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Social Inequalities in International Student Mobility: A Systematic Literature Review

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Social Inequalities in International Student Mobility: A Systematic Literature Review Working Paper

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Abstract

This working paper introduces the aims, process and preliminary findings of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on inequalities in international student mobility (ISM) in the framework of the [EU COST Network](#) on International Student Mobilities. The review explores the academic literature from 2000-2022 on inequalities in access to and participation in ISM.

The conceptual framework outlines understandings of ISM and how social inequalities based on factors including gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, disability, language, and refugee status can shape access, experiences, and outcomes. The methodology follows the PRISMA approach, including a multilingual search strategy in nine languages. It includes empirical and conceptual work, of all methodologies. The review includes 216 publications, the majority of which are journal articles. Key findings highlight inequalities in who participates in ISM, with underrepresentation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities. Experiences during ISM are shaped by discrimination, exclusion, and lack of support. However, research on LGBTQ+ and disabilities in ISM is limited, as were research designs that adopted an intersectional understanding of inequalities.

The review concludes by synthesising the key findings on how different forms of inequality manifest across the ISM journey, and identifying important gaps in the literature, such as the predominance of research produced in and focused on the Global Minority, the lack of intersectional approaches, and the absence of critical definitions of key topics related to inequality, such as disability. Recommendations are made for future research and policy to address inequalities in international student mobility.

Keywords: International students, International student mobility, Inequalities, Access, Participation

Introduction

This working paper introduces the aims, process and preliminary findings of the Working Group 2 on social inequalities in access to and during ISM in the EU COST Network on International Student Mobilities (ISM).

Each working group has been tasked to conduct a Systematic Literature Review on the theme in relation to ISM. Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs), while originally developed for medical research, have become increasingly popular in the social sciences with the rapid rise in publications on all topics demanding more rigorous and systematic approaches to engaging with this literature. In brief, an SLR sets up a transparent set of criteria and processes to identify and review literature on a specific topic. While there are many different approaches, the PRISMA methodology (Moher, et al., 2009) is one of the most established and developed, and it is this that we have adopted as a guide. A regularly updated list of SLRs related to international students and internationalisation is available on the Research with International Students website (Mittelmeier, 2022).

We offer this open-access paper to share our work in progress. In this paper, we explore our conceptual framework, with understandings of ISM and social inequalities briefly explained, our methodology, and findings of the scoping review.

Our research question was: What has been published in the academic literature since 2000 on inequalities in access to and participation in ISM?

More specifically, we explored:

1. What social inequalities shape ISM?

2. How do these inequalities affect:

    a. access to, or exclusion from, ISM opportunities?

    b. engagement with local and international students during ISM?

    c. differential outcomes whilst abroad?

3. How do institutional, national, and international policies reduce or increase ISM-related social inequalities?

Conceptual Framework: Understandings of international student mobility and social inequality

ISM is usually understood to refer to people who physically cross international borders for the primary purposes of study. Such travel has historically been a privilege for the wealthy or otherwise advantaged. Today, barriers to ISM include differential tuition fees (Tannock, 2018), border policies (Crumley-Effinger, 2024), selective international admissions (Lomer, 2023), and pre-existing global inequalities, deriving from colonial relations of power (França et al., 2018). These barriers are often taken for granted, unchallenged as norms for global higher education (HE) that are simply characteristic of our contemporary systems. Concern for equity in global HE typically remains concentrated at the national level (Tannock, 2018). Many national HE systems have policies designed to enhance equality of access, participation and outcomes, but few apply these to ISM.

ISM contains multiple forms. First, mobility can be of various durations, from short sojourns of days or weeks (often referred to as 'study abroad'), to longer stays associated with semesters or terms of study ('exchanges', 'credit mobility'), to the full-length of degree programmes (usually simply 'international students' or sometimes 'global students') - and indeed, beyond. The prevailing understanding of which category 'international students' fall into varies by context, and (though this is often unacknowledged) by policy (Bennett et al., 2023). In some contexts, international students are understood to be overseas fee-paying degree-seeking students, often (but not always) structured through marketisation (Weber et al., 2023). In others, the term 'international students' refers typically to exchange students, present for a semester or a year. Exchange programmes vary in scale, from institutionally managed bilateral agreements to large-scale regional programmes like Erasmus+. In some contexts, the term 'study abroad' is used to refer only to exchanges or credit mobility, while in others, all forms of ISM are described as 'study abroad'. Thus, in this review, we do not make a distinction between ISM and study abroad. The motivations, rationales, experiences vary considerably across these forms. What does not vary is

that all such forms are impacted by inequality as research on ISM has repeatedly shown (Teichler, 1996). This is what makes inequalities in ISM a highly relevant topic which, as of yet, lacks a coherent overview.

This review focuses on social inequalities, which are understood here as experiences of harm or conversely the exercise of privilege as a result of ascriptive identity or socio-economic background that results in advantage or disadvantage in access, experience, or outcomes. In this lens, mere difference is not inequality; inequality is the result of the different ascriptions, for instance, through active discrimination or exclusion, or covert or systemic bias. In this review, we therefore built on understandings of social inequalities that affect educational access and outcomes shaped by personal characteristics, namely: gender, socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity, sexualities, religion, disability, and language. Distinctions are sometimes made between equity and equality, where equality is taken to mean the same intervention or process is applied to all, while equity may require selectively advantaging historically marginalised social groups. In this review, we use the term 'inequalities' to encompass both differences in equity and equality.

Potential inequalities in HE and therefore ISM relate to access, experience and outcomes. Historically, there has been an emphasis on process-oriented understandings of equity, such that access became a key focus for research on educational inequalities, particularly for higher education (McCowan, 2016). In the context of, for example, reversing racial segregation in the USA in the mid 20th century (Harper et al., 2009), and apartheid in South Africa (Sehoole & Adeyemo, 2016), it was essential to ensure that rules and regulations prohibited explicit, authorised discrimination or exclusion at the point of access to HE. However, as in broader scholarship on social justice in education, a focus on equality of outcomes has become prominent, in recognition of the embedded social nature of racism (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), sexism (Danic, 2015), ableism (Lindsay & Fuentes, 2022), elitism (Reay, 2006) and other forms of marginalisation. We do not focus on outcomes in terms of the effects ISM may have for international students' employability, position in the labour market or social mobility or which effects ISM may have in turn for specific kinds of inequalities and related structures and practices. However, if research studies point to the effects of inequalities for students' access to ISM and/or the ways they can

participate and may experience ISM, we include such outcomes in our discussion. Similarly, if studies focus on academic outcomes from ISM (e.g. academic attainment or degree outcomes), we report on this as well.

In addition, inequalities in ISM are structured by global inequalities within and between nations. Western European nations led colonial endeavours which enslaved, oppressed, starved, killed, and robbed colonised peoples. The lasting impact of the coloniality of power has been to epistemically marginalise the knowledges, languages, and intellectual worth of people (Mignolo, 2021) from what has variously been called the Third World, developing countries, the Global South and more recently, the Global Majority. These terms are employed differently among the multiple disciplines that contribute to the scholarship on ISM, and in many legitimate varieties of World English. In this review, we aim to use the term Global Majority in our own analyses, to reflect the awareness that Eurocentric White perspectives are in fact a global minority experience (Campbell-Stephens, 2021). However, where scholars use other terms, such as Global South or developing countries in their own work, we have retained their usage, since the terms are not always used synonymously. Still, we hope to encourage future scholars in this emerging subfield to reflect critically on the connotations of different terms (Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2022).

Thus, inequalities in ISM is an underdeveloped area of critical scholarship. While there are many studies on individual aspects, as our review demonstrates, efforts to synthesise knowledge beyond specific institutional, national, and regional contexts are few. Yet it is clear that, as with many other forms of tertiary education, access and participation is variable across underprivileged groups, experiences and engagement varies, as do outcomes. In addition, institutions and countries vary in their capacity to attract and recruit ISM, with long-term consequences for development. This review therefore serves the important purposes of bringing together the extant literature on inequalities in ISM, to highlight shared findings, contradictions, varied understandings, and, hopefully, recommendations for practice.

Methodology

This review took a systematic approach to synthesise evidence from existing research. This approach was informed by the PRISMA methodology (Moher et al., 2009;

Shamseer et al., 2016), which is a guided approach for developing and organising systematic reviews in a robust way, outlining a series of clear steps for researchers.

Search approach

Our approach started by developing a set of guiding keywords for searching the literature. We developed 9 search strings for this stage.

All search strings started with "international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad", as the key context for this review. Furthermore, we used an additional term in our search string to limit our search results to higher education level ("higher education" OR university). We then included a string in all searches referring to either processes or student groups in focus: 1) inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities; 2) "socioeconomic background" OR "socio-economic background" OR poverty OR "social class" OR "socioeconomic class" OR "socio-economic class" OR disadvantage OR privilege; 3) race OR ethnicity OR racialisation OR racialization OR minority OR minorities; 4) disability OR disabilities; 5) gender; 6) religion OR religious; 7) sexuality OR sexualities OR LGBTQIA+ OR LBGTQIA+ OR LGBT OR LBGT OR LGB OR LBG OR queer; 8) "non-traditional student" OR "nontraditional student; 9) refugees OR "asylum seekers".

In the next step, all nine search strings were applied to key databases of academic research: DOAJ, EBSCO (English), ProQuest, Scopus, Web of Science, IBZ Online (German), WISO (German), IBSS (German), DIPF Leibniz Institut (German), RCAAP, Scielo, Latindex, Redib, REnates, Google Scholar, and Eric. As ISM is commonly mentioned in passing or as contextual information for research in higher education studies, we limited searches to titles, keywords, and abstracts only, where allowed by the database (e.g. Scopus).

Multilingual search

In addition to English, searches were conducted in the following languages: Finnish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish and Turkish (see Appendix 1 for more details on multilingual search strings). This was considered important since non-Anglophone knowledge is often marginalised in globalised knowledge production (Mazenod, 2018) and citation practices (The Citational Justice Collective et al., 2022).

These languages were selected based on available expertise in our working group, ensuring involvement of a minimum of two colleagues proficient in the chosen language. Two colleagues developed a tailored search strategy, consistent with the main search approach. We recognise that several major global languages were not represented within our working group, including Chinese and Arabic, which are the two missing United Nations languages. This constitutes an important limitation for future work to build on, as multilingual reviews are becoming more common (Kalocsányiová et al., 2022; Rubio-Alcalá et al., 2019; Wolff et al., 2021).

Results of these searches are included in a table below and details about the search strings and databases are presented in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Search results by language

Language	Number of unique relevant sources identified in database search	Number of unique sources included after first round screening + hand search results	Number of unique sources included for analysis
Finnish	15	5	2
French	857	31	17
German	25	8	8
Italian	0	0	0
Portuguese	2	1	1
Romanian	0	0	0
Spanish	4	1	1
Turkish	3	0	0
English	1.879	197	187
TOTAL	**2.785**	**243**	**216**

Due to the high rate of irrelevant returns, language groups screened papers for potential relevance during the search process.

The paucity of results identified in, for example, Spanish, Portuguese and Finnish, indicates that well-recognised pressures to publish in English (Ramírez-Castañeda,

2020; Sheldon, 2020) may inhibit the development of scholarship in languages other than English. We therefore opted to include such occasional papers as we identified and were able to review. In contrast, the searches in German and French suggested substantial work in these languages. All work was included in the screening and coding process presented below.

