An investigation on the rationales to internationalize higher education in public universities in Kenya

Gladys Ndunge Mutinda
College of Public Administration, Nanjing Agricultural University, Nanjing, China
Castro Gichuki
Strathmore Business School, Strathmore University, Nairobi, Kenya
Zhimin Liu
College of Public Administration, Nanjing Agricultural University, Nanjing, China, and
Xue Shan
College of Teacher Education, Anqing Normal University, Anqing, China and
College of Education Science, Hubei Normal University, Huangshi, China

Abstract

Purpose – The converging global trends for countries and educational institutions is to push the boundaries of science and develop new technologies through the application of internationalization strategies. However, the extent to which higher education institutions (HEIs) participate and apply internationalization strategies in higher education (IOHE) varies by institution and region.

Design/methodology/approach – The study employed the multi-level ordinal regression to estimate how various factors influence the rationales to internationalize higher education.

Findings – The study revealed that the salience of HEIs choice of a specific rationale for the IOHE stems from either the academic, administrative and socio-cultural levels.

Research limitations/implications – This article posits, particularly for Kenyan universities, that proper identification of their needs and wants for their higher education is key to successfully engage in IOHE. This recognition of needs and wants places them in the right position to identify appropriate rationales to engage in this complex process.

Originality/value – The novelty of this study is based on the fact that in Sub-Saharan Africa, research on the rationales for the IOHE in universities is highly lacking. A focus on more localized contexts is a critical starting point for these institutions to own and situate the internationalization process in a way that meets their needs.

Keywords Internationalization, Higher education, Public universities, Kenya

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the past few decades, the international dimension has become a significant part of higher education policies worldwide, with governments, scholars and universities prioritizing the process (Bulut-Sahin and Kondakci, 2023). The internationalization of higher education (IOHE) has evolved from being a reactive to a proactive strategic issue that is now mainstream, with its focus, scope and content undergoing significant changes (De Wit and Altbach, 2021). The type of university and how these institutions integrate the process within their national contexts both have an impact on internationalization approaches in higher education, which are highly contextualized processes. Institutional pathways to internationalization can vary depending on institutional missions and values. Due to the
various opportunities and pressures faced by nations and HEIs, scholars agree that IOHE is highly complex (Calikoglu et al., 2022). While institutions have varying motivations and rationales for engaging in internationalization processes that align with their missions, values and needs, not many institutions have clearly defined these motivations.

Rationales for internationalization in HEIs vary based on the purpose, functions and activities of the institutions (Knight, 2015). Rationales refer to universities’ motivations to engage in internationalization strategies and initiatives. If the motivations or rationales are not clear from the start, the IOHE tends to lack momentum and may result in a fragmented response to various international ventures (Thu, 2018). Research has identified Economic, Academic, Political and Socio-cultural rationales for internationalization (Altbach et al., 2019). However, the premise of our analysis on the rationales of IOHE is embedded on a framework adapted from Mutinda and Liu (2022) that focuses on three aspects (Academic, Administrative and Socio-cultural factors) that are critical in understanding internationalization for African universities. While little research has been conducted on IOHE in low-income African countries (Moshtari and Safarpour (2023) research investigating rationales chosen and which ones are given priority for a specific HEI is rather limited, as pointed out by Seeber et al., 2016).

Understanding the beliefs and rationales behind HEIs’ internationalization approaches is crucial, especially when it comes to understanding the various rationales that HEIs seek for IOHE in their institutions and the motivations behind such approaches. This article aims to contribute to the literature by examining the institutional factors that influence HEIs' rationales for internationalization in Kenya. From a post-colonial perspective, investigating rationales for internationalization in African universities is important, as these motivations shape the choices made by local institutions. Understanding local rationales enables Kenyan universities to approach internationalization as a process that celebrates African culture while incorporating foreign elements.

