Original article

Singapore's global education hub ambitions: Government and institution strategies and practices

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Abstract:
The landscape of higher education has been evolving in recent decades, characterised by the increasing number of international students and shifts in their study destinations. While recognising their significance in economic, cultural, and societal contributions, governments and universities worldwide have integrated the internationalisation of higher education into policy agendas. As one of the newly emerging destinations, with the vision of a global education hub, Singapore has set a prime example of successful internationalisation in higher education and provides valuable insights into effective practices for internationalisation. By examining the government's policy and the National University of Singapore's strategies and practices, this study seeks to enhance understanding of how to effectively navigate the complexities of internationalisation in this dynamic landscape.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, international higher education has experienced a significant transformation characterized by a substantial increase in the global number of international students. According to the OECD (2020), the number of international mobile students rose to 5.6 million in 2018, more than doubling the figure from 2005. Further research highlights a growing tendency among international students to seek opportunities to remain in the countries where they completed their studies (Sangganjanavanich et al. , 2011; Wiers-Jenssen, 2019). Numerous countries now increasingly acknowledge the potential of international students as a crucial asset for economic growth and sustainability in an interconnected world(Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2021; Levent, 2016; Tian & Liu, 2021). Integrating these students into the labour market not only addresses critical labour shortages but also enriches workforce diversity and fosters innovation, thereby leveraging their unique perspectives and skills to enhance the global competitiveness of host countries.

The internationalisation of higher education has thus increasingly become a significant policy issue for both universities and governments in developed and developing nations (Beerkens, 2004). It has also given rise to new ways of governance that affect both education and the economy. As Lomer (2017) notes international students are vulnerable to the effects of the host country's mobility policies. Many countries have revised their immigration policies and organisational frameworks for global education in order to attract more foreign students (Lomer et al. , 2018). As such, higher education institutions around the world are striving to advance internationalisation by integrating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into their teaching and learning functions, partnerships, cross-border mobility, and research initiatives (Ramaswamy et al. , 2021).

Furthermore, the destinations chosen by international students are also evolving. Traditionally, the flow of international students is mainly from developing countries to developed countries (Lanati & Thiele, 2020; Lee & Tan, 1984). Western countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia have dominated the international student market.

Nevertheless, recent trends indicate a shift towards the non-western countries (Tian & Zhang, 2024; Xu et al. , 2024). Singapore, in particular, has become a popular choice for international students due to its high academic standards, strategic location, international collaboration, and multicultural environment (Mok, 2012) Additionally, among the top universities globally, the National University of Singapore (NUS) attracts students worldwide with its innovative curriculum, significant research contributions, and partnerships with prestigious universities around the world. The university's strategic initiatives, such as forming alliances with international institutions, promoting research collaboration, and offering a wide array of programs tailored to international students, make it a prime example of successful internationalisation in higher education and provide valuable insights into effective practices for internationalisation.

The experience in Singapore reflects broader trends in East Asian regions such as Malaysia and Hong Kong in China, where governments and institutions are increasingly leveraging their unique strengths to compete in the global education market to develop as regional hubs of higher education. However, despite having a robust and esteemed higher education sector in the region, there is a scarcity of synthesized publications focusing on Singapore, making its experience in promoting international higher education an interesting area awaiting further study (Cheung, 2021). Therefore, by examining the government's policy and NUS's strategies and practices with the sources from official websites and literature, this study seeks to enhance understanding of how to effectively navigate the complexities of internationalisation in this dynamic landscape.

2. Literature review

The concept of internationalisation of higher education has undergone substantial evolution over the last few decades, reflecting the shifting dynamics of global education. According to Knight & De Wit (1995), "internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of a higher education institution" (p. 17). This definition highlights the multifaceted nature of internationalisation, covering a wide range of activities, including student and faculty exchanges, international research collaborations, and the incorporation of global perspectives into the curriculum from an institutional perspective. Knight (2008) traces the evolution of the term internationalisation and updates its working definition as follows: "Internationalisation at the national/sector/institutional level" is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels" (p. 21). This definition deliberately emphasizes purpose, function, and delivery rather than teaching, research, and service. It highlights the importance of multiple levels and providers within the broad field of postsecondary education. As Chen (2011) points out, internationalisation transcends being merely an institutional endeavour but a systematic and continuous initiative by governments to elevate the quality

and competitiveness of their higher education systems on a global scale. Similarly, De Wit (2015) acknowledges that internationalisation has evolved from a minor, fragmented and marginal concept to a major, central strategic agenda item for governments and higher education institutions worldwide.