Screening

Using a collaborative online reference management software (Zotero), the research team extracted results from the databases and added all results in a shared group library for review. In line with the key aims of this review, we developed a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria for evaluating this set, which are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion	**Exclusion**
1. Relevance - studies must meet all criteria:	ISM (or related concept) is clearly identified as a keyword, in the abstract, main concept, a significant focus of the research question, aim and scope, or title Social inequality (or related concept e.g. equity, privilege, capital, discrimination or specific dimension of ascribed identities or demographics OR inequalities between countries) is clearly identified as a keyword, main concept, part of the research question, aim and scope, or title. Study focuses on tertiary education levels (higher education, university, vocational, technical, further education) Physical mobility only, any duration Mobility is cross-border / transnational / international Mobility does not have to be for the sole or primary purpose of education - including migrant	Outputs relating to graduate employability, internships or work placement abroad will be excluded Physical health Studies with COVID-19 built into the design or purpose of the study Emergency remote learning during COVID-19 Virtual mobility or online learning Historical studies Second or later generation migrants (i.e. born in the country of studies) Teaching international students about inequalities or on students' attitudes about equality (or attitudes towards international students) Content of the paper is repeated

	students, refugee students, displaced students, etc Focuses on the period 2000-2022	in another item in the database Focus on identity construction / development / social adaptation, acculturation or assimilation
2. Document type:	Report, journal articles, book chapters Empirical papers or reports of any methodology: can be qualitative or quantitative, or mixed. Theoretical & conceptual papers <u>with an explicit focus on student mobility only</u> & inequalities. Papers focusing on institutional or national policy, and curriculum or teaching practices will be included. Reports are to be included.	Exclusively opinion-based or commentary sources. Conference papers or proceedings. MA or undergraduate student theses / dissertations. General sociological theory. Media/ press releases PhD Theses Book reviews. Books (as a whole).
3. Date: published after 2000	Published (online or in print) 2000-2022.	
4. Languages:	English Spanish French Finnish Portuguese Romanian German	Languages that do not feature on our list were excluded: Chinese The following languages searched and identified no relevant results: Turkish Romanian

Our initial search identified 2785 unique items.

Pre-screening involved reviewing meta-data such as date, document type, language, and the keywords of titles. Since the Bologna reform, culminating in the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and the joining in of further countries in subsequent years brought important changes to student mobility, only publications after 2000 were considered. We designated the summer of 2022 as the cut-off point for publication for practicality. No out-of-range dates were identified through the screening. We included any results

that had demonstrably been through a peer-review process, excluding only conference papers, media, PhD theses and opinion-based work (n=274). We excluded results in languages our working group was unable to read, namely Hungarian, Russian, and Arabic (n=5). We excluded items relating to COVID-19, employability or post-graduation work, or social relationships, as covered by other SLRs in the ENIS network, as well as items relating to international student mobility in pre-tertiary contexts. In total, 711 items were excluded for lack of relevance against the inclusion criteria.

The title, abstracts, and, where necessary, full texts were reviewed in the first round of screening to remove articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Working in the group Zotero library, articles were assigned to either be included or excluded. If excluded, they were assigned to a folder for the key exclusion criteria. 12 screeners worked collaboratively to review the results in two rounds. We included any items related to international student mobility in the broadest possible definition, with inequality as an explicit focus, as indicated by the article title, keywords, abstract, research questions, research methods, or findings. We removed any results which only casually mentioned international student mobility as a contextual factor, such as through stray observations in the introduction or literature review, as well as articles focusing on broader internationalisation efforts not linked to students.

Decisions were initially made in first screening by a single reviewer, and each category (e.g. excluded for relevance) was independently reviewed by a second reviewer. In the case of disagreement, a third reviewer arbitrated to maintain consistency. There was 68% agreement between first and second reviewers, demonstrating a high accuracy rate in initial screening decisions. 858 items were excluded in the first round of screening. Excluded articles are available in the accompanying dataset, which may be of interest for further review.

However, despite attempts to maintain consistency across the screening team, a degree of subjectivity was unavoidable in the screening process, especially with such a large group of contributors. We mitigated this with regular discussions and clarifications, updating shared documents for inclusion and exclusion criteria, and encouraged review to continue to evaluate for relevance throughout the process. In the second round of screening, a smaller group of reviewers checked the items

proposed to be included, resulting in a further 132 excluded. It was clear that reviewers during the second round applied more demanding standards of relevance than did reviewers during the first round. We consider this shows the evolution of our collective thinking on the topic, and criteria were adapted to reflect this.

In addition, we conducted hand-searching or manual searches in personal libraries and in key journal archives, resulting in adding 24 items. Most of these results came from a single journal, *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad.* While this journal is indexed by several major databases in our search strategy, including ERIC and DOAJ, several relevant items did not include any of our key terms. This confirms the importance of including hand-searching in systematic reviews.

We included both empirical research and conceptual or literature review items. This was intended to ensure that we could accurately report on changing understandings of inequalities in relation to ISM, some of which would be necessarily conceptual in nature. We did not place criteria on the country or context of origin in the research, with the intention of developing a global understanding of evidence-based approaches to ISM. We set no methodological or quality criteria. The aim of keeping these criteria open was to ensure the greatest possible epistemic diversity. A small number of papers were excluded for lack of access (n=15).

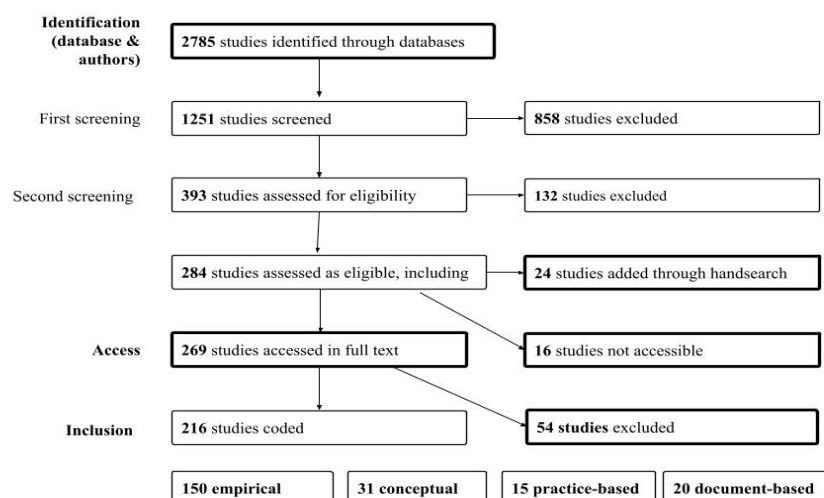The coding process is described in detail below, followed by results of the synthesis of findings.

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

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Study Characteristics

In this section, we present a preliminary overview of included studies.

Document Type

We included 6 reports, 7 book sections and 203 journal articles. It appears that the majority of research on inequalities and ISM is being published in journal articles, and future research can confidently restrict reviews to this document type, particularly given the challenges of accessing book sections.

Languages

The vast majority of results identified were in English (n=187), despite our multilingual search strategy. Only 28 results in other languages were retained, 17 in French, 8 in German, 2 in Finnish, 1 in Portuguese and 1 in Spanish. We note that there were substantial results in all languages searched that related more broadly to international students, experiences, and mobility, but fewer in relation to inequality specifically. Future research should therefore consider that when conducting broad or generalist searches, multilingual strategies can be relevant, but that for more specific topics, publication pressures towards English-language outlets may mean that monolingual approaches may be sufficient.

Journals

Journal article results were published in 131 different journals, representing a very broad spread. Only 28 journals included more than 1 paper on the topic. This suggests that there is not a clear hub of journals that focus on this topic, functioning as a scholarly community. Instead, research on inequalities and ISM is dispersed across many outlets. The journals that publish most extensively on the topic are *Frontiers: the Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* (n=19), *Higher Education* (n=10), *Journal of Studies in International Education* (n=9), and *Journal of International Students* (n=5).

Disciplines

Papers were coded to discipline areas, based on the EBSCO list of academic subjects (https://www.ebsco.com/academic-libraries/subjects). Most papers included are in the

area of education (n=129). Other prominent disciplines include sociology and social work (n=28), humanities(including mobility and migration studies) (n=18), literature & language (n=5), and psychology (n=4). Multidisciplinary work is also prominent (n=17). This indicates that future research needs to adopt an interdisciplinary literature review approach to ensure that relevant studies are included, and may also suggest that further research is needed on specific groups such as LGBTQ+ international students.
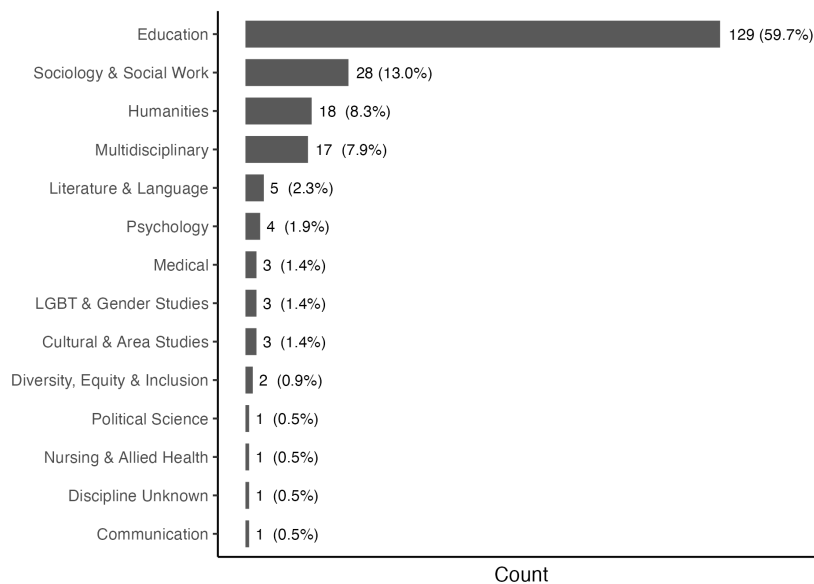

Figure 2: Number of items included by discipline

Dates

In line with other reviews on internationalisation (Abdullah et al., 2014), we observe a dramatic increase in publications over the last decade on the topic of ISM and inequalities.
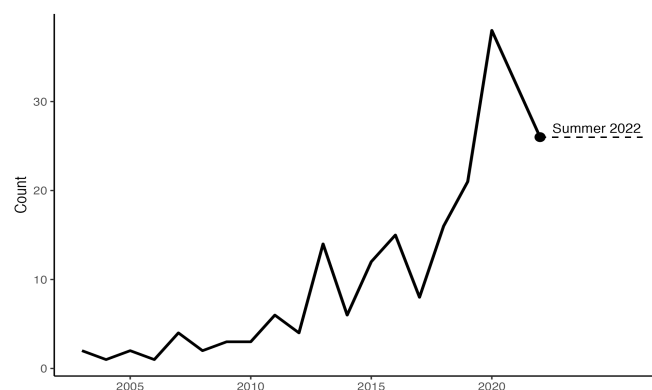

Figure 3: Number of papers included by year of publication

Author Affiliation Location

Author affiliation location was extracted through manual coding of contact information of the corresponding author included in the full-text of the papers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the USA (n=67), UK (n=32) and Australia (n=26) were the most frequent, followed by Germany (n=15), Canada (n=13), and France (n=11), as shown in Figure 4. This reflects established observations of the prevalence of ex-imperial or globally dominant countries in published research (Demeter, 2020). However, our results also included scholars based in Turkey, Thailand, Indonesia, Chile, and Brazil. This suggests that scholarship on inequalities in ISM has important contributions made worldwide, whose research is being published in global outlets, despite barriers of academic publishing. This approach has its limitations, as there may be cases in which an author's personal location is different to their institutional affiliation, or may have multiple affiliations in different countries.
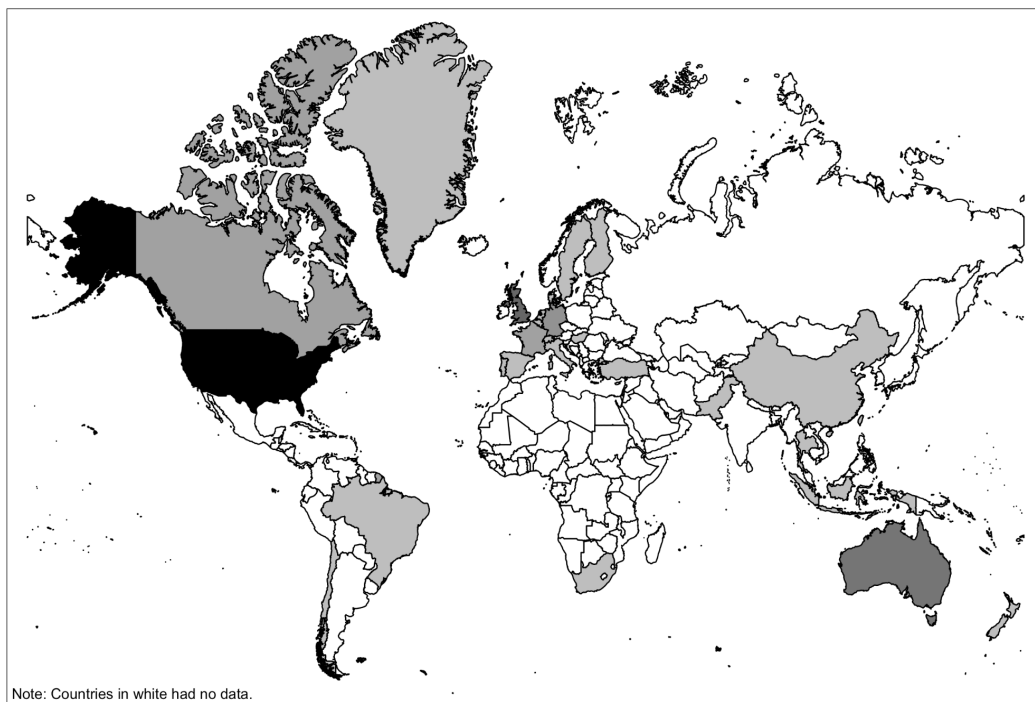

Note: Countries in white had no data.