The article is structured as follows: The first section presents key conceptual definitions. The second presents the rationale for IOHE. The third presents the context of the study, the fourth explains the research methodology, the fifth presents the findings and discussion and the sixth presents the conclusion and provides recommendations, implications for policy and practice and limitations of the study.

**Key conceptual definitions**

In this article, IOHE is the cohesive process of transformation that incorporates international perspectives into the academic, administrative and socio-cultural aspects of higher education to promote knowledge dissemination that transcends institutional boundaries and beyond (Mutinda and Liu, 2022). While De Wit (2002) put forward the traditional four-category approach on the rationales to internationalize: Academic, Socio-cultural, Economic and Political this article adopts the framework from Mutinda and Liu (2022) which focuses on three critical aspects (Academic, Administrative and Socio-cultural) for understanding the implications of IOHE. These three aspects are closely related to the rationales for internationalization, as shown in our conceptual framework (Figure 1) and make up the dependent variables in our study. The independent variables include the internal and external factors that impact the various choices of rationales to internationalize higher education as well as the staff characteristics of the sampled interviewees.

**Rationales to internationalize higher education**

The reasons for internationalization in higher education vary among institutions, regions and nations. Before engaging in this process, universities must assess their needs and motivations.
For Kenyan universities, identifying their higher education needs is crucial for successful internationalization. Recognizing these needs helps them determine their motivations and make informed decisions about adopting internationalization strategies. These motivations can be economic, political, pedagogical, or socio-cultural in nature (Maringe et al., 2013).

Institutions focused on improving their academic output will choose an internationalization rationale that aligns with this goal. An academic rationale aims to enhance higher education quality, promote research collaboration, attract talented students and faculty and foster an inclusive curriculum. Internationalization is expected to support academic mobility, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic which has necessitated the shift to virtual mobility. This transition facilitates a more balanced internationalization landscape in the current world (Finardi and Guimarães, 2020). Virtual exchange opportunities help students develop global competencies, connect with institutions abroad and foster cross-cultural communication (Duffy et al., 2022).

IOHE of HEIs has led to an increase in students selecting southern countries as destinations for overseas education (Pham et al., 2021). Success factors for attracting international students include fostering an international environment, reputation for quality education, affordability and providing support to international students (Jampaklay et al., 2022). Attracting international students promotes teaching, learning and tolerance for other cultures (Sukoco et al., 2021). Internationalization also improves the quality of academic offerings and reflects the competitive nature of universities seeking a global audience (De Wit and Altbach, 2021; Sok and Bunry, 2021). As institutions seek to become internationalized, creating an international curriculum is therefore synonymous to the process of internationalization (Li and Xue, 2022). The implementation of an internationalized curriculum is a customized process for HEIs as this depends on their priorities at the international level (Renfors, 2021).

HEIs that pursue an administrative rationale for internationalization seek to improve institutional reputation, competitiveness, diversify revenue sources and develop global
competence and a call for international research collaboration is inevitable (Seeber et al., 2016). HEIs engage in the IOHE for financial benefits that come through collaboration with other international institutions (Rowe, 2021). Internationalization is expected to complement resources that enhance research quality as well as its impact (Fan et al., 2022). Participation in international research as studies have shown improves student and faculty satisfaction (Ryu and Nguyen, 2021). Institutions that pursue internationalization are revered as prestigious world-class universities (Li and Xue, 2022) as internationalization is perceived as a way for institutions to advance their place in global rankings (Altbach et al., 2019).

Socio-cultural rationales to internationalize higher education are grounded on an understanding that IOHE can foster cultural exchange, global citizenship, social responsibility and inclusive learning environments (Sisavath, 2021). At the same time, internationalization improves intercultural competences for faculty and students while promoting local cultures and values (López-Rocha, 2021; Strotmann and Kunschak, 2022).

The context
This study explores the post-colonial and globalization theory to explore alternative approaches to the internationalization process in Kenyan institutions. The aim is to promote a more inclusive, collaborative and transformative approach that brings modernization, rethinking and the reshaping of values that is grounded in the local context (Parjanadze, 2009; Da Silva and Pereira, 2024).