Governments play a crucial role in the internationalisation of higher education, mainly through policy frameworks, funding mechanisms, and bilateral or multilateral agreements (Li, 2016; Ndum & Udoye, 2020). Many countries have developed national internationalisation strategies aimed at expanding their global educational presence and attracting international talent. These strategies often include visa policies that facilitate the entry and stay of international students and scholars, recognition of foreign qualifications to promote academic mobility, and support for language training to enhance the global readiness of domestic students. Financial support from governments is also crucial for the internationalisation of higher education (Liu et al. , 2021; Matei et al. , 2015). This support manifests in various ways, including scholarships for international students, grants for faculty exchange programs, and funding for international research endeavours. Notable scholarship programs such as the Fulbright Program in the United States (Snow, 2008), the Chevening Scholarships in the United Kingdom (Humfrey, 2011), and the Erasmus+ Program in the European Union (Bronze et al. , 2024; Giardino et al. , 2022) significantly contribute to fostering international academic exchanges and collaborations. Governments also provide financial aid to higher education institutions to bolster infrastructure and resources crucial for internationalisation. This encompasses investments in international student services, global engagement offices, and intercultural training programs. Such financial backing is essential for universities to enhance the capacity to host international students and facilitate global partnerships (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011). Furthermore, through diplomatic channels, governments negotiate bilateral and multilateral agreements that facilitate international cooperation in higher education. Such agreements help in establishing transnational education programs, where institutions from different countries collaborate to offer joint or dual degree programs. These initiatives enable students to gain international experience and qualifications without necessarily leaving their home countries, thereby broadening access to global education (Knight & Lee, 2022).

On the other hand, universities are the frontline actors in the internationalisation process, responsible for implementing government policies and developing their own strategies for global engagement, thus acting as the primary agents of change in this domain. Over the years, many universities have increasingly integrated international, intercultural, and global dimensions into their curricula and operational frameworks (Bartell, 2003; Ge, 2022). They have adopted various strategies to attract international students and faculty, establish international partnerships, and offer globally recognized programs. For instance, some universities offer joint or dual degree programs in collaboration with foreign institutions, allowing students to gain qualifications recognized in multiple countries (Chan, 2022; Knight & Lee, 2022). This integration not only enhances the international education experience for students

but also prepares them for a globalized workforce. Moreover, universities strive to create inclusive and diverse campus environments that reflect the global nature of contemporary higher education. By attracting and supporting international students and staff, universities enrich the cultural and intellectual life of their campuses (Wang & Frank, 2002). This diversity fosters a multicultural learning environment where students can engage with peers from various backgrounds and perspectives (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011). Furthermore, the competitive landscape of global university rankings has intensified the focus on internationalisation among higher education institutions (Hauptman Komotar, 2019) Universities are increasingly aware that their performance in these rankings is influenced by their internationalisation efforts, which include metrics such as the proportion of international students and faculty, as well as research collaborations across borders (Hauptman Komotar, 2019). This competitive pressure propels universities to enhance their international profiles, thereby aligning their goals with broader governmental strategies for higher education.

Driven by the forces of globalisation and the increasing demand for international higher education experiences, the internationalisation of higher education has emerged as a pivotal area of focus for both governments and universities globally. As Marginson & Rhoades (2021) emphasize, government policies significantly shape the direction and intensity of internationalisation efforts. It is thus essential to explore in-depth and in detail the successful examples of internationalisation in higher education. This paper aims to delve into the practices of the Singaporean government and the NUS as exemplary cases and offer insights for policymakers, academic leaders, and practitioners seeking to advance their own internationalisation efforts.

3. Methodology

As the primary aim of this study is to identify and highlight the significant measures undertaken by the Singaporean government and the NUS to promote internationalisation within the higher education sector, a documentary search was conducted. This approach involved a systematic review of relevant legal and official documents, reports, and articles available on the websites of key legal and educational institutions. Two main sources were consulted and reviewed systematically due to their authoritative and comprehensive coverage of policies, initiatives, and practices related to the internationalisation of higher education in Singapore. The Ministry of Education's website (https://www.moe.gov.sg/) provides extensive information on national education policies, strategic plans, and international collaborations, while the NUS website (https://www.nus.edu.sg/) offers detailed insights into the university's internationalisation strategies, partnerships, and programs.

The search process involved several key steps to ensure a thorough review of the available documents. The first step was to identify all relevant documents related to the internationalisation of higher education. This included policy documents, strategic plans, annual reports, and articles published by the MOE and NUS. Keywords such as "internationalisation," "global partnerships," and "student mobility," were used to filter the search results. Each relevant document was carefully examined to extract pertinent information regarding the measures and initiatives aimed at promoting internationalisation. The extracted information was then categorised into key measures and initiatives. This categorization helped in organizing the data and provided a clear framework for understanding the various approaches adopted by the Singaporean government and NUS. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information, the identified measures were cross-referenced with other sources, including academic articles, news reports, and publications. This step was crucial in validating the findings and ensuring that the documented measures were consistent with broader trends and practices in the field of international higher education. The final step involved compiling and synthesising the information into a coherent narrative.