Figure 4: Author locations by institutional affiliation of corresponding author

Results

In this section, we synthesise the key findings of included papers, as relevant to the research question, namely inequalities in international student mobilities.

Types of Papers

In the second review phase, 216 items were coded.

A data extraction template was created in a spreadsheet, with the included articles listed. The template was collaboratively developed, and trialled with the volunteer coders.

Given the breadth of the review, we established different templates based on their methodology. This enabled a flexible approach, and coders opted to work on categories with which they had experience and expertise. The lead author made a preliminary division of the papers into these categories, subject to revision during coding. The types of papers are defined in each section.

Empirical studies

Empirical items were defined as studies that drew their data from human participants, not documents, and did so for a pure research purpose (not for the development or evaluation of practice). 150 empirical studies were identified. We also included secondary data analysis in this category.

How was ISM studied?

The majority of studies were conducted at the micro-level of individual students (n=107), followed by a substantially smaller group that examined macro issues at the national or global scale (n=14). Only 8 studies were conducted at the institutional scale. 21 studies were multi-scalar. This implies that meso and macro-level examinations of inequalities in ISM have the greatest potential for future contribution in the subfield.

Most of the studies examined degree abroad ISM (n=61), with fewer examining credit mobility (n=2) or medium-term (defined as 3-12 months) (n=7), and more examining

short-term mobility (n=8) or study abroad of undefined duration (n=5). Several studies included multiple forms (n=21) and a very high number (n=34) failed to define or specify their terms, while for 11, this was not a relevant categorisation. Indeed many papers could only be coded here by inference from their analysis and discussion. We recommend all researchers in the domain of ISM and inequalities to ensure that they specify what form of ISM they interrogate and to bear in mind that international audiences use different terms. For example, we note that research conducted in the USA often refers to 'study abroad', assuming that this refers to credit mobility. While this may translate well to the European context, in the global context, 'study abroad' can often mean degree-level mobility and should therefore be clarified to enable nuanced interpretation of findings. The language of 'international education' is often presumed to be inclusive of multiple forms of ISM, as well as internationalisation at home, but rigorous empirical research should acknowledge that the time and purpose of ISM will affect experiences and inequalities and incorporate fully operationalised definitions.

How was the research designed?

We also sought to examine whether and how the research was designed to examine inequalities.

Most of the empirical studies were conducted during ISM (n=75). A substantial proportion collected data before ISM, examining aspirations or intentions (n=31), but few were conducted after (n=12). A substantial number of studies included data from more than one point in the ISM experience (n=27), and 5 studies were designed such that the timing was not a factor. This does not necessarily indicate a research gap, as our parameters intentionally excluded examining graduate outcomes in the labour market, where we would expect to see more studies collecting data after the conclusion of ISM. Still, there may be value to conducting studies of inequality of experience and *academic* outcomes postgraduation.

Of course, our selection criteria predisposed the final sample to prefer studies designed to examine social inequalities (n=106). Still, we included 8 studies that identified inequalities as an incidental finding, and 21 that identified inequalities only as an outcome from their research questions. However, in 14 cases, coders could not

determine how inequalities had been conceptualised in the planning of the study. Since so many studies have been designed with social inequalities in mind, we hope to see future research adopting increasingly sophisticated designs to advance this area of scholarship and practice.

In methodological terms, our final corpus included: 74 qualitative studies; 58 quantitative studies; and 18 mixed methods studies.

Within these, the research approaches were diverse, as Table 3 below indicates.

Table 3: Research approaches used

Research approach	Count of papers	Research approach	Count of papers
Correlational	44	Biography	2
Case study	20	Content analysis	2
Phenomenology	12	Naturalistic participant observation	2
Exploratory	10	Network analysis	2
Narrative	9	Creative methods	1
Cross-sectional	6	Comparative	1
Ethnography	8	Grounded theory	1
Causal-comparative	4	Longitudinal	2
Thematic analysis	3	Not specified/unclear	20
Total		**150**	

Some studies incorporated multiple research designs. Certain research designs are underused in this subfield, particularly: creative methods, longitudinal research, and comparative research.

How was data collected?

We coded the research designs separately from data collection instruments, a distinction rarely represented accurately in this corpus of research. There is again quite a high proportion of studies which do not specify their research design (n=16) which can only be described as poor practice. Since 28 studies used multiple data collection instruments in one research design, we extracted each instrument separately.

Table 4: Data collection methods used

Data collection methods	Number of studies
Interview	71
Survey	47
Secondary data	24
Observation	10
Focus group	9
Document analysis	4
Not specified	2
Other	2
Archival records	1

Surveys (n=47) include scale-based questionnaires, mixed methods with some open-ended or free-text questions, and unspecified varieties. Observations include participant and naturalistic observation and unspecified varieties (n=10), and were typically used as a secondary method. Interviews were the most popular general research tool (n=71), and this included semi-structured and unstructured interviews (but these were not consistently identified in the literature and can therefore not be confidently quantified). Secondary data analysis was also employed in a substantial

group of studies (n=24). The total number here is higher than the count of individual papers due to the number of papers that employed multiple approaches to data collection.

Who were the participants?

We further identified whether studies recruited students (n=136), staff (n=22) or other groups (n=11) as their participants. 23 studies included multiple participant groups.

Only 7 papers focused exclusively on staff. Typically, papers including staff perspectives addressed academic faculty (n=12) or administrators (n=9), often international recruitment officers or study abroad coordinators. Studies with staff typically adopted qualitative or mixed methods, and usually with smaller samples of staff.

89 studies included international students as participants (including Erasmus, EU students, and study abroad). 34 studies involved home, sedentary or immobile students. 13 studies included multiple student groups, and 4 studies included migrant and refugee international students.

Where studies reported the nationality of student participants, we recorded this. It is particularly important in the field of research with international students (Mittelmeier et al., 2024) to identify specific demographic characteristics to avoid homogenisation and consequent dehumanisation. We expected it to be universally discussed given the topic area of ISM. Most studies focused on students of one nationality (n=61), and specific nationalities are demonstrated in Figure 5 below. Studies working with existing datasets were able to include a wider range of nationalities in their sample, up to 96. 29 studies included more than 1 nationality, and named each nationality. 32 studies stated that they included multiple nationalities, but did not further specify. 13 studies stated that they included international student participants, but made no mention of nationality as a demographic attribute. 5 studies listed only the main geographic region (e.g. Asia, Africa) of origin. While there are multiple different ways of understanding and categorising international student status other than nationality, some indication of social identity should be given to facilitate synthesis and subsequent research (apart from work with global datasets, such as the UNESCO UIS). Otherwise, this risks further entrenching the homogenisation of international student populations.
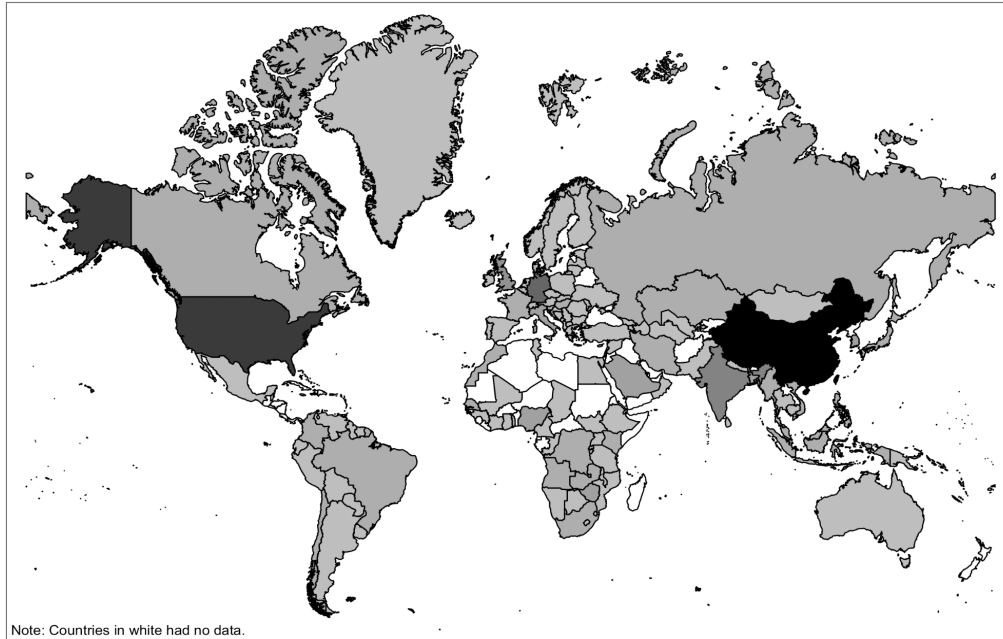
Note: Countries in white had no data.

Figure 5: Nationalities of participants

Across those studies that did identify the home country of international student participants, 132 are represented. The most frequently researched groups are from China (n=21), USA (n=20), Germany (n=14), and India (n=8). We further coded the countries to the geographic sub-region (noting that this does not reflect cultural or political distinctions that may be highly meaningful in the production of research and in the shaping of ISM).

Where the research includes student participants, most research focuses on students from Eastern Asia (n=32), Eastern Africa (n=27) and Northern America (n=24). Comparatively little research has been done on students from Northern Africa (n=7), Central Asia (n=4), the Caribbean (n=3), Australia and New Zealand (n=1), and Central America (n=1) (see Figure 6 below).
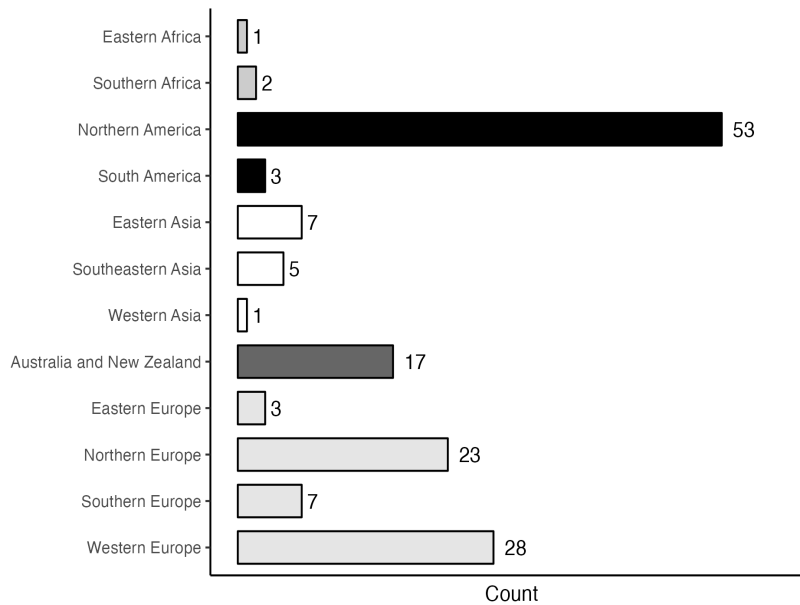
Figure 6: Number of studies involving student participants by geographic sub-region

How big were the samples?