The post-colonial theory which is the anchor theory to this research, analyzes the ongoing effects of colonialism in the context of globalization. On the other hand, the globalization theory is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, its influence is undeniable and the higher education sector has been affected the most (Vaira, 2004; Zajda and Rust, 2016) note, it is impossible for HEIs to be immune to the changes that globalization generate. In this article, these theories specifically examine the rationales for internationalization in light of the unequal power dynamics between the global North and South (Mlambo and Baxter, 2018). Scholars within the post-colonial theory framework have linked the imbalances and inequalities observed in globalization and internationalization to the lasting legacies of colonialism (Ashcroft, 2017).

This is particularly relevant for universities in Africa, which have historically operated from the periphery due to the colonial legacy (Otieno, 2018). Despite having access to global structures, the higher education system in East Africa, including Kenya, remains marginalized (Moshtari and Safarpour, 2023). Research by Moshtari and Safarpour (2023) highlights the challenges East African countries face in the internationalization process, including policy setbacks, organizational structure issues, financial and resource constraints and social and cultural challenges. While Kenya has been involved in internationalization since its colonial days, negative colonial legacies continue to hinder knowledge exchange, contributing to imbalances. Therefore, this article critically examines the institutional factors that influence the rationales for internationalization in Kenyan institutions. By challenging dominant discourses and practices, the goal is to contextualize internationalization processes that prioritize local agendas over western ones (Da Silva and Pereira, 2024). The aim is to pave the way for a more equitable and informed approach to internationalization in Kenyan institutions.

Research methodology
The study used a cross-sectional research design to collect data from a specific group of individuals at a single point in time. This design allowed the researchers to gather data from administrators of public universities in Kenya and heads of faculty divisions. A multistage sampling technique was utilized to determine the sample size. The initial phase involved purposive sampling to select four public universities based on their varied years of
establishment, development levels, size, research funding, world ranking, budgetary allocations and locations across Kenya. The study utilized probabilistic or non-probabilistic methods to identify a sample size of 280 individuals, consisting of faculty heads, academics and administrative staff from the four public institutions in Kenya. The 280-sample size was established for the study based on sampling probability calculations. The calculated sample size has a confidence level of 95, an indication that the real value is within ±5.86% of the measured/surveyed value.

\[ n = \frac{z^2 \hat{p}(1 - \hat{p})}{\varepsilon^2} \]

Where:
- \( z \) is the z score
- \( \varepsilon \) is the margin of error
- \( N \) is the population size
- \( \hat{p} \) is the population proportion
- \( = 280 \).

**Data collection procedure**

The questionnaire was chosen due to its ability to ensure a high level of data standardization and the widespread acceptance of generic information among any community (Schary and Waldron, 2017). The survey questionnaire underwent revisions and adjustments, authorized by the 5th International Association of Universities (IAU) Global Survey on Internationalization. It was distributed using the Survey Monkey platform, using a five-point Likert scale. This platform was chosen for its efficiency in ensuring participant confidentiality. The questionnaire aimed to collect data on university profiles, student exchange opportunities, international students and faculty, research cooperation, higher education quality, international curriculum, collaboration, graduate employability, awareness and Kenyan culture. Before distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in higher education to ensure its validity. The survey items showed a satisfactory internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient of 0.791 suggesting reliable and consistent findings.