By employing this rigorous documentary search methodology, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the internationalisation efforts in Singapore's higher education sector. The findings from this methodology not only shed light on the specific measures adopted by the Singaporean government and NUS but also contribute to a broader understanding of how Singapore is positioning itself as a global hub for higher education.

4. Findings

4.1 Rationale and Singaporean government policies

4.1.1 The structural factors fuelling the internationalisation of higher education

Singapore's ambition to become a leading global education hub is grounded in several structural factors that create an optimal environment for attracting international students and fostering international educational collaborations.

Firstly, Singapore's long colonial history has significantly influenced its development as a multiracial society (Rocha, 2011) With a population of approximately 5.9 million people, Singapore is a melting pot of diverse languages and cultures. This multiculturalism serves as a strategic asset, providing a rich cultural environment that appeals to international students seeking a cosmopolitan and inclusive educational experience (Noor & Leong, 2013) The opportunity to interact with and learn from peers of various cultural backgrounds enriches the learning experience and prepares students for global citizenship.

Singapore's outward-oriented policy has also been instrumental in creating an open and dynamic environment for both the economy and business (Robinson, 2018). This policy orientation has facilitated the integration of Singapore into the global economy, making it a hub for trade, finance, and innovation (Wang, 2018). The openness of Singapore's economy attracts multinational corporations and fosters a vibrant job market. For international students, this means access to extensive internship opportunities, industry collaborations, and potential employment prospects post-graduation, which are

critical factors in their decision-making process.

In addition, the Singaporean government places a strong emphasis on developing a creative, innovative, and internationally competitive education system (Hairon, 2021). By prioritising high-quality education that aligns with international standards, the government ensures its institutions maintain a global competitive edge. Singapore's education system is designed to foster critical thinking, creativity, and innovation, equipping students with the skills necessary to excel in a knowledge-based economy (Liu, 2019).Initiatives such as the Global Schoolhouse Strategy and partnerships with prestigious international universities underscore Singapore's commitment to educational excellence and internationalisation.

Furthermore, the policy of bilingualism plays a crucial role in enhancing the employability of graduates (Tan, 1997) With English as the main medium of instruction, graduates in Singapore are well-equipped to compete in international job markets and engage effectively in global business environments (Hairon, 2021; Shahi et al. , 2022). The bilingual policy also helps to develop a more integrated and harmonious society by promoting mutual understanding and respect among different ethnic groups (Bolton & Ng, 2014; Tan, 1997). Such cultural competence is highly valued in today's interconnected world and serves as a significant attraction for international students.

These four structural factors collectively create a conducive environment for the internationalisation of higher education in Singapore and form the foundation upon which the Singaporean government has built its education internationalisation strategy.

4.1.2 Global schoolhouse strategy and strategic synergies

Reforms in Singaporean higher education to promote internationalisation with the vision of becoming the Boston of Asia were carried out in 1997, as a response to the growing trend of globalization (Lee, 2011). Following a series of policies introduced by the government, the internationalisation of higher education has become a strategic priority for the Singaporean government.

One of the most influential policies introduced by the Ministry of Trade and Industry was the Global Schoolhouse Strategy in 2002, aimed at transforming Singapore into a global education hub. The strategy targeted to attract 150,000 international full-time students by 2015 (Waring, 2014), whose significance has been recognized by the Singaporean government as this influx would not only contribute to the local economy but also create a diverse and dynamic educational environment (Tan, 2016; Tan2017). Such diversity was deemed essential for fostering a vibrant ecosystem conducive to research, innovation, and entrepreneurship (Tan, 2016). In addition, the Global Schoolhouse Strategy was designed to boost the education sector's contribution to Singapore's GDP from 1.9% to 5% by 2015 (Waring, 2014). This economic boost was expected to stimulate job creation and spur economic development, making education a key pillar of Singapore's growth strategy. Apart from attracting international students, by enticing prestigious foreign universities to establish branch campuses, Singapore sought to elevate its academic standing

and create a magnet for top-tier talent from around the world so as to enhance the quality of education available locally and bring global recognition to Singapore's higher education sector (Rudolph et al. , 2024; Tan, 2017). Therefore, the Global Schoolhouse Strategy was expected to be a strategic move to bolster Singapore's economic competitiveness and address the talent needs of its knowledge-based economy (Lee, 2018; Lo, 2014).