We extracted information research provided about sample sizes. Naturally, this varied based on the methodological approach (see above), with qualitative studies generally adopting smaller sample sizes[1], most frequently between 1-20 participants (n=61), with a median of 16. However, some larger sample sizes were reported in the case of, for example, qualitative text analysis of student work from large cohorts of up to 139 (Preece, 2019).
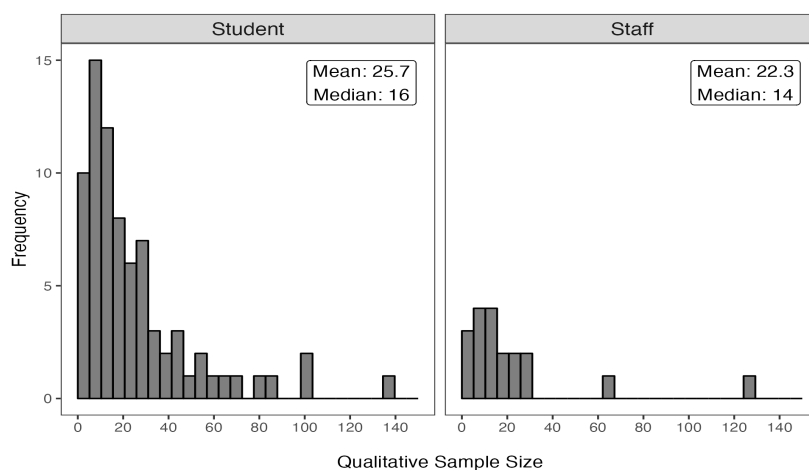

Figure 7: Qualitative studies by number of participants

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[1] For this analysis, we count the sample sizes in mixed method studies separately (i.e. the number of participants in survey elements are counted as quantitative and the number of interview participants as qualitative).

One challenge in assessing the sample size is that studies using focus groups often reported only the number of focus groups, rather than the number of participants, so these figures may underestimate the number of participants for the few studies using focus groups.

Sample sizes were typically considerably larger for quantitative studies, with a median 1,417 student participants. They ranged from a low of 30 participants, which falls well below most thresholds for making statistically significant conclusions, to a high of 1,922,199. This high represents studies using secondary quantitative data, which had a median sample size of 8,594 in contrast to surveys with a median of 483. Even amongst quantitative studies, 5 did not report their sample size.

Note: Mean and median values excluded the 12 sample sizes greater than 10,000.
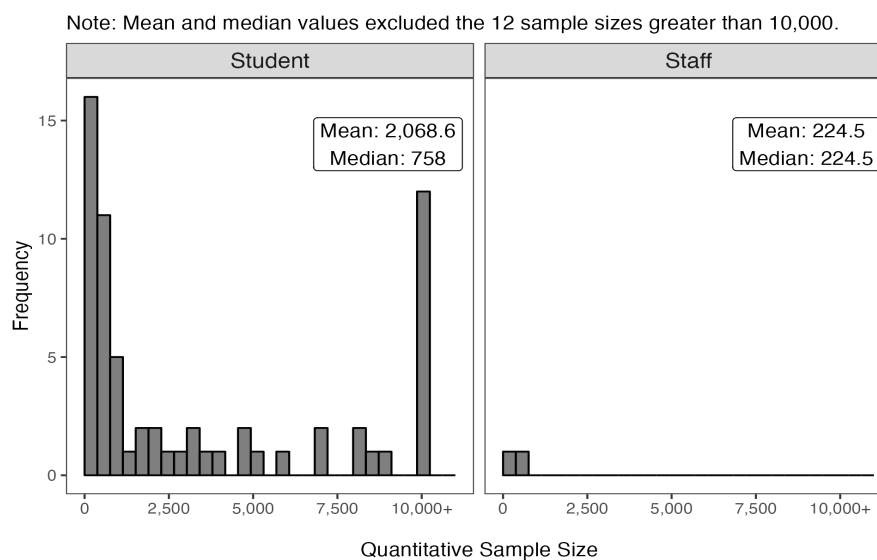
Figure 8: Quantitative studies by number of participants

Where was the data collected?

Most data was collected in one country (n=127). 8 studies collected data in 2 countries, and very few (n=11) collected data in 3 or more countries (excluding those working with global datasets - n=2).

Most studies collected data in destination countries (n=90), as opposed to countries of origin (n=45)[2]. For the majority of the 31 studies examining intention or plans *before* ISM, data collection took place in the country of origin (n=24). In the 75 studies

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[2] This information was developed as a second order code, working with information provided during first order coding.

conducted *during* ISM, 65 collected data in the destination country. The remaining 10 were conducted through virtual surveys or other remote research methods. The 12 studies conducted after ISM are more evenly split, with 4 conducted in destination and 6 in origin countries i.e. post-return. The bias towards studies taking place before and during ISM reflects our scope and selection criteria, namely the exclusion of studies relating to graduate and labour market outcomes (see above).
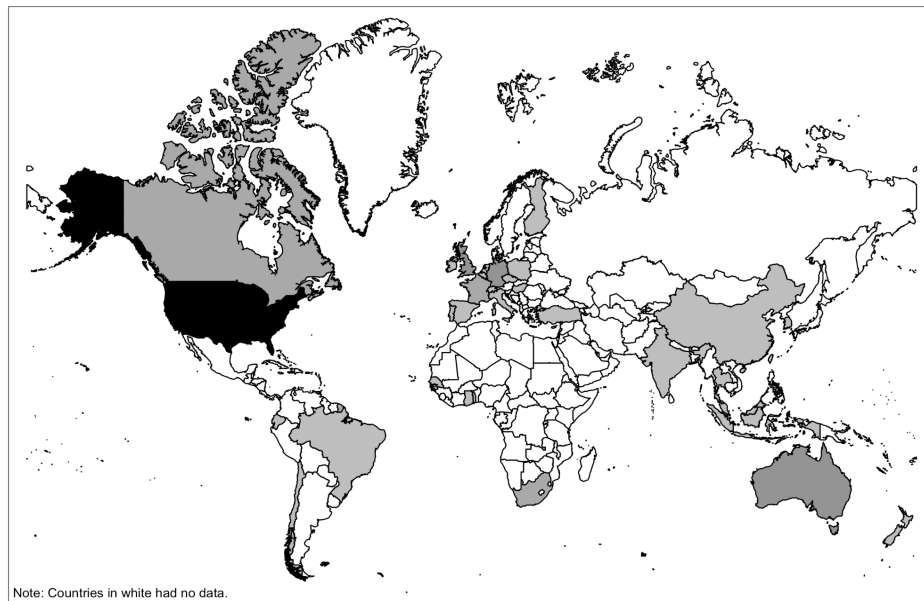

Note: Countries in white had no data.

Figure 9: Country where data was collected

Figure 9 shows where the data was collected, noting that this is a distinct category from the previous discussion on participant nationality and location of author affiliation. 49 studies collected data in the USA, followed by 14 in Australia, 14 in Germany, and 11 in the UK. This closely follows patterns of ISM itself, reflecting the world's largest destinations. In this sense, it is useful that inequalities in ISM are being researched in these locations. However, this demonstrates most research data into inequalities in ISM is being collected in Global Minority countries. Further research is needed that collects data in Africa, South America, South-Eastern and Southern Asia, Eastern Europe, and Western Asia. This is a matter of global inequalities in the space of knowledge production, since it is likely that there is differential regional funding and capacity to engage in research on these topics.

The corresponding author location (see Figure 4 above), as listed on publications, corresponds in most cases to the location of data collection (n=106). While this

observation might seem banal, it actually raises potential concerns about the imbalance of global research. Most research is being led by authors in the Global Minority (see above in Bibliometric analysis), particularly major destination countries, yet inequalities in ISM seem likely to disproportionately affect Global Majority countries. Only 13 items in our corpus could be categorised as originating from Global Majority countries. This suggests that the comparative absence of research on inequalities in ISM that uses data gathered from and by research and researchers in Global Majority countries is a major gap in the subfield.

Where researchers conduct research beyond their affiliated location (n=44), it is more frequent that these are scholars based in the Global Minority (n=35) researching either other Global Minority contexts (n=11) or Global Majority contexts (n=18) or other (n=6, e.g. use of global datasets). It is rare to see scholars based in the Global Majority (n=19) researching the Global Minority (n=4) or other Global Majority contexts (n=3). Further, only scholars located in the Global Minority examined global data in this sample (n=3).

Yet overall, scholars from the Global Majority in this subfield conduct research beyond their own national context at a higher rate (47%) than scholars from the Global Minority (27%). This might offer leaders in the subfield the impetus to further support Global Majority scholars in conducting research beyond their national contexts, and to perhaps de-prioritise research originating solely in the Global Minority.

What theories were used?

Finally, we can provide an overview of the use of theory in the corpus. Most papers used an established theory or developed a conceptual framework to inform their research (n=94), and 26 used more than 1.

Many papers used no clear theory or conceptual framework (n=56). Some of these had well-developed literature reviews that, especially for quantitative work, directly informed the development of hypotheses or research questions. While the explicit use of a named theoretical framework is not a necessary indicator of high-quality research, it does generate an acceleration of insights, particularly for small-scale qualitative work.

Discipline also affects the use of theory, as Figure 10 shows below.
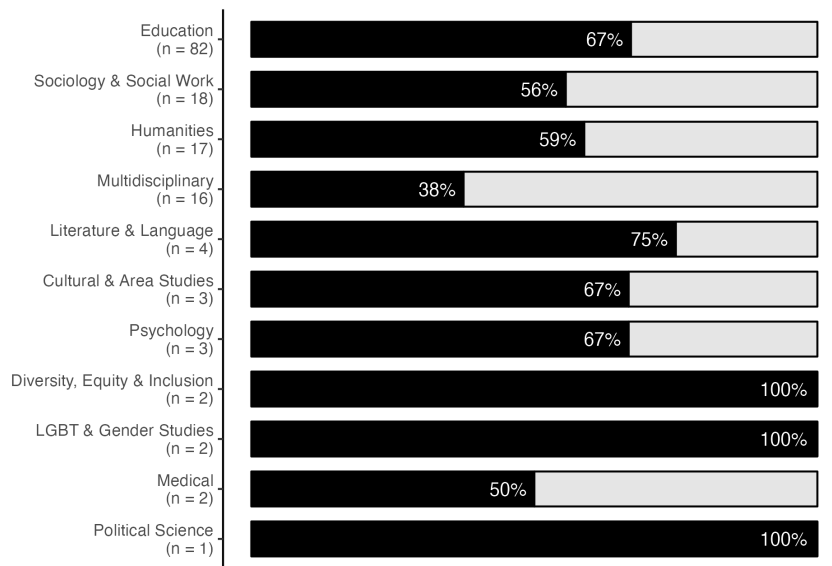
Figure 10: Proportion of studies that used theory by discipline

There is a substantial range of theories used with 98 unique theories or conceptual frameworks identified. These can be broadly categorised into 'families' of theories. The single most dominant theorist is Pierre Bourdieu, with the key concepts of habitus (n=3) (e.g., Lingo, 2019), social reproduction (n=6) (e.g., Perez Mejias et al., 2018) and capitals of multiple forms (n=11) informing a total of 20 papers. Critical Race Theory was also a significant group of studies (n=16) including studies on racialisation (1) (e.g., Azim & Happel-Parkins, 2019), EYES theory (n=1) (e.g., Yeo et al., 2019), raciolinguistics (n=1) (e.g., Lin, 2021), and neo-racism (n=3) (e.g., Dos Santos, 2019).

Table 5: Theoretical families and numbers of studies

Theoretical 'family'	Sum of studies	Theoretical 'family'	Sum of studies
Theories about capitals	17	Psychological theories	6
Rational choice theories	16	Feminist theories	5
Critical Theories about Race	16	Theories about gender	5
Theories about social inequalities	15	Theories about mobility	4

Theories about diversity & inclusion	13	Organisational theories	3
Theories about minorities	8	Theories about identity	3
Theories about experiences	7	Theories about language	3
Theories about global relations	7	Theories of learning	2

Synthesis of Empirical Findings

In this section, we aim to synthesise key findings from the empirical papers included. We break this synthesis down according to different factors which typically structure wider social inequalities, namely: socio-economic status (SES), ethnicity and religion, gender and sexuality, language, refugee status, and nationality. This approach necessarily foregrounds a single factor at a time, and backgrounds intersectionality. Several studies clearly highlighted through their analysis the importance of intersectionality (Hamilton et al., 2020; Bryant & Soria, 2015), with Hamilton et al. (2020), for example, quantifying food insecurity as 2.52 times more likely amongst students experiencing two or more forms of marginalisation. As Michl et al. (2019, p.40) frame it: "Communities with marginalised identities (TGE (trans or gender expansive) study abroad students, for example) are often forced to engage in constant reflection regarding the ways these identities affect, alter, and relate to their experiences and interactions." Where studies signalled a link between multiple factors, this has been signalled throughout. However, this approach is important to highlight what the academic literature does and does not establish about specific dynamics of inequalities in access to and participation in ISM.