**Data analytical methods**

Data for the study was analyzed through percentages and means. The ordinal regression model assumes latent continuous variables linked to the ordinal response via the threshold concept where the maturity data are ordinal in nature (Bürkner, 2017). According to (Wagner et al., 2006), multi-level models have been extensively developed to model hierarchical data. Therefore, in this analysis, this study uses multi-level to estimate how various factors influence the rationales for IOHE while estimating the odds of being in a particular stage \( k \) relative to being above that stage and can be formulated as:

Where \( \Pr(y = kx + z) \) is the conditional probability of being in stage \( k \), conditional on being in that stage or beyond, given the linear predictor \( (X + Z) \), \( k = 1, 2, 3 \ldots, K_1 \), \( k \) is the thresholds or cut points, are the population-level regression coefficients (i.e. fixed effects), \( X \) are population-level covariates, \( Z \) are grouping variables and are group-level coefficients, which are also known as random effects. Response categories imply that each predictor’s influence is invariant over ordinal responses. Table 1 below describes the dependent and independent variables applied in the ordinary least squares (OLS) model.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Rationales</td>
<td>5 = Extremely important, 4 = Very important, 3 = Important, 2 = Somewhat important and 1 = Not important all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad exchange opportunities for local students (AEO1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attract international students or faculty (AISF2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen International research cooperation and quality (IRCQ3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve higher education quality (IHEQ5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovate and internationalize curriculum (IIC6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Rationales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial benefits from international/regional collaborations (FBIRC7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve world-class status recognition (AWCSR4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve graduate employability internationally (IGEI8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Cultural Rationales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving intercultural competence and awareness for students and faculty (IICCASF9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote the Kenyan culture and values (PKCV10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Independent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of years</td>
<td>This is the of years the university has been in operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University ISO Certification: ISO 9001:2015</td>
<td>Dummy variable is Yes or No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ISO 9000 quality management system is a set of standards that helps universities to meet customer and other stakeholder needs within statutory and regulatory requirements related to academic services. Registration of ISO Certification that a university management system and services meet all the requirements for standardization and quality assurance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM Programs</td>
<td>The number of STEM Programs. This is the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, including Computer Science, offered by the university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences/Humanities</td>
<td>The number of Social Sciences/Humanities offered at the university. This encompasses such fields of study as (in the humanities) history, English, philosophy, foreign languages, classics, history of art and (in the social sciences) sociology, psychology, economics and political science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Science courses</td>
<td>Number of the health Sciences degrees offered by universities’ medical schools include and include a wide range of specializations such as Epidemiology, Anatomy, Physiology, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Nutrition, Clinical Medicine and even Alternative Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Programs</td>
<td>Number of active and attractive graduate programmes offered by the universities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.
Description of variables
Findings and discussion

Description of institutional/external factors

This section highlights institutional factors that affect the choice of specific rationales for engaging in the IOHE in public universities in Kenya. Table 2 indicates that in the financial year 2018/2019, the universities received government funding amounting to 2.7075 billion (Bn) Ksh, while the research funding was 267.7833 million (Mn) Ksh. Table 2 further shows that 87.5% of the universities were accredited with ISO 9001:2015 certification. While different universities around the world have different and rather rigorous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An index measuring Government Capitation Financial Year 2018/2019</td>
<td>Index measuring the mean amount of funding derived from Differentiated Unit Cost (DUC) criterion to disburse the funds as applied by Universities Funding Board (UFB). The criterion considers several parameters that are included to promote equity and sustainability in the sector. They include; 1. Staff Cost, Student-Staff Ratio; 2. Student Numbers; 3. Cost of Infrastructure and operations; 4. Student Load Types and; 5. Levels of Programs (Diploma, Degree, Masters and PhD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index measuring Research Funding</td>
<td>Index measuring the mean amount of research funding from government agencies, non-profit organizations and corporations in FY 2018/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index measuring Donations and Grants</td>
<td>Mean amount of donations and grants funding in FY 2018/2019. This includes number of gifts from alumni and friends of the University in Ksh. Also, the donations and grants include number of bursaries and scholarships, offered to university to capacity building programmes and student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE (Times Higher Education) Ranking 2019</td>
<td>Appearance in rating Dummy variable 1 = Yes 0 = No. Times Higher Education World University Rankings is an annual publication of university rankings by Times Higher Education magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QS Ranking in 2019</td>
<td>Appearance in rating Dummy variable 1 = Yes 0 = No. QS World University Rankings is an annual publication of university rankings by Quacquarelli Symonds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source(s): Authors’ own work