To achieve the policy goals of the Global Schoolhouse Strategy, several supplementary initiatives were adopted by the Singaporean government. One key initiative is the Tuition Grant Scheme (TGS), which provides grants to support international students' study for selected diploma or undergraduate courses in the University that is listed with the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs), making higher education more accessible and affordable for talented students from around the world (Kent, 2017; Ministry of Education, 2023). Successful applicants are bonded and required to work for a Singapore entity for 3 years upon graduation. This bond promotes the presence of highly educated and skilled international graduates in the workforce to contribute to the growth and dynamism of Singapore's economy, thereby maintaining a competitive edge in a knowledge-based economy (Ng, 2013).

Singaporean government also provides financial support to international students to pursue PhD and EngD degrees through the Singapore International Graduate Award (SINGA)(Mok, 2013; Sidhu et al. , 2014). This program is a collaborative effort among the Agency for Science, Technology and Research, the NUS, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore University of Technology and Design, Singapore Management University, and Singapore Institute of Technology. SINGA is awarded to international students with excellent academic records and a strong interest in research (Agency for Science, Technology and Research, 2024). By offering scholarships to top international students, SINGA helps to bring in high-calibre talent from around the world, strengthening Singapore's global academic and research ties.

Given that there is a limited number of grants available for international students, and selection is competitive and based on merit, the Singaporean government, alternatively, allows international students to take up part-time jobs and work up to 16 hours per week during term time while full-time during holidays (Ministry of Manpower, 2021). Allowing international students to work helps them reduce their financial burden, enables them to gain valuable work experience, and enhances their employability, which is beneficial when they enter the job market (Fakunle, 2021; Pham et al. , 2018). Upon graduation, international students in Singapore will have the option to apply for a Long-term social visit pass (LTVP), facilitating their transition from academic life to the professional workforce. The LTVP grants graduates one year to seek employment in Singapore, allowing them ample time to explore job opportunities and secure a position that aligns with their career aspirations, and no sponsors (e.g., employer) are required (Ministry of Manpower, 2024; Yap, 2014). The significance of the LTVP policy has also been implicitly acknowledged. As both Singapore and Hong Kong in China are one of the Asian Tigers, these two similar small economies

have been making great efforts in developing themselves to be "regional educational hub" and share some similarities. Similar to the LTVP, Hong Kong introduced the Immigration Arrangements for Non-local Graduates (IANG) to non-local graduates to retain talent (Lam & Tu, 2015). The Singaporean government thus can attract and retain international students, reflecting its proactive approach to talent management and commitment to maintaining Singapore's status as a global education hub.

4.1.3 Transforming higher education: Empowering local institutions

The Singaporean government's internationalisation efforts also manifested in effectively delegating and empowering local universities to carry out their roles (Ng & Tan, 2010). Prior to the issuing of the Global Schoolhouse Strategy, two public universities, NUS and Nanyang Technological University, had been granted greater managerial autonomy in 2000 (Lee & Gopinathan, 2008). This move was significant as it marked a shift towards a more decentralized and flexible governance model in Singaporean higher education. The Singaporean government took further steps in 2005 by extending full autonomy and accountability to all publicly funded universities (Ministry of Education, 2005). Universities gained the freedom to formulate their own strategic plans for internationalisation, aligning their goals with global education trends and market demands (Mok, 2011) With full autonomy, universities were given greater control over their financial resources. Universities can allocate funding towards internationalisation initiatives, such as scholarship programs, international research projects, and global faculty recruitment. The autonomy also allowed universities to introduce innovative programs tailored to attract international students, including joint degree programs, international summer schools, and global research collaborations, which have significantly boosted their international appeal.

In summary, thanks to the structural factors and a set of policies that attract international students, the Singaporean government has created a conducive environment for the internationalisation of higher education. On this basis, this autonomy empowered the universities to respond more swiftly and effectively to global trends and opportunities, positioning them to enhance their international profiles. In the next session, the practice of NUS in internationalisation will be elaborated in detail to provide a reference for universities that seek to promote internationalisation.

4.2 The NUS: Strategies for internationalisation

With a vision to be "a leading global university shaping the future", NUS has implemented a comprehensive 5-year plan of global strategy (National University of Singapore, 2019). This strategy seeks to position NUS at the forefront of global education and global engagement, to nurture future-ready graduates and to build stronger connections across diverse talent communities. Five strategic pillars were introduced and intricately linked to the internationalisation of higher education, enhancing NUS's global standing and its role in the global academic community: 1) Creating global experiences

for all; 2) Leading the way in innovation and growth for Southeast Asia; 3) Developing intellectual leadership in global education; 4) Strategic engagement with university consortia and alliances; 5) Establishing NUS as a node where global talents meet.