Socio-economic status

Georgiana Mihut, Suvi Jokila, Orlanda Tavares, Joyce Aguiar, Ying Yang

We identified 69 studies that related to SES. Current evidence strongly suggests that students from lower SES are less likely to participate in ISM (Di Pietro, 2020; Dias Lopes, 2020; Findlay et al., 2012; Schnepf et al., 2024; Van Mol, 2022), and less likely to participate in activities designed to include home students in internationalisation (Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022). Moreover, SES gaps in ISM participation have not

decreased over time in Italy, Germany and France (Di Pietro, 2020). Financial constraints are one of the documented barriers faced by students from lower SES to studying abroad (Netz & Grüttner, 2021). Mechanisms through which the impact of SES manifests in ISM include prior educational achievement (Di Pietro, 2020; Dias Lopes, 2020), prior language training (Finger, 2011; Di Pietro, 2020; Preece, 2019), and segregation of high SES students in elite higher education institutions (Schnepf et al., 2024).

The research highlights SES as a substantial determinant of ISM, perpetuating privilege (Ballatore & Ferede, 2013; Findlay et al., 2012; Lee & Wright, 2016), exacerbating class disparities (Tsang, 2013; Tuxen & Robertson, 2019; Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022), and deepening gender inequalities (Bryant & Soria, 2015; Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016). This dynamic reinforces a self-perpetuating cycle of advantage, elevating individuals with higher SES backgrounds within ISM. Gender and class also intersect with SES, further complicating the challenges faced by women and less privileged individuals in their pursuit of international education (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016). A substantial portion of these studies therefore took place **before** ISM (n=25).

Socio-economic disparities are also reflected in the experience **during** ISM (n=22). Research indicates there are differences in the behaviour and experiences of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds during ISM. Studies have shown disparities between scholarship and non-scholarship holders, as well as between students who work and those who do not (Ndiaye, 2020; Glass et al., 2021).

The impact of SES post-mobility can manifest in different ways depending on ISM context. For example, in Latvia, bureaucratic challenges hinder foreign degree holders from entering the workforce, a challenge primarily faced by students with lower cultural capital (Lulle & Buzinska, 2017). However, studies exploring the impact of SES **after** ISM were less common (n=7), as expected given that we excluded studies focusing on graduate and labour market outcomes.

Some studies highlight the significant impact of institutional policies on study-abroad participation rates (Whatley & Stich, 2021). These policies play a crucial role in shaping ISM and should be intentionally designed to mitigate educational inequalities

(Perez Mejias et al., 2018). The state's involvement in funding ISM is emphasised as a significant factor in fostering ISM (Holloway et al., 2012), not only contributing to addressing disparities in ISM opportunities but also aligning with broader educational equity goals.

ISM studies discuss SES as a characteristic of individuals in their home country or area (Gerhards & Németh, 2015; Van Mol, 2022) or as a characteristic that emerges from their mobility in their destination country or region (Deutschmann, 2022). Most studies therefore adopted an **individual** level approach (n=47). ISM can be influenced by the political and economic conditions of a student's home country, intersecting with SES. For example, in Yang's (2018a) study on Indian students studying at a Chinese medical school, "some Indian youth who are academically excluded from public medical schools and financially excluded from private options, end up seeking affordable overseas provision in countries outside the Anglophone world" (p. 729). In contrast, only a few studies adopted a **national** level perspective (n=11). Several studies adopted **multi-scalar** approaches that bridged individual and regional levels of analysis (n=8), but few explored SES on the **institutional** scale (n=3).

On the other hand, students from low and middle-income countries may be more likely to seek education in developed countries with perceived better educational resources and opportunities. Mobility as such may produce economically disadvantaged positions. For instance, students from the Global South may be charged more in tuition than their counterparts in the Global North (Deutschmann, 2022).

While quantitative approaches are most frequent when researching who participates in ISM (n=38), the underrepresentation of students from lower SES has been documented across studies using also qualitative (n=17) and mixed (n=11) approaches. Most of these studies have been explored in higher income contexts, such as the USA (n=13), Germany (n=10), UK (n=5), Australia (n=4), Canada (n=4), and other European countries (n=8). In addition, for SES, more studies included data from multiple countries or global data (n=14).

Existent studies propose a number of national and institutional policy recommendations to address the SES gap in ISM. At the national level, these include suggestions to implement social quotas for ISM opportunities (Dias Lopes, 2020), to

decrease the reliance on prior academic achievement in the selection of students for ISM (Schnepf et al., 2024), to distribute ISM scholarship opportunities to higher education institutions, regardless of their institutional rank (Schnepf et al., 2024), to increase language proficiency among low socio-economic background students (Dias Lopes, 2020; Finger, 2011), and to reduce visa costs for students from lower SES countries (Deutschmann, 2022). At the institutional level, studies recommend outreach initiatives and more targeted information sharing among low SES students (Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022), reforming the use of agents and brokers for recruiting international students (Tuxen & Robertson, 2019), and consolidating the provision of internationalisation at home initiatives (Van Mol & Perez-Encinas, 2022). Further research can focus on developing interventions aimed at lowering the SES gap in ISM and evaluating their effectiveness. Further research is also needed to understand the effects of ISM on students with different SES backgrounds.

A large number of studies have addressed the effect of SES in access to and during ISM and also proposed the recommendations for mitigating its negative impact. However, little attention has been given to international student recruitment policies and institutional admission criteria in access to ISM (Lomer et al., 2023), which is directly associated with what kind of students (e.g. socio-economic background) will be eligible for application and admission. Therefore, future research is needed on how international student recruitment and admission recede the impact of SES on access to ISM.

Ethnicity and religion

Sören Carlson, Irma Budginaitė-Mačkinė, Thais França, Daniel Klasik

We identified just one study that takes religious aspects into account by enquiring into the experiences of Muslim international students in the United States (Anderson, 2020). When it comes to ethnicity, however, research has identified quite a number of outcomes and factors that contribute to social inequalities in ISM in the 57 studies identified. Among the various **outcomes** under consideration, research has particularly focused on the diverse forms of racism (Kamanzi, 2021; Kwon, Hernandez & Moga, 2019; Omeni, 2016; Randall, Crawford & River, 2020; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), discrimination (Dos Santos, 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011; Liu, Wong & Tsai, 2016;

Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007) and microaggressions (Azim & Happel-Parkins, 2019; Kim & Hogge, 2021; Willis, 2015; Yeo et al., 2019) that mobile students encounter. Interestingly, Muñoz and Maldonado (2012) and Omeni (2016) identify various coping strategies that international students develop in reaction to such experiences. Additionally, some studies report feelings of outsiderness (Talley-Matthews, Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2020; Trilokekar & Kukar, 2011), loneliness (Liu et al., 2016) and homesickness (Wang & Cross, 2005; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007) for different groups of international students related to their racial or ethnic identity. A somewhat different direction is taken by Yan and Cheng (2015), who enquire into Chinese students' academic success when studying in Korea, and those studies which focus on issues of identity change among international students of varying ethnic origins (Bush et al., 2022; Fenech at al., 2013).

The **factors** that produce and/or reproduce such inequalities are, first and foremost, related to ethnicity and race. Research shows that students' access to international mobility schemes, systemic barriers they face and their intentions to study abroad may vary depending on their ethnic background (e.g., Perkins, 2020; Trebilcock & Nanere, 2020) and racial background (e.g., Whatley & Raby, 2020). The small group of studies (n=9) identified which took place **before** ISM explores these. Most studies that explored ethnicity and race examined experiences **during** study abroad (n=38) or at multiple points (n=5), with 2 unspecified timings. The experiences of international students abroad are shaped by such systemic barriers as unwelcoming institutional environments (Talley-Matthews, Wiggan & Watson-Vandiver, 2020), culturally exclusionary and silencing hidden curricula (Baykut et al., 2022) and pervasiveness whiteness in official institutional policies, routine practices within the institution, and the informal culture (Kim, 2016; Madriaga & McCaig, 2022). Complementary, pedagogical practices can also be deemed exclusionary and act as silencing devices towards international students (Baykut et al., 2022). Furthermore, students may experience different academic expectations and unequal access to internship opportunities (Dos Santos, 2019) due to their ethnic or racial background. As international students find themselves situated in complex hierarchies of perceived desirability depending on the country or region of origin (e.g., Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007), this may lead to an internalisation of "inferior" positions (Baker & Clark, 2011). On a more positive side, research also indicates that students from diverse ethnic

backgrounds are motivated to engage in ISM due to the anticipated benefits upon return (Perkins, 2020) and that students possessing advanced linguistic and multicultural proficiencies prior to their studies abroad tend to attain the most significant linguistic and academic benefits thereafter (Wang et al., 2020). However, only 3 studies examined the impact of ethnicity **after** ISM.

Within this research strand, authors typically draw on **theories** that either explain the process by which students decide to pursue education abroad, or the biases that lead to inequitable outcomes. On the decision-making side, scholars have commonly used various kinds of choice models (Perkins, 2020; Salisbury, et al., 2010, 2011; Trebilcock & Nanere, 2020). Similarly, scholars have applied theories of planned behavior to describe students' intent to study abroad (Trebilcock & Nanere, 2020). In describing the structural environment that generates inequality in international student mobility experiences, scholars often draw on critical race theory (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012), neo-racism (Dos Santos, 2019) or intersectional approaches (Green et al., 2015; Willis, 2015). However, scholars have occasionally also focused on the positive assets of students, taking anti-deficit approaches (e.g., Perkins, 2020), or using theories that focus on languages as resources (e.g., Preece, 2019). Finally, when describing students' experiences abroad, scholars have invoked theories of culture shock (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

Finally, some authors also make some suggestions on how to better support international students. These **recommendations** focus on addressing language barriers, included a focus on language skills training and support (Hartley et al., 2019; Wang & Cross, 2005; Wang et al., 2020), or emphasise forms of cultural exchange and support that come either indirectly from experiential learning (Rahatzad et al., 2013) and interaction with other students (Reinhardt et al., 2021), including students from a student's own country (Wang & Cross, 2005), or directly from intercultural assistance or mentorship programmes (Dos Santos, 2019; Penner et al., 2021). Recommendations for other types of direct assistance often include intervention programmes designed to target homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007), and targeted outreach to parents and peer groups (Perkins, 2020). However, many of these recommendations appear rather uncritical, since they focus on individual rather than structural level interventions.

Most studies discussing ethnicity adopted a qualitative paradigm (n=31), with several (n=16) quantitative studies, and 10 mixed approaches. Most studies focused on the micro-level i.e. the individual (n=43), with few studies at the institutional level (n=4), or national level (n=1), and 9 that adopted multi-scalar approaches. Most studies were conducted in the USA (n=27), Australia (n=4), UK (n=2), Canada (n=3), Brazil (n=2), France (n=2) and other European countries (n=4).

While the research on ethnicity is comprehensive and reflects parallel research on ethnicity in other domains, the scholarship on religion as a factor of inequality affecting international students is seriously lacking.

Refugees

Sahizer Samuk, Cosmin Nada

10 studies exploring the challenges for refugees as inequalities were identified. Inequality for refugees in HE commonly relates to legal and financial barriers. Papers regarding inequalities and refugees primarily focus on their legal status (Bertoldo & Redin, 2021; Grüttner et al., 2021), which often affects challenges to access higher education (Hartley et al., 2019). Webb et al. (2018) highlight the crux of the problem saying that the refugees are neither domestic nor international students and they find themselves in-between where the tailored economic, legal and social integration schemes at the universities addressing their needs are missing.

Asylum seekers in particular have an in-between status which creates inconsistencies, uncertainties and ambiguity in the university environment. In the UK, for instance, Murray (2022) found that asylum-seekers in limbo with immigration decisions experienced multiple uncertainties, and very few universities out of 72 took measures to provide support to forced migrants for higher education needs. Yet only 2 studies were identified that adopted an institutional or national perspective, and 2 that adopted multiple level approaches. Most studies, despite the legal and structural challenges, focused on individual level experiences (n=6).

The second major issue is the financial problems/lack of scholarships (Webb et al., 2018) and not having the right to work. As a result, the dropout rate of refugee background HE students is higher (Grütttner et al., 2021).

Language policy for refugees also formed an important theme in the research. Pradeau's (2022) paper focuses mostly on undocumented migrants, criticising voluntary language courses suggests that the public policy should address their socio-linguistic integration and courses. Reinhardt et al. (2021) is the only paper that measures the refugees' capabilities on language and economic literacy from a strength-based perspective.