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of years in operation</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>8.760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of University ISO Certification: ISO 9001:2015</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td>0.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. STEM Programs</td>
<td>62.75</td>
<td>30.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Social Sciences/Humanities</td>
<td>108.58</td>
<td>59.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Health Science course</td>
<td>6.130</td>
<td>1.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Graduate Programs</td>
<td>90.25</td>
<td>35.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index Measuring Government Capitation FY 2018/19 (Bn of Ksh)</td>
<td>2.7075</td>
<td>1.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index Measuring Research Funding in FY 2018/19 (Mn of Ksh)</td>
<td>267.7833</td>
<td>146.296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index Measuring Donations and Grants in FY 2018/19 (Mn of Ksh)</td>
<td>70.1541</td>
<td>21.9690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE (Times Higher Education) Ranking 2019</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.5560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QS Ranking 2019</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.4330</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source(s): Research data 2020

Table 2. Institutional/external factors
internationalization strategies, the inclusion of the number of years an institution had been in operation as a measurement is important in this study as it reveals the different time levels of exposure, different infrastructure and funding available for the different universities as acknowledged in (De Wit and Deca, 2020; De Wit and Altbach, 2021).

Table 3 illustrates the results of the Likert scale used to assess the rationales for the IOHE in Kenyan public universities. The results show that 55.4% and 26.4% of the respondents considered improving graduate employability internationally as a rationale as very important and extremely important factor respectively while only 2.1% considered it as not important. Internationalization was considered very important (47.9%) or extremely important (38.6%) because it improved higher education quality. Internationalization was regarded as very important (55%) and extremely important (26.1%) factor that improved innovation and internationalizing of curriculum. While 12% and 48.6% of the respondents considered internationalization rational as important or very important factors that attract international students or faculty. Internationalization was regarded as very important (21.4%), very important (47.1%) and extremely important (18.9%) factor in providing abroad exchange opportunities for local students. These findings suggest that the administrators and academics recognize the importance of improving the academic quality offerings of the university while engaging in the process of internationalizing higher education at the institution. Respectively, 43.6% and 35.4% of respondents viewed internationalization as a very important and an extremely important factor that strengthens the quality and cooperation of international research.

**Academic rationales**

The results of a multi-level ordinal regression analysis (Table 4) indicate that the availability of STEM and social science programs in an institution significantly influences its academic rationale for internationalization. This finding aligns with the belief that a diverse range of academic programs attracts more international students and faculty (Sukoco et al., 2021). In Kenyan universities, where international students currently only comprise 1% of the student population, it is crucial to embrace and welcome a diverse number of international students. This promotes an international outlook and enriches interactions within the university, creating a global village (Jowi et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the impact of government funding on universities and ISO certification greatly influences their decision to prioritize internationalization. This includes strengthening international academic research cooperation and research quality. The

![Table 3](image-url)

**Note(s):** 5 = Extremely important, 4 = Very important, 3 = Important, 2 = Somewhat important and 1 = Not important all