In response to these strategic pillars, NUS has introduced a set of initiatives designed to achieve its internationalisation goals. The Global Relations Office (GRO) was established in 1996 to foster closer international partnerships and enhance global engagement (NUS Global Relations Office, 2024a). The creation of GRO was a strategic decision aimed at centralising and streamlining the university's internationalisation efforts, thereby optimising the use of resources and aligning these efforts with NUS's broader mission.

4.2.1 Global education opportunities for NUS students

Thanks to a broad-based curriculum and cross-faculty enrichment modules, students enjoy high flexibility in personalizing their global education experience, which may last for weeks, months or semesters depending on students' preferences. Through the extensive global network and close partnerships with renewed universities, NUS provides students with opportunities for global experience and exposure at home (i.e., Duke-NUS, Yale-NUS College) and abroad (i.e., Student Exchange Programmes, Summer & Winter Programmes, Research Attachments, Study Trips for Engagement and EnRichment (STEER), and the Southeast Asia Friendship Initiative (SFI)).

NUS has established two collaborative higher education institutions in Singapore. Duke-NUS Medical School is a postgraduate medical school jointly established by NUS and Duke University in 2005, and to complement NUS's existing undergraduate medical school (Duke-NUS Medical School, 2024). The primary objective is to provide holistic and innovative medical education while engaging in extensive, cutting-edge research that addresses contemporary healthcare challenges, benefiting both Singapore and the international community. It exemplifies a successful international partnership, combining the strengths and expertise of two renowned universities from different parts of the world. This collaboration not only enhances the educational and research capabilities of both institutions but also fosters a global exchange of knowledge, ideas, and best practices. At the same time, by attracting top-tier talent from around the world and providing them with a world-class education, Duke-NUS enhances the international profile of Singapore's higher education system. The presence of international students and faculty at Duke-NUS creates a diverse and dynamic academic environment, promoting cross-cultural interactions and collaborations that are essential for a globally engaged educational institution. The other one is Yale-NUS College, a liberal arts and science college established through a partnership with Yale University in 2011 (Yale-NUS College, 2024). One of its characteristics is the diversity of students and faculty members. With a Singaporean-to-international student ratio of 60:40, the college represents over 60 nationalities, creating a rich tapestry of cultural perspectives and experiences. Yale-NUS employs over 140 experienced faculty members recruited from around the world.

These educators bring diverse linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, contributing to a creative, dynamic, and innovative learning environment. Their varied perspectives enrich the academic experience, encouraging students to think critically and approach problems from multiple angles. In addition, as a residential college, Yale-NUS engages students in community responsibility, intercultural interaction, and collective wellness. This residential model immerses students in an environment that fosters continuous practice in developing social skills and a positive mindset, equipping them to thrive in an ever-changing global society. Living on campus, students are encouraged to engage deeply with peers from different backgrounds, promoting mutual understanding and respect, which are critical components of global citizenship.

The Study Abroad team at GRO offers the Student Exchange Programme (SEP), enabling students to spend one or two semesters at partner institutions. With nearly 190 university-wide exchange partners, more than 1000 exchange placements are secured for students each year through SEP. In the academic year 2023-24, more than 2,600 NUS students benefited from the SEP (NUS Global Relations Office, 2024c). Additionally, the Summer and Winter Programmes are designed to maximise students' term breaks without disrupting their regular academic schedule (NUS Global Relations Office, 2024e). These global programmes allow students to earn credits applicable towards their NUS degree. Apart from these flagship exchange programmes, there are some special global programmes. The NUS Study Trips for Engagement and EnRichment (STEER) programmes also provides opportunities for students to experience diverse socio-cultural-economic environments of new and fast-evolving regions such as Southeast Asia, Latin America, Middle East and Southern Africa (NUS Global Relations Office, 2024d). The mix of thematic classroom-based learning, experiential site visits, as well as the immersive interactions with local communities can broaden students' horizons and build up international perspectives. The NUS STEER Award are provided for programme participants to help defray their programme expenses. NUS also provides outbound opportunities based on residential units through Southeast Asia Friendship Initiative (SFI) (NUS Global Relations Office, 2024b). Leveraging Singapore's unique geographical location, students have the opportunity to gain invaluable insights into a region abundant with opportunities through the experiential trip. The SFI courses are credit-bearing, and students receive a letter grade for the course. Through exploring the specific local challenges and solutions related to Sustainable Development Goals and Innovation and Enterprise, Students gain a heightened global awareness by delving into pressing international issues within various cultural and socio-economic contexts. The Peer Advising Programme further supports exchange students by assisting with the application process, facilitating communication with academic advisors for module mapping, and offering guidance on living and learning abroad. PAP also organizes drop-in clinics and annual study abroad talks to address students' concerns and help them plan fruitful exchange experiences.