The included research regarding inequalities of refugee students in higher education was based in these countries: Brazil (n=1), Germany (n=3), Australia (n=2), South Africa (n=1), the UK (n=1), and France (n=1). In terms of research methods, three are mixed methods, two are quantitative and four are qualitative. Only in one paper were the nationalities clear and only in another of them the regions where the refugees are from, were indicated. Home countries in two papers are unspecified and, in the rest, (in four papers) the home countries are identified as multiple but not indicated specifically. This suggests a limitation to the existing literature, which may tend to assume homogeneity among refugee students.

Amongst the papers examined, the other missing link (that the research can focus more ideally on) was the outcome of their success at the university. Another issue that needs to be considered is the focus: asylum-seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants are different categories, but in some papers, they seem to be converging and this causes a lack of focus on identifying the main problems of each group. Hence, a generalisation to find solutions to the inequalities mentioned in these papers would be impossible as the categories are not homogeneous as they are "heterogeneous vulnerable groups" (Reinhardt et al., 2021).

More than good practices, the literature made recommendations and policy suggestions: greater refugee rights and support provision (Lee & Sehoole, 2020), permanent protection visas (Hartley et al., 2019), a supportive environment where the refugees can have more social exchange with other students (Reinhardt et al., 2021) and more scholarships (Pradeau, 2022).

Language

Sanam Roohi, Sazana Jayadeva

Taken together, 25 papers offered an understanding of the multifaceted way in which language-related inequalities shape ISM. First, access to top-ranked universities, mostly located in English or French-speaking parts of the world, required applicants to demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language, which, in turn, was strongly correlated with having studied in a private high school and SES (see above) (Omer, 2006; Perez Mejias et al., 2018; Kanouté, Hassani & Bouchamma, 2018). Relatedly, proficiency in a foreign language among international students correlated with the GDP of the sending country or the colonial relationship of exploitation/extraction between the sending and receiving countries (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). Moreover, students from privileged backgrounds could position their multilingualism as an asset vis-a-vis students from working-class backgrounds (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Preece, 2019). While class was not explicitly mentioned, a few papers also considered how migrant background may inflect study-abroad intentions differently among first and second generation students (Goldstein & Lopez, 2021) and those with refugee backgrounds (Hartley, Baker et al., 2019; Grüttner et al., 2021). Students with second-generation migration backgrounds were more likely to choose study abroad options than their first-generation counterparts.

In addition, some international students reported being negatively stereotyped and discriminated against by domestic students as a result of perceived limitations in their proficiency in the language of instruction (Randall et al., 2020), a finding noted among students with migration and refugee backgrounds (Hartley et al., 2019; Grüttner et al., 2021). Indeed, many international students struggled with speaking and comprehending the language of instruction in the study destination, which adversely impacted their confidence to participate in classroom and group exercises (ibid), and could affect their academic performance (Yan & Cheng, 2015). Some papers also pointed to how language barriers of various kinds could impact international students' sense of belonging and integration beyond the classroom – in the university campus and in the host society more broadly (Wang & Cross, 2005; Yang, 2018; Penner et al., 2021; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Finally, the impact of language-related factors extended beyond the period of ISM, with a few papers illustrating how limited proficiency in the language of the study destination could adversely impact international students' university-to-work transitions (Korhonen, 2015; Maury, 2018).

Papers examining language as a source of /criterion for inequalities at different stages in students' study-abroad journeys (n=25) were coded together. The vast majority of these papers (n=17) considered language-related inequalities mediating students' experiences during ISM, while a few examined how such inequalities might impact students before (n=3), after (n=2), or at multiple stages of their ISM journeys (n=2), and one remained unclear as to the stage of ISM being examined. In terms of the scale of analysis, most papers provided a micro-level analysis (n=16), while a small number carried out meso (n=3), macro (n=3) or multi-scalar analyses (n=3). The majority of studies were qualitative (n=11), while a smaller number drew on quantitative (n=8) and mixed methods (n=6). A range of theories and concepts were applied to examine how language-related inequalities mediate ISM, including language ideology (Sung, 2022); raciolinguistics theory (Lin, 2021); language-as-resource approaches (Preece, 2019); critical race perspectives (Kamanzi, 2021); feminist theory and intersectionality theory (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016); social reproduction theories (Perez Mejias et al., 2018) and Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Kanouté et al., 2018); social justice frameworks (Clark et al., 2021); glottopolitical approaches (Pradeau, 2022), and culture shock theory (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Most studies were conducted in English-language destinations, namely Australia (n=4), USA (n=4), Anglophone Canada (n=2), New Zealand (n=1) and the UK (n=1). Destinations with other languages included Finland (n=2), France (n=2), Germany (n=1), Francophone Canada (n=1), South Korea (n=1), Spain (n=1) and Turkish Cyprus (n=1).

As a corrective to language-based imbalances within classrooms, a couple of papers also pointed to policy directives that could ameliorate the situation. These measures include intensive language training programmes before the start of the academic calendar as a tool for social justice within classrooms (Clark, et al., 2021; Pradeau, 2022).

There are several limitations identified in the reviewed articles on how language-related inequalities shape ISM. Some papers were exploratory at best, not offering any comprehensive insights on the correlation between language and students' experiences mediated by their religious backgrounds (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007), or their status perception (Baker & Clark, 2011) or even their racialisation as seen during the

COVID pandemic (Lin, 2021). Others focus solely on unequal outcomes rather than the question of equity during ISM (Clark et al., 2021).

Problems presented by sampling such as excluding exchange students (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014), or including a limited number of respondents (Penner et al., 2021) or institutions (Goldstein et al., 2021), was also recorded in a few studies. Some studies omitted interviewing students (Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016), or focused only on international students (Sung, 2022), or a single institution (Goldstein et al., 2021), making the findings rather narrow and non-generalizable. Some studies acknowledged this problem, and suggested that further studies are required. For instance, Hartley et al. (2019) or Lin (2021), pointed out the issue of (anticipated) discrimination among students from underrepresented groups in host and home countries, needs sustained inquiry.

The problem of selection bias or exclusion was also evident in some studies. The exclusion of crucial information like elite students' academic abilities or names of all the universities they applied to when evaluating university rankings as a criterion for application was missing in Perez Meijas et al. (2018). Conversely, others like Grüttner et al. (2021) focused only on university applicants rather than enrolled students. In Yang's (2018a) paper, the data presented did not follow Indian medical students in China into postgraduate life to assess the social im/mobility outcomes. In another instance, Petzold and Peter (2015) used cross-sectional design which did not permit reviewing how an internationalised social environment translates into the process of ISM. These temporally restrictive studies did not allow for deeper insights into how language barriers may influence choices from application to post-graduation.

Gender

Nathalie Aerts

56 studies were identified that explored the impact of gender on ISM through the lens of inequalities. Generally, women have stronger intentions to cross borders for study purposes more frequently than men (e.g. Salisbury et al., 2010, 2011; Van Mol, 2022). Women are more likely to be influenced by authority figures and educational contexts, while men's ISM intent is mainly shaped by personal values and peer influence

(Salisbury et al., 2010). The focus on intent is reflected in research designs that explore intent **before** ISM (n=14).

In the Netherlands, Van Mol (2022) found that women's stronger exploration motives accounted for the gender gap in ISM. Additionally, Gülen (2019) concluded that women voiced less financial concerns about their stay abroad. However, the overrepresentation of women might not be universal across countries and degrees. Dias Lopes (2020) found that women participate less frequently in a Brazilian study abroad programme, due to its focus on STEM. Female Chinese and Taiwanese international students in the USA were less likely to pursue a STEM degree (Cai, 2003) and similar findings were observed for women participating in the ERASMUS programme (De Benedictis & Leoni, 2020).

Despite the overrepresentation of women in ISM, negative experiences transpire **during** ISM (n=23). Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch (2016) found that the vulnerability of international female students leads to gender-based violence. Gender often intersects with other inequalities, including SES (Dias Lopes, 2020; Lingo, 2019; Martin, 2017; Van Mol, 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Zhang & Tang, 2021; Salisbury et al., 2010, 2011), and ethnicity/race (Anderson, 2020; Azim & Happel-Parkins, 2019; Lobnibe, 2009; Willis, 2015). Qualitative studies showed, for instance, that Chinese middle-class female students study abroad to counterbalance negative gender biases in China (Martin, 2017) and improve labour market opportunities (Zhang & Tang, 2021). The review further revealed that minority group students experience discrimination and micro-aggressions in receiving countries, particularly minority women. On campuses in the USA, Muslim women experienced discrimination for wearing the hijab (Anderson, 2020) and frequent and severe Islamophobic micro-aggressions (Azim & Happel-Parkins, 2019). These experiences have detrimental effects on the well-being of international students. A study by Liu and colleagues (2016) found that gender, racial and nationality discrimination negatively impacted the life satisfaction of Asian international students in the USA, both directly and indirectly through feelings of loneliness. Overall, gender is more commonly understood on the individual level (n=40) than the institutional (n=3) or national level (n=7). 6 studies adopted multi-scalar approaches, but this suggests that the structures of gender discrimination or inequalities are underexplored in this area of literature.

A multitude of theories have been applied to account for the gender gap, such as Personal Investment Theory (Van Mol, 2022), Rational Choice Theory (Gülen, 2019), and Human Capital Theory (Cai, 2003; Lingo, 2019, Salisbury et al., 2010; Salisbury et al., 2011).

Quantitative paradigms were more common in studies relating to gender (n=33) than qualitative paradigms (n=18) and mixed approaches (n=5). Most studies relating to gender were conducted in the USA (n=19),with fewer occurring in multiple countries (n=9), UK (n=3), Germany (n=3), Canada (n=4), and other European countries (n=6).

Future studies investigating gender gaps in ISM should consider using a non-binary distinction of gender, as virtually all studies included in this review merely distinguish between men and women. Only one study was identified that explored the experience of ISM for trans and gender expansive students, highlighting particular hardships in relation to gender-policing and sexual violence, as well as unique joys of community building and self-exploration (Michl et al., 2019).

Moreover, gender differences in ISM are often not articulated in terms of inequalities. Consequently, valuable contributions did not match our selection criteria even though these studies contain relevant insights on the development of the gender gap and fruitful theoretical perspectives as to why women are overrepresented in ISM (Bryant & Soria, 2015; Cordua & Netz, 2022; Di Pietro, 2022; Hurst, 2019; Thirolf, 2014). Finally, few studies (n=5) explored the relation between gender and outcomes **after** ISM.

To increase ISM among men, STEM-related subjects could offer more flexibility in their curricula. These subjects often have fixed course schedules and including a mobility window would therefore facilitate going abroad. Moreover, faculty members and employees from the international office could more strongly advocate the potential benefits of acquiring international experience for future labour market opportunities, especially among men (Di Pietro, 2022). In spite of women crossing borders more frequently, particularly minority women are at risk of experiencing gender-based violence and discrimination. Receiving universities should, therefore, take proactive steps to establish a safe and equitable environment for (minority) women. To foster

such environments, intercultural awareness and respect should be an integral part of the curricula offered by universities (Azim & Happel-Parkins, 2019).

Sexualities

Sylvie Lomer

Few studies (n=3) included sexualities in their discussion of international students. In the USA, LGBTQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning or queer) students were found to be more likely to study abroad or engage in volunteer/work experiences abroad (Bryant & Soria, 2015). Both LBTQQ sexualities and international student status were linked to food insecurity (Hamilton et al., 2020). Finally, one study included sexualities and gender identities in their analysis of language experiences, but did not highlight the relevance of these (Penner et al., 2021).

Studies were split between qualitative and quantitative approaches (n=1, n=2), and were conducted exclusively in the North American context (Canada n=2, USA n=1).

As Nguyen et al. (2023) state, LGBTQ+ international students remain largely silenced in contemporary research, and much more research is needed.

Disabilities

Annette Bamberger

Broadly the very limited literature on disability and ISM (n=5) emphasises that disability negatively affects international students' prospects: both their decision to ISM and also their support structures and outcomes upon arrival in a new destination. Disability is framed as a challenge to students in studying internationally, and for institutions in supporting them.

Students with disabilities were found to be less aware of the options to study internationally and are less likely to perceive them as accessible (De Benedictis & Leoni, 2021; Heirweg, et al., 2020; du Toit, 2018). HEIs are often ill equipped to support them, lacking knowledge about specific disabilities to provide effective support (Olave-Encina, 2019; De Benedictis & Leoni, 2021; Heirweg et al., 2020; Masterson-Algar et al., 2020; du Toit, 2018).