**Source(s):** Research data, 2020
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1) AEO</th>
<th>(2) AISF</th>
<th>(3) SIRCQ</th>
<th>(4) AWCSR</th>
<th>(5) IHEQ</th>
<th>(6) IIC</th>
<th>(7) FBIRC</th>
<th>(8) IGEI</th>
<th>(9) IICCASF</th>
<th>(10) PKCV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of years in operation</td>
<td>-0.294** (0.091)</td>
<td>-0.487*** (0.088)</td>
<td>0.247** (0.059)</td>
<td>0.195** (0.085)</td>
<td>0.052 (0.084)</td>
<td>0.204** (0.073)</td>
<td>0.102 (0.079)</td>
<td>-0.164 (0.149)</td>
<td>0.006 (0.075)</td>
<td>-0.006 (0.080)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status of University ISO:9001:2015 Certification</td>
<td>-0.556 (0.639)</td>
<td>0.389 (0.457)</td>
<td>1.127* (0.512)</td>
<td>0.780 (0.413)</td>
<td>0.268** (0.421)</td>
<td>-1.449** (0.558)</td>
<td>0.515 (0.547)</td>
<td>-0.493 (0.402)</td>
<td>0.090 (0.504)</td>
<td>-0.345 (0.530)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No STEM Programs</td>
<td>0.002 (0.008)</td>
<td>0.028 (0.015)</td>
<td>0.030*** (0.005)</td>
<td>-0.008 (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.011 (0.009)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.005)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.013)</td>
<td>-0.010 (0.009)</td>
<td>-0.004 (0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Social Sciences/ Humanities Science course</td>
<td>0.057*** (0.010)</td>
<td>0.013 (0.012)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.009)</td>
<td>-0.330* (0.085)</td>
<td>0.006 (0.003)</td>
<td>0.018 (0.013)</td>
<td>0.010 (0.011)</td>
<td>0.009** (0.004)</td>
<td>0.001 (0.004)</td>
<td>0.257* (0.111)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Graduate Programs</td>
<td>0.022*** (0.006)</td>
<td>-0.010 (0.029)</td>
<td>0.001*** (0.003)</td>
<td>0.009 (0.012)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.015* (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.006 (0.007)</td>
<td>0.005 (0.021)</td>
<td>0.017* (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM Government Capitation FY 2018/19 (Bn of Ksh)</td>
<td>0.032* (0.013)</td>
<td>0.005 (0.004)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.004)</td>
<td>-0.008* (0.003)</td>
<td>0.005 (0.009)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.018)</td>
<td>-0.014 (0.019)</td>
<td>0.001 (0.013)</td>
<td>0.012 (0.015)</td>
<td>-0.000 (0.019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM Research Funding in FY 2018/19 Mn of Ksh</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.002* (0.001)</td>
<td>0.002* (0.001)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.001)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.001)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.002)</td>
<td>0.001 (0.004)</td>
<td>0.001* (0.001)</td>
<td>0.018 (0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM Donations and Grants in FY 2018/19 Mn of Ksh</td>
<td>0.008 (0.012)</td>
<td>0.022* (0.010)</td>
<td>0.023** (0.008)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.004)</td>
<td>0.023 (0.016)</td>
<td>0.003 (0.009)</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.003)</td>
<td>-0.011 (0.010)</td>
<td>0.012 (0.013)</td>
<td>0.016 (0.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE (Times Higher Education) Ranking 2019</td>
<td>0.002* (0.006)</td>
<td>-0.121 (0.090)</td>
<td>-0.144*** (0.003)</td>
<td>0.003* (0.013)</td>
<td>0.036*** (0.008)</td>
<td>0.085** (0.028)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.006)</td>
<td>0.004** (0.006)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.010)</td>
<td>-0.004*** (0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QS Ranking 201</td>
<td>-0.023 (0.014)</td>
<td>0.007 (0.013)</td>
<td>0.043* (0.018)</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.010)</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.003)</td>
<td>0.013*** (0.004)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.003)</td>
<td>-0.005 (0.014)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.003)</td>
<td>0.055 (0.029)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cut 1: -10.513*** (2.140) | -10.695 (2.300) | -6.779*** (5.420) | 0.755 (3.25) | -0.478 (1.984) | 0.055 (1.453) | -0.633 (1.472) | -0.879** (2.843) | -2.532 (1.873) | -0.434 (1.737) |
Cut 2: -5.155*** (1.033) | -9.520 (2.183) | -5.42*** (1.90) | 3.221 (3.33) | -0.399 (2.093) | 1.579 (1.446) | 0.237 (1.47) | -0.791** (2.794) | -1.217 (1.841) | -0.946 (1.680) |
Cut 3: -0.279 (0.39) | -8.515 (2.169) | -4.057** (1.284) | 8.063 (1.596) | 0.473 (1.988) | 2.674 (1.458) | 2.387 (1.808) | -0.630 (2.564) | 0.011 (1.533) | 1.487 (1.701) |