4.2.2 Research and internship experience enhancing programmes for NUS students

NUS attaches great importance to students' needs to improve their academic abilities. Under the Global Research Attachments provided by GRO, students have exceptional opportunities to broaden and enhance their undergraduate experience under the mentorship of world-class researchers. By living and conducting research in another country through summer research exchange, students can immerse themselves in a different academic and cultural environment. These attachments are thus instrumental in fostering academic and professional growth, allowing students to engage in cutting-edge research while gaining exposure to diverse academic and research methodologies. Moreover, participating in global research attachments helps students build a robust professional network, establishing connections with researchers and academics worldwide. These networks can prove beneficial for future academic pursuits, career opportunities, and collaborative research endeavours. The partnership with well-recognized universities such as The Chinese University of Hong Kong, University of Tokyo - Research Internship Program (UTRIP), Tel Aviv University Summer Research Program in the Sciences (Israel) and ETH Zurich Student Summer Research Fellowship (Switzerland) secures a high quality of international research experience.

The NUS Overseas Colleges programme was started in 2001, giving students the opportunity to experience, live, work and study in the world's leading entrepreneurial hubs (Lim et al. , 2016). Participants of the programme either spend 6 months or a year overseas, attending courses at reputable partner universities to acquire deeper technical knowledge, such as Stanford University, NYU Tandon School of Engineering, University of Toronto, Tsinghua University, and Peking University. Students will also be assigned to work in technology-based start-ups as an internship to gain exposure to entrepreneurship. The programme is offered at twelve different locations across the globe, covering North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Interning overseas significantly enhances competitiveness in the job market. The NUS has introduced the NUS Global Internship Programme (NGIP), designed to provide students with practical experience and skill development through work placements in foreign countries (Centre for Future-ready Graduates, 2024). Through this program, students can acquire broader business and cultural perspectives, thus fostering a global mindset. Furthermore, the experience enhances adaptability and resilience, traits essential in today's dynamic world. Participating in the NGIP enables students to build valuable career networks and improve their intercultural communication skills, preparing them for success in an increasingly interconnected global environment. Southeast Asia, home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies and a diverse range of industries, is one of the primary destinations within the NGIP. Students can expect opportunities in sectors such as technology, finance, and education. Internships typically last a minimum of ten weeks, with the possibility of extending beyond the vacation period. Additionally, several financial

aid options are available to support students undertaking internships, both within and outside the NGIP.

These programmes exemplify NUS's dedication to global education by providing undergraduates with the opportunity to experience learning at home and at an international partner university. Participating in global programmes offers students the unique opportunity to immerse themselves in different cultural and academic environments, fostering the development of global citizenship. Moreover, these programmes present an excellent chance for students to acquire a new language, embrace diverse cultures, and form new friendships. An overseas stint can also significantly enhance career prospects by broadening students' global perspectives and expanding their professional networks.

4.2.3 Inbound opportunities for exchange students

A leading global university centred in Asia, NUS provides a unique blend of Asian and global experiences aimed at maximizing students' potential and future readiness. In the academic year 2023-24, more than 2,100 international exchange students came to NUS to experience (NUS Global Relations Office, 2024c). A variety of orientation activities are conducted to assist incoming exchange students in settling into life at NUS. For instance, orientation briefings for international students, such as the Office of Student Affairs' OSA LIVE are designed to provide essential information and support. The GRO, in conjunction with the Global Student Ambassadors, organizes a Welcome Party at the start of each semester, providing a platform for new exchange students to interact with their peers and local NUS students through music, food, games, and giveaways. To enhance the vibrancy of the exchange term, various festive events and cultural activities are organized throughout the year by both students and staff. These activities range from inter-faculty sports games to music recitals, offering a wide array of artistic, cultural, and sports opportunities. In terms of financial consideration, Nominated Exchange (NGE) students benefit from waived tuition fees. Awards and scholarships for exchange students like NUS-UBC Exchange Award will be offered to help underprivileged groups to achieve international learning experiences.

4.2.4 Brand name promotion through global collaborations

NUS attaches great importance to fostering global collaborations for faculty members and students to exchange knowledge and ideas. Therefore, it is devoted to holding influential international education, research, entrepreneurship, network or alliance conferences and seminars to create meaningful platforms for great minds to gather together and share their thoughts or academic achievements.

Currently, NUS is running three double degrees, two concurrent, and three joint programmes with overseas universities. Those partner universities are located all over the world, such as France (e.g., French Grandes Ecoles, Sciences Po), Japan (e.g., Waseda University), Australia (e.g., University of Melbourne, Australian National University), and the U.S. (e.g., University of Dundee, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill). These programmes require students to study in both countries, for instance, a few semesters in NUS and a few semesters in overseas universities. Students are given opportunities to not only experience a totally different learning environment but also study alongside other foreign students in cross-cultural settings. Furthermore, global exposure is beneficial for them to develop professional networks, an open-minded attitude, and the flexibility to adapt to multicultural workplaces in their future career. After completing the programme, the degree qualification conferred by two universities at the same time can also enhance the mobility and international competitiveness of students if they plan to work abroad.

