understanding of how internationalization is experienced at the ground level. Finally, future studies should examine the role of digital technologies and virtual exchange in expanding internationalization within resource-constrained open university environments.

From a theoretical perspective, the study is limited by its focus on organizational learning and strategic internationalization frameworks without fully integrating other relevant theories such as institutional theory or stakeholder theory, which could provide additional lenses for interpreting the role of IO in open universities. This may constrain the depth of understanding regarding how institutional culture, external pressures, or power dynamics influence internationalization practices. Methodologically, the use of a qualitative case study approach—though rich in contextual detail—limits the generalizability of findings beyond the sampled Asian open universities. The

reliance on semi-structured interviews and document analysis may also introduce researcher bias or incomplete representation of stakeholder views, particularly from students or non-IO administrative staff. Furthermore, while the study includes multiple universities, it does not employ triangulated quantitative data or longitudinal analysis, which could enhance the reliability and robustness of conclusions regarding impact and change over time.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

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