Source(s): Research data 2020

Table 4. Multilevel ordinal regressions on rationales of internationalization of higher education in public universities in Kenya.
preference for an academic approach to internationalization is not surprising, especially considering the limited research capabilities in Kenya. Engaging in the internationalization process offers significant advantages for African countries, as research capacities in Kenya and Africa as a whole are currently at a historically low level, with only 1% of research originating from Africa (Jowi et al., 2013). As identified by Rowe (2021), Seeber et al. (2016) the complexity and costs associated with research make it challenging for a single country, particularly a middle to low-income country, to possess the capabilities and resources to carry out high-quality research. This explains the engagement in internationalization mainly aimed at strengthening research capacities and complementing skills and knowledge through collaboration with well-established universities internationally, as suggested by (Fan et al., 2022; Li and Xue, 2022). Engaging in internationalization also ensures that Kenyan research capacities and academic outputs maintain a certain level of academic quality and standards.

The amount of government capitation also significantly impacts the universities’ choice to adopt an academic rationale for internationalizing the curriculum. This finding is supported by Renfors (2021) who advocates for engagement in the (IOHE) to ensure that universities align their curricula with international standards, thus providing students with better competencies. Internationalizing the curricula requires local Kenyan universities to constantly evaluate the curriculum being offered to students, ensuring it reflects the dynamic changes of the international platform. This is important as it guarantees that students are provided with a quality curriculum that supports the transferability of skills from the local context to the international context.

Additionally, the results reveal that the number of graduate programs available is also significant in universities’ choice of academic rationales for IOHE. This finding is critical as it indicates that as universities engage in internationalization, there is a spill-over effect that improves the academic quality of the education services provided at these institutions. This finding aligns with (Sok and Bunry, 2021; De Wit and Altbach, 2021), who argue that engaging in the internationalization process encourages the alignment of local education standards with quality and excellence initiatives. As universities compete on a global playing field, it is crucial that their higher education services meet the global standards to maintain a competitive advantage.

**Administrative rationales**

Administrative rationales for internationalization focus on intentional and systematic institutional policies and leadership that support pervasive internationalization. This perspective represents a more delegative approach to drive institutions towards becoming globalized. Research findings suggest that STEM and social sciences courses significantly contribute to universities adopting administrative rationales for increasing their competitive advantage internationally and gaining financial benefits from international collaborations (Rowe, 2021).

Furthermore, the availability of research funding from the government and government capitation for institutions significantly impacts the adoption of administrative rationales. Government support and research funding play a crucial role in facilitating internationalization, as international collaborations require substantial resources (Jowi et al., 2013; Fan et al., 2022).

The number of years an institution had been in operation and its ranking in the QS world ranking also significantly influence the choice of administrative rationales for internationalization. Institutions strive to enhance their prestige and reputation to achieve a world-class status globally, thereby attracting potential students and faculty who seek affiliation with top-ranked academic institutions (Blackmore et al., 2016). Additionally, being ranked in international rankings also influences the universities’ choice of administrative rationales that promote the employability of their graduates.
Socio-cultural rationales

The process of internationalization in higher education is driven by socio-cultural rationales that emphasize learning versatility, mutualistic comprehension and the acquisition of linguistic capabilities, while fostering social and cultural intellectuality. This approach aims to orient students with the “otherness” of different cultures and promote intercultural competence.

Research conducted using multilevel ordinal regression analysis revealed significant factors influencing the adoption of socio-cultural rationales for internationalization in institutions of higher education. One influential factor is the amount of government capitation provided to the institutions. A socio-cultural rationale for internationalization enhances students’ international awareness and engagement with global issues, thereby fostering their overall development. This finding aligns with the arguments put forth by (López-Rocha, 2021; Strotmann and Kunschak, 2022) who advocate for internationalization that nurtures open-minded, dynamic citizens capable of functioning in foreign environments and promoting intercultural competence.