Two collaborative research institutes have been established by NUS in Singapore. The first one is the Logistics Institute – Asia Pacific, a collaboration with the Georgia Institute of Technology for research and education programmes specialized in global logistics, industrial engineering, information technology, and supply chain management (The Logistics Institute - Asia Pacific, 2024). The institute provides joint logistics expertise to cater to the needs of the industries by emphasizing emerging technologies. The second one is The Next Age Institute, which is a partnership with Washington University in St. Louis to study, create, and test social innovations, as well as transfer knowledge to policy and practice (NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, 2024). Its research area mainly focuses on human and social issues, such as the ageing population, social inequality, globalization, etc. The institute not only envisions defining the relationship between the individual and the state in this ever-changing world but also shapes a new social contract for the future.

NUS has set up two research institutes in China, one is in Suzhou and one is in Chongqing. Each specializes in different scientific research areas. NUS (Suzhou) Research Institute is dedicated to delivering pioneering research on advanced microelectronic devices, agricultural and food science and technology, energy and environment technology, functional materials, interactive multimedia and software development, and artificial intelligence (NUS (Suzhou) Research Institute, 2024). Meanwhile, the NUS (Chongqing) Research Institute mainly focuses on advanced manufacturing and materials, intelligent sensing and AI, modern logistics, finance, and risk management (NUS (Chongqing) Research Institute, 2024).It aims to construct an advanced industry incubation base for innovation, technology transformation, and entrepreneurship. By establishing a physical presence in China, NUS demonstrates its commitment to global engagement and collaboration. Through collaboration with China, NUS strives to reinforce Sino-Singapore cooperation to accomplish mutually beneficial outcomes in research and education and enhance its visibility and influence in the global academic community.

NUS initiates entrepreneurship and research cooperation with external multinational companies through various channels. At all stages of entrepreneurship of global entrepreneurs, from the initial stage to the growth stage, NUS Start-up Runway has corresponding institutions to carry out various cooperation with entrepreneurs from all over the world (NUS Enterprise, 2024). At the early stage of entrepreneurship, NUS Enterprise provides workspaces and guidance for entrepreneurs from across the world, while during the growth

period, it assists startup companies find talent and financial support. Additionally, NUS Enterprise helps entrepreneurial projects gain societal influence, thereby fostering a dynamic ecosystem of innovation and growth. In addition to direct cooperation with startup companies, NUS Enterprise also partners with well-known international companies. For instance, the Tencent & NUS Cloud Startup Program benefits selected startups with cloud credits, technical support, and more. The cooperation between I5 at NUS Enterprise and Huawei aims to nurture IoT solutions for Smart Nation, focusing on areas such as smart living and transportation. The partnership with Mercedes-Benz aims to help startups realize their ideas in line with the market, while the Innovation Runway project with L'Oreal seeks unique solutions in personalized beauty. NUS demonstrates the capability to work with industry leaders through these global entrepreneurship partnerships, reinforcing its reputation as a hub for innovation and forward-thinking solutions.

Currently, NUS has established several joint laboratories with multinational companies. One example is the collaboration with Shell company from the Netherlands on a joint research project which aims to electrochemically produce ethanol and n-propanol from carbon dioxide, a gas that is commonly released into the atmosphere. This project, supported by the National Research Foundation, was formalized through a $4.6 million research programme, announced at a ceremony on 14 May 2021. Additionally, NUS partnered with Cisco from the United States to establish a laboratory focused on boosting innovation and research in key technology areas, including artificial intelligence, healthcare, urban infrastructure, and cybersecurity. These capabilities are crucial in driving Singapore's knowledge-based, innovation-driven digital economy. Based at NUS's Kent Ridge campus, the Cisco-NUS Accelerated Digital Economy Corporate Laboratory was established with an investment of $54 million over five years, supported by the National Research Foundation Singapore. Furthermore, NUS and Johnson Controls from the United States, the global leader for smart, healthy and sustainable buildings, have embarked on a joint collaboration on smart buildings research. Johnson Controls has committed approximately $5 million to this research programme where teams from both organisations will work together to address industry-wide challenges. Apart from this, NUS also cooperated with Thales from France to promote the innovation of quantum security and quantum sensors. Engaging in groundbreaking projects with industry leaders attracts scholars, researchers, and students from around the world, solidifying NUS's reputation as a hub for innovation and advanced studies. The successful implementation of such projects also exemplifies NUS's collaborative spirit and its dedication to addressing global challenges through joint efforts.