One discrepancy among the studies related to length of mobility. Several studies indicated that the length of mobility was an important consideration for those with disabilities, with an implicit assumption that shorter periods would be preferable. However, Masterson-Algar, Jennings and Odenwelder (2020) indicated that for students with autism, longer periods of study abroad may be advisable to give them a chance to settle into routines. This indicates that scholars need to exercise caution and eschew one-size-fits all recommendations. Important factors such as the nature of the disability, other possible social identities which may create intersectional inequalities, and the length of mobility should be considered. However, half of the papers did not define the type of mobility addressed (e.g. short-term, degree). This indicates a certain imprecision in the literature, as several papers indicated that the length of the mobility was significant in promoting or hindering mobility.

The cohort of studies (n=5) addressing disabilities and international students was notably small. Only 1 paper addressed national and regional levels of analysis, with the majority of papers (n=4) addressing the micro level of students or support staff members. This indicates that national and supranational level analysis are lacking and are an important gap in the literature. The papers ranged from 2016-2021, indicating that disability is likely a relatively newer consideration in ISM literature. There was an equal number of qualitative and quantitative studies (n=3, n=3). Theories used include the Capability Approach, ecological systems theory and Goffman's work on identity, however, half of the papers did not contain a conceptual or theoretical framework. This may indicate a more practitioner-oriented audience.

The studies were likewise focussed considerably on promoting mobility to students with disabilities in the Global North, or Global North universities supporting international students (presumably from around the world); only 1 study focussed on incoming and outgoing international student mobility in the Global South (i.e. South Africa). As China, Turkey, Russia, Malaysia and UAE are now major players in ISM, this is surprising and may indicate that this is a particularly Anglo-European area of concern.

There is widespread advocacy for better policies and practices to ameliorate this situation. De Benedictis and Leoni (2021) contend that establishing clearer policy priorities and improving data collection methods are crucial steps towards enhancing

the engagement of students with disabilities in the Erasmus program. Additionally, Olave-Encina (2019) emphasises the importance of raising awareness among university stakeholders about the social-affective aspects of students with disabilities. Furthermore, du Toit (2018) highlights the necessity for increased focus on marketing strategies and promotional efforts to facilitate international mobility opportunities for these students.

Conceptual and secondary research

Sahizer Samuk, Zahide Erdogan

These 31 conceptual papers are in the fields of Education (21), Sociology and Social Work (4), Communication (1), Psychology (1), Nursing and Allied Health (1), Humanities (1), LGTBQ and Gender Studies (1) and Interdisciplinary (1). 15 of the papers focus on economic inequalities in the form of social class, social status, SES social and economic status, privileges and different social strata in general. The second most underlined inequality (7) is on ethnic and racial inequalities. 2 focus on gender inequalities, 1 of which included both SES and gender intersection. 3 papers focus on epistemic inequalities. Finally, 1 focuses on global inequalities, geographic inequalities (south-north divide) and 1 paper concentrates on language-related inequalities (Anglophone and others).

These conceptual papers reinforce and further explain the inequalities detailed in empirical work. In terms of gender, the over-representation of women in humanities in study abroad from Australia (Nerlich, 2015) mirrors the empirical findings above. However, it contrasts with Ono and Piper's (2004) review, suggesting that Japanese companies systematically discriminated against women employees seeking to obtain MBAs. This emphasises the importance of context in the interpretation of inequalities in regard to ISM.

The neoliberal logic of recruiting students to higher education institutions as a means of internationalising creates financial inequalities through higher costs, tuition fees, visa fees (and more) for ISM. Kubota (2016) argues that intersectional inequalities of gender, race, geography and SES are structured by the prevailing neoliberal ideology, with many deterred from study abroad by financial barriers or opportunity cost (Nerlich,

2015). These are established in HE systems which, like the UK, allow differential international tuition fees (Tannock, 2013). SES is highlighted from multiple conceptual perspectives (e.g. differentiating between social strata or social milieus or using occupational status as a measure) to affect the implementation and planning of study abroad (Bargel & Bargel, 2012). Older students with work and family responsibilities are further impacted by this dilemma, a point not raised through the empirical work above (Netz, 2015). Similarly, Capobianco (2020) suggests that queer voices are not heard in shaping strategies and programmes of international education.

Matic (2019) argues that the cycle of privilege benefiting participation in ISM, which confers further advantage, exacerbates global inequalities in all countries involved in internationalisation. This is also true on the national scale, as brain drain disadvantages countries in the long term (Dassin, 2013). However, as options for study destinations expand, the dynamics of inequalities shift, with, for example, Chinese students who cannot afford Anglophone destinations opting to study in Hungary (Li, 2020). This offers access to ISM for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, but this may not offer the full extent of the cultural capital conferred from more established ISM destinations.

Inequalities of ethnicity are also highlighted, with studies on study abroad participation from African American students (Thomas, 2013), and African international students in China (Mulvey, 2022). In the latter study, Mulvey highlights how students from different SES backgrounds navigate experiences of discrimination differently, emphasising the importance of intersectional approaches (Joshi et al., 2021). Manathunga (2019) synthesises the impact of assimilationist pedagogies on indigenous, migrant, refugee and international doctoral students, arguing that time pressures of PhD study reinforce these damaging approaches.

Disability was addressed by two conceptual studies. McLean et al. (2003) identified important issues to provide an equitable environment for disabled students intending to study abroad, taking cultural variation into consideration. Johnstone and Edwards (2020) review USA HE activities in relation to disabled international students, finding that there is limited institutional commitment in most universities to design accessible programmes.

Two studies also highlighted a significant consequence of the inequalities identified here: psychological well-being. Ciftci et al. (2013) suggest international students from non-Anglophone countries and lower SES experience more frequent incidences of depression and have lower 'self-control'. This is echoed by the scoping review of McKenna et al. (2017), which identifies clear intersections between quality of life and ethnic/racial discrimination.

Several studies address epistemic equality in relation to ISM. Hayes and Cheng (2020) argue that international students are often not considered full democratic citizens as part of their academic community. Hayes argues elsewhere (2019) that international students are put at risk of epistemic exclusion, and traces this to the colonial legacies of many Global Majority, source countries. It is also critical that study abroad programmes adopt reciprocal partnership approaches that avoid exploiting indigenous hosts (Moorhead et al., 2021).

Global inequalities in the context of ISM have been studied by many authors but gaps seem to exist in certain areas (e.g. disability, temporality, intersectionality, migration status, gender) more than others (e.g. socio-economic background, ethnic/racial equality, epistemic equality, global inequalities promoted by ISM).

Practice-based results

Sylvie Lomer

Papers examining specific practices or interventions as their data source were coded together. Many of these papers focused on short-term study abroad programmes (n=10), two focus on degree abroad, and Wolf-Mandroux (2019) describes a partnership-driven approach to supporting international students. Most papers focused on underrepresented ethnic minority groups (n=10) and disadvantaged socio-economic groups (n=5). One focused on students with intellectual disabilities (Kelley et al., 2016), another targeted working adults completing their degree at night (Peppas, 2005), and another focused on student-athletes (Barker, 2016).

Each study abroad initiative can be said to share a few characteristics. First, they planned the timing and duration of the trip with their target audience in mind (e.g., Black et al., 2022; Barker, 2016). Second, they included preparation activities as part

of the curriculum (e.g. Dean and Kelly, 2020). Third, several of these were credit-bearing initiatives that included assessed components (Barker, 2016; Edwards, 2020; Peppas, 2005). Fourth, several were fully-funded initiatives (though this often meant they were highly competitive) (Picard et al., 2009; Blake, et al., 2020). Fifth, staff training was often included to increase competence in supporting underrepresented groups (e.g., Picard et al., 2009; Lathouras, 2020). Finally, alignment between the curricular objectives, the academic activities during the study abroad, and the recreational and/or touristic elements of the programme was typically a point of value in evaluations. Several initiatives appear to have benefited significantly from reflective opportunities (Pulsifer et al., 2020). Also, several initiatives included peer or alumni mentoring (Wolf-Mandroux, 2019; Murrell, 2022).

This literature varied widely in its engagement with the previous scholarship, some conducting rigorous reviews, some with very sophisticated conceptual framings (e.g., Edwards, 2020), and others with very limited reading. Two papers - Edwards (2020) and Pulsifer et al. (2020) - demonstrated exceptional coherence between the design of the study abroad intervention, the theoretical framework adopted, and the practices within which the study abroad intervention was housed.

Few papers were therefore able to make substantive policy recommendations beyond their institutional context, despite portraying evaluations as typically positive. It seems that a common policy barrier to developing targeted initiatives to underrepresented groups in ISM is a requirement that all educational initiatives must be open to all groups and cannot be restricted to, for example, one or more ethnic minorities (although this example is from the USA context, similar barriers may occur depending on the framing of equalities legislation elsewhere).

An obvious limitation of this type of initiative, commented on in several papers, is that part of the success of these projects depends on the small scale, the relationships between staff and students, and the sense of community that develops between students, and between students and their local hosts. They are not therefore either scalable or transferable. However, we can state as a practice recommendation that it is desirable for individual institutions to undertake (and fund) small-scale, curriculum-driven, short-term study abroad initiatives that target specific student groups who may

otherwise struggle to access ISM, and for those programmes to be small by design, not just at the outset, but permanently and intrinsically.

Given the variability of literature review present in these papers, we would strongly encourage all authors of published articles driven by practice in international education to conduct a systematic review. We observe many disparate, yet closely related, interventions into practice that could be more widely adopted with a better integration with the existing literature and potential cross-institutional collaborations. Such initiatives could attract greater policy attention as a result of more substantive evidence bases.

Document-based results

Sylvie Lomer

Papers which conducted document based analysis, such as policy, curricula, websites, etc were coded together (n=18). Of these, the majority originated in Education (n=15) and 3 in Sociology & Social Work. They examined websites (n=7), government policies (n=5), reports from international education organisations promotional or recruitment documents (n=2), newspaper articles (n=2), internationalisation strategies (n=1) and online social media posts (n=1). These studies focused on the national level (n=9) or the meso institutional level (n=8), with only 1 study adopting a micro, individual approach (n=1). Most papers adopted an explicitly critical paradigm, whether 'postmodernist critical' (n=2), critical queer theory (n=1), critical race theory (n=1) or critical discourse analysis (n=1). Two papers adopted a neo-institutional theoretical framework, and concepts of governmentality, spatiality, postcoloniality, and capitals were also represented in a single paper each.

These papers seek to explore a wide range of topics through the lens of equity or inequality, from a lack of equity in work-integrated learning opportunities (Andrew, 2020), to the disparities of resource between satellite and parent campuses (Brooks & Waters, 2018) and the construction of refugees in Australian education policy (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007).

Buckner and Stein (2020) explore definitions of internationalisation from international education organisations and highlight an ongoing emphasis on international students,

staff and student mobility, and curricular change, with limited attention to inequalities. These definitions are reflected in institutional activities that focus on partnerships and mobility (Buckner et al., 2020), and neoliberal and neo-colonial assumptions are replicated in representations of the world in study abroad programmes (Chakravarty et al., 2020). Similarly, at the regional level in the Bologna process, understandings of social inequality in the Bologna process remain abstract and backgrounded relative to the need to diversify internationally mobile students (Finger, 2014). A 'functional overview of tuition fees' highlights that in most of the EU, international students are charged differential fees, constituting unequal treatment (Golovic et al., 2020).

Two studies focused on how media discourses construct international students (Paltridge et al., 2014; Yao & George Mwangi, 2022). Paltridge et al. (2014) argued that Australian newspapers constructed international students as passive economic resources, exploiters of the immigration system and victims of violence and racism. Yao and George Mwangi (2022) focused on representations of Asian students during the COVID-19 pandemic, and found they were positioned as scapegoats, bearers of disease, cash cows and political pawns.

Several studies explore marketing and outreach, highlighting differences between secular and religiously affiliated universities in outreach to LGBTQ+ students regarding study abroad opportunities (Hipple et al., 2020) reflecting a frequent lack of information and support for study abroad shared with students with disabilities (Bivins, 2021). Taylor (2018) specifically highlights the lack of intelligibility of international admissions materials, concluding from a review of USA universities that most are written at a 14th grade comprehension level, presenting challenges to most high school graduates. He argues this constitutes a barrier to equal access to international education opportunities. Wang and Sun (2021) examine how USA universities represent international students in support services and conclude that many discuss inadequate support that emphasises deficit views of international students, or as they put it: 'discriminative phrasing that portrays international students as lacking in hygiene and punctuality'. They argue this reflects xenophobic attitudes from universities. O'Connor (2018) identified similar concerns in Ireland, highlighting that institutional discourses tend to homogenise international student experiences. It is also important

to avoid homogenising international students' views about equality, specifically differentiating between equality of opportunity and outcome (Ho et al., 2015).