Another significant influence on the adoption of socio-cultural rationales is the availability of research funding, donations and grants. Institutions that prioritize intercultural competence organize cultural learning through exchanges, facilitating greater understanding between nations and cultures. This approach helps develop students’ skills and knowledge for global citizenship (Maringe et al., 2013).

Interestingly, the study also found a negative impact of being ranked in university rankings, specifically THE rankings, on the pursuit of a socio-cultural rationale that promotes Kenyan values and culture. This finding highlights the influence of colonialism on Kenyan universities and its impact on the internationalization process. The westernized curriculum prevalent in these institutions has hindered their participation in international platforms. To counteract this, it is crucial for internationalization efforts to complement and enrich local culture instead of dominating it (Otieno, 2018). The socio-cultural aspect of internationalization in higher education is essential for promoting intercultural competence, global awareness and understanding. Factors such as government support, research funding and the balance between internationalization and cultural preservation play significant roles in shaping the approach institutions adopt. It is imperative to strike a balance that respects and amplifies local culture while integrating it with global perspectives.

Conclusion

In order for universities to embark on the internationalization process of higher education, it is crucial for institutions to assess their specific needs and desires. This article presents a framework that takes into account various factors at the Academic, Administrative and Socio-cultural levels that influence the rationales for internationalization. The findings suggest that number of years an institution had been in operation, the presence of STEM, social science and graduate programs and the availability of government funding play significant roles in a university’s decision to pursue internationalization at the academic level. These rationales drive the alignment of local higher education standards with global quality initiatives. Additionally, the research funding, government support and international rankings influence the administrative rationales chosen by institutions. Moreover, factors such as government funding, university donations and available grants affect the adoption of socio-cultural rationales that promote intercultural competitiveness and awareness.

However, the study also revealed that being ranked in international rankings negatively impacts the pursuit of a socio-cultural rationale focused on promoting Kenyan values and culture. This finding aligns with post-colonial theory, which highlights the challenges faced by low-middle income countries in fully participating in the international realm. The study recommends that universities, especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa and Kenya, need to identify their specific needs and wants to successfully engage in the IOHE. Understanding
their motivations within their unique contexts is key to navigating this complex process. It is important to acknowledge that the motivations for internationalization vary across institutions, regions and nations.

**Implications for policy and practice**
The leadership of (HEIs) should set clear goals and assess progress during the internationalization process. This ensures that their motivations and reasons for internationalization remain relevant. Universities must commit to internationalization by training staff and identifying useful rationales. Evaluating resources, risks and challenges is important before engaging in internationalization. Involving staff at all levels, establishing concrete goals and ongoing assessment processes are crucial for successful internationalization. Preservation of cultural values and consideration of Africanization should also be emphasized. Each university should prioritize internationalization strategies based on their unique needs and resources.

**Limitations of the study**
This study was only limited to four public universities in Kenya; other HEIs and private universities were not considered. The findings, therefore, of this study are limited to these four universities but could be used as a reflection of how other universities may engage in the IOHE. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data which is sometimes associated with the respondents answering in a socially desirable manner. To alleviate this limitation, the questionnaire was anonymous.

**Recommendations for further research extension**
Further research should aim to replicate this study by including a wider range of public universities, in addition to the four already examined. Exploring the involvement of private universities would also provide valuable insights into the similarities and differences in their approaches to internationalization. Conducting a large-scale comparative study on African countries’ internationalization efforts in their respective universities would be beneficial. Examining the impact of COVID-19 on the internationalization of Kenyan universities, as well as addressing the risks and challenges they face in this process, is also important for future research.

**References**


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Corresponding author
Zhimin Liu can be contacted at: liuzhimin@njau.edu.cn

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