5. Discussion

The internationalisation of higher education has become a focal point for many governments and universities worldwide, driven by the increasing number of international students and the economic, cultural, and societal contributions they bring.

Singapore's success in this domain offers valuable insights into effective practices for internationalisation.

5.1 Alignment of university strategies with national policies

During Singapore's transformation to the Boston of the East, the focus of the country's education hub construction has shifted from a skills-based hub to a knowledge hub. Since international talent training and overseas talent, introduction have knowledge spillover effects on knowledge innovation and industrial development, talents can be regarded as the foundation for constructing knowledge hubs. Therefore, rather than regard internationalisation as a goal in itself, NUS attaches great importance to knowledge translation and acquisition, and mobilization of talent, reflected in an array of global collaborations with universities and entrepreneurs in teaching and learning, research and entrepreneurship. However, we need to be vigilant about the risk that the scarcity of cross-cultural learning resources will lead to differences in students' cross-cultural learning experiences, thus making the cultivation of international talents a privilege for a minority group.

This alignment is also found in the internationalisation of higher education in Shanghai, China. The internationalisation strategy of Shanghai universities focuses on attracting international talents and cultivating the global competence of local students, in response to the requirements of Shanghai's "14th Five-Year Plan" to cultivate high-end talents and promote human resources reserves, reflecting the development trend of universities adapting to the transformation and upgrading of student hubs at the regional level. This integrated alignment ensures that efforts at both the institutional and governmental levels are mutually reinforcing, thereby enhancing the overall impact of internationalisation initiatives.

5.2 Glocalization: Emphasizing regional and global influence

The dominant position of Western countries in international relations has led to a gradual evolution of internationalisation into Westernization (Guo et al. , 2022). Nevertheless, the practices of the Singaporean government and NTU indicate that Singapore's higher education internationalisation retains distinct characteristics, demonstrating the phenomenon of glocalization within the higher education sector.

Glocalization represents a synthesis of globalization and localization (Smith, 2007). In the sphere of higher education, this term refers to an educational policy that has been adopted and expanded globally while being adapted to meet national, local, and institutional contexts (Mok, 2003). For instance, the emphasis on Asia-centric initiatives is a recurring theme in the strategies of the Singaporean government and universities, while simultaneously striving to exert global influence. This dual focus on internationalisation and localization has also been observed in other East Asian regions, such as Hong Kong in China, the Philippines, and Malaysia. In their pursuit of becoming global education hubs through the internationalisation of higher education, those regions that can better integrate international and local dimensions are poised

to distinguish themselves and showcase unique competitive advantages (Zhang, forthcoming; Zhang et al. , 2024).

6. Conclusion

The global economy has made the flow of goods, services, financial capital, technology, information, ideas, and people easier and more affordable. The landscape of higher education has thus been evolving in recent decades, characterised by the increasing number of international students and shifts in their study destinations. Therefore, the internationalisation of higher education increasingly become a significant policy issue, which has given rise to new ways of governance that affect both education and the economy. National governments and universities have responded to this trend with different strategies and varying degrees of openness, resulting in varying levels of success in the internationalisation of higher education.

Singapore, like other East Asian regions such as Hong Kong in China, the Philippines, and Malaysia, is very keen to develop the island state as a global education hub. With good policy design and all-round support, the Singapore government and the NUS have set exemplary cases for other regions and institutions wishing to pursue internationalisation. The success of Singapore is grounded in several structural factors which create a conducive environment and form the foundation for building its education internationalisation strategy for the internationalisation of higher education. The Singaporean government has implemented comprehensive policies to attract international students, such as the Global Schoolhouse initiative. When formulating policies, the Singaporean government does not limit itself to education but aims to achieve the goal of becoming an international education centre through a series of multi-faceted policies. It is also the key to success for the government to give universities autonomy so that they can design globalization strategies based on their circumstances.

With sufficient autonomy, NUS gained the freedom to centralise and streamline its internationalisation efforts, thereby optimising the use of resources while aligning its goals with the national vision of being a "global education hub". Supportive of the government's policy, NUS has implemented a variFety of programs and activities of internationalisation at home and abroad. The successful implementation of these projects also exemplifies NUS's collaborative spirit and its dedication to addressing global challenges through joint efforts, which further strengthens NUS's global standing and its role in the global academic community.

The experience in Singapore reflects broader trends in East Asian regions such as Malaysia and Hong Kong in China, where governments and institutions are increasingly leveraging their unique strengths to compete in the global education market to develop as regional hubs of higher education. Researchers with an interest in internationalisation in higher education should expand the scope of focus and put more effort into studying this area.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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