Ziguras (2016) and Walker (2014) take quasi-historical approaches to understanding how national policies towards international students shape contemporary settings in Australia and the UK respectively. Ziguras explicitly considers how access for international students can be expanded in a marketised context, identifying scholarships, short qualification courses, low-cost housing, rights to work during study, and availability of post-study work visas as factors that would support students from low SES family backgrounds.

Few of the document-based papers venture to make policy recommendations, focusing more on highlighting critical issues within the documents they examine. A few suggestions for practice are made, such as increasing the visual representation of disabled students on study abroad websites (Bivins, 2021), fostering discussions of power and inequality at the institutional and national levels with reference to internationalisation strategies (Buckner et al., 2020), modify the way admissions materials are written (Taylor, 2018), and develop low-cost options for study abroad such as short courses and low-cost housing (Ziguras, 2016).

As a comparatively small research area, this indicates that further research into how policies, institutional documents, and media both represent and materially support or obstruct the access and participation of students to international education is needed, across all demographic categories.

Conclusions

The overall conclusion we can draw from this SLR is that inequalities continue to plague access to, participation in and outcomes from ISM. While many initiatives are well-intentioned, if ISM is to be an equitable space, there is a long way to go.

The literature demonstrates that there is a relatively good understanding of how binary gender (men/women) and SES shape access and participation to ISM in Europe: women participate more than men in ISM, and lower SES reduces access to ISM. It also shows how SES and ethnicity shape participation and experiences of ISM from a North American perspective: again, lower SES makes participation in ISM or study abroad less likely, and ethnic minority students are also less likely to access ISM. However, since racialisation constructs ethnicity differently in all national contexts, further study is needed.

It is fairly clear that language mediates access to and experiences of ISM, particularly fluency in English, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese, and that such fluency is mediated by SES.

Likewise, it is clear that refugees experience substantial access barriers to higher education, in multiple contexts (Streitwieser et al., 2018), but this is under explored in the ISM literature, because refugees are either not viewed as international students, hence they are not present in the ISM literature; or if they are viewed as such, it is universities which are re-classifying them in order to exact higher fees (Bailey, 2023).

Since the literature is dominated by studies on marketised contexts (USA, UK, Australia), there is a risk that practices adopted by other international study destinations that are less marketised are not highlighted in research such as this. There is evidence that ISM inequalities persist in both marketised and non-marketised contexts (Weber et al., 2023), but further research is needed on Global Majority non-marketised systems.

Little is known about how LGBQ+ sexualities, trans or expansive gender identities, disability, minoritised religions, and forced migration status other than formal refugee categories impact access to and participation in ISM. We identified very few studies that examined academic attainment as an outcome of inequalities in relation to ISM.

With few exceptions, studies did not adopt an intentionally intersectional approach to understanding multiple demographic categories of ascriptive identity. This absence fails to appropriately represent the exponentially negative effect of multiple disadvantaged identities, and therefore the currently known effects of inequalities are probably underestimated.

While studies that examine experiences of racial, economic and linguistic marginalisation are valuable, as a subfield to enact change for greater equality, the scholarship needs to focus on the structures that produce such marginalisation, rather than experiences as an outcome. Such an emphasis would help to decentre deficit narratives that make individuals responsible for negative experiences.

Moreover, there is considerable research on the USA, Australia and Western Europe as study destinations; rather less research addresses ISM from and to Global Majority destinations, however this is beginning to change (see Tight, 2022). This is not a call for Global Minority scholars to conduct helicopter research in the Global Majority, but an aspiration for scholarly networks and organisations to support research from Global Majority scholars (see activities of, for example, the British Association of International and Comparative Education).

Judging only by quantity of research, it might appear that SES and race/ethnicity are the most consequential dimensions of inequality in ISM. However, low numbers of research articles may reflect that barriers are too high for certain groups to participate in ISM at all (e.g., students with physical disabilities) or that some identities are largely invisible to researchers (e.g., LGBTQ+ status or students whose ethnic group is minoritised at home, but unrecognised abroad). That this SLR has identified only small numbers of papers in regards to particular disadvantaged groups may therefore indicate that further research is needed, particularly designed to identify potential international students *before* participating (or deciding not to) in study abroad.

One of the major barriers to such research is the absence of publicly available, transnationally comparable datasets that systematically document these demographic variables. Datasets made available by OECD and UNESCO do not include these

demographic variables in relation to ISM. Ethnicity, disability, and religion are, for example, understood differently in different national contexts (Salmi & D'Addio, 2021), and the creation of such datasets would therefore be a major challenge, and indeed illegal in some countries. However, what policy values, it tends to count, and currently it is clear that neither national policy, nor regional policy, prioritises understanding inequalities in ISM (Olenina et al., 2022). Should institutions or regional bodies wish to remedy this, the creation and publication of such datasets should be normalised as part of their internationalisation activities and commitment to equality in the provision of international higher education.

In the absence of such datasets, it is understandable that research tends to take a narrow focus on a specific case study context or set of demographic variables. Small scale case studies will also be constrained in their capacity to adopt intersectional understandings, simply because they are unlikely to be able to identify participants who fall into multiple demographic categories in a small sample and/or tightly defined context. Such research should be seen in relation to the wider literature documented here, and can usefully move beyond, for example, the documenting of untheorised 'experience' of international students. We would also encourage researchers to adopt Open Access practices of sharing datasets for further analysis, where ethically appropriate, in the hope that future research can develop through secondary analysis of multiple datasets, and encourage researchers to build on such datasets when they do exist.

Given this dominance, our review concludes that research on ISM and inequalities needs to:

1. Explicitly explain the definition of 'international student' or 'study abroad' with an awareness of the variation of terms used, such as credit or degree mobility

2. Explicitly state information such as the nationality of students, the overall research design,

3. Explicitly discuss the institutional, local and national context for the study, such as the degree of marketisation, immigration policies, and institutional norms for international admissions (e.g. competitive or not)

In particular, much of the literature from scholars based in the USA seems to lack awareness of the global field of research and to use terms that do not necessarily translate globally. Scholarship in the subfield of ISM should expect to review literature on study abroad, and scholarship on study abroad should systematically include previous literature that relates to 'international students' and/or 'ISM'. Otherwise, we risk the subfield stagnating in silos.

In concrete terms of practice, it seems likely that information, application, and admissions processes that are blind to gender, ethnicity, and disability are insufficient to remedy pre-existing social inequalities. Initiatives that seek to reach out to marginalised or underrepresented groups in ISM with information, tailored short-term mobility opportunities, and perhaps increased subsidies, may have more chance of increasing equality of participation. However, this review highlights that money is only a small part of the decision to study abroad - a necessary but not a sufficient condition - and not sufficient to surmount all the structural barriers to ISM. One of the challenges of the apparent division between research and practice is that many excellent practices may be taking place in isolated institutions, but without publication and promotion, are unlikely to become widespread practice.

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Appendix 1

Search strings in English used in EBSCO (English), Scopus[3], Web of Science, Proquest and DAOJ
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university)
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university) AND ("socioeconomic background" OR "socio-economic background" OR poverty OR "social class" OR "socioeconomic class" OR "socio-economic class" OR disadvantage OR privilege)
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university) AND (race OR ethnicity OR racialisation OR racialization OR minority OR minorities)
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university) AND (disability OR disabilities)
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university) AND (gender)
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university) AND (religion OR religious)
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university) AND (sexuality OR sexualities OR LGBTQIA+ OR LBGTQIA+ OR LGBT OR LBGT OR LGB OR LBG OR queer)
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university) AND ("non-traditional student" OR "nontraditional student")
("international students" OR "international student mobility" OR "study abroad") AND (inequality OR equity OR equality OR inequalities) AND ("higher education" OR university) AND (refugees OR "asylum seekers")

Search strings used in other languages (in alphabetic order)		
Language	**Database**	**Search string**
	ARTO[4], surveys and reports published by the Finnish National Agency for Education EDUFI[5]	"kansainvälinen opiskelija" (international student)
		"ulkomaalainen opiskelija" (foreign student)
		"vaihto-opiskelija" (exchange student)
		"vaihto-opiskelu" (exchange studies)
Finnish		"kansainvälinen liikkuvuus" (international mobility)

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[3] Due to additional functionalities available on the Scopus database, the searches in Scopus were carried out limiting the search to TITLE-ABS-KEY and PUBYEAR > 1999.

[4] Arto is a collection of Finnish periodical and monograph articles in Melinda which is a collaborative environment for national cataloguing activities as well as a national metadata repository that is used to collate descriptive metadata on library materials.

[5] EDUFI acts as the National Agency for Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps and Nordplus programmes taking care of the implementation of the programmes in Finland. In addition, EDUFI hosts several national programmes that promote and provide funding for internationalisation.

	and Eurostudent[6]	akateeminen liikkuvuus (academic mobility)
		opiskelu ulkomailla (study abroad)
French	Google scholar	"Etudiants internationaux" AND "inégalité OR égalité"
	IBZ Online	"internationaler student" AND ungleichheit
		ausland AND Studium AND ungleichheit
		"internationaler Student" AND status
		"internationaler student" AND klasse
		"internationaler student" AND "soziale herkunft"
		erasmus AND status
	WISO	ausland AND studium AND ungleichheit
		ausland AND mobilität AND ungleichheit
		auslandsstudium AND ungleichheit
		auslandsmobilität AND ungleichheit
		Studierendenmobilität AND Ungleichheit
	IBSS – International Bibliography of the Social Sciences	Studierendenmobilität
		Ausland AND Ungleichheit
		Auslandssemester AND Ungleichheit
		Auslandsstudium AND Geschlecht
German	DIPF Leibnitz Institut für Bildungsforschung Datenbank	Studierendenmobilität AND Ausland AND Erasmus
		Auslandssemester
		Erasmus
Italian	EBSCO	"Studenti internazionali" OR "Studenti stranieri"
		("Studenti internazionali" OR "Studenti stranieri" OR "Studenti Erasmus") AND ("Uguaglianz*" OR "Equità" OR "pari opportunità")
		("Studenti internazionali" OR "Studenti stranieri" OR "Studenti Erasmus") AND ("Uguaglianz*" OR "Equità" OR "pari opportunità"") AND "Class* social*"
		("Studenti internazionali" OR "Studenti stranieri" OR "Studenti Erasmus")) AND ("Inclusione" OR "Esclusione" OR "Marginalizzazione" OR "Implicazione" OR "Integrazione)
		("Studenti internazionali" OR "Studenti stranieri" OR "Studenti Erasmus")) AND ("Includere" OR "Escludere" OR "Marginalizare" OR "Implicare" OR "Integrare")
	Google Scholar	("Studenti internazionali" OR "Studenti stranieri" OR "Studenti Erasmus"

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[6] Eurostudent is a student survey that explores the living conditions, studying, mobility, social background and livelihood of students in higher education. Data are simultaneously collected in more than 20 European countries for the use of higher education policy, higher education institutions and researchers.

Portuguese	RCAAP	
	[Scielo](#)	
	[Latindex](#)	
	Redib	
	Renates	
	Google académico (Google Scholar)	("desigualdades sociais" OR desigualdade) AND ("mobilidade estudantil" OR "estudar fora" OR Erasmus OR "estudantes internacionais")
Romanian	Google scholar	'Inegalități sociale' OR 'inegalitate' AND 'studenti internationali' OR 'studiu în străinătate' OR 'Erasmus'
	EBSCOhost	'Inegalități sociale' OR 'inegalitate' AND 'studenti internationali' OR 'studiu în străinătate' OR 'Erasmus'
Spanish	SCIELO	"Estudiantes internacionales o Movilidad estudiantil o Movilidad estudiantil + igualdad" "Estudiantes internacionales o Movilidad estudiantil o Movilidad estudiantil + equidad"
	Dialnet	"estudiantes internacionales" OR "estudiantes extranjeros" OR "movilidad por razón de estudios" OR "movilidad estudiantil" AND "desigualdad"
Turkish	EBSCO	("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği") AND (eşitsizlik OR eşitlik OR eşitsizlikler) AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite)
	Eric	
		("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği") AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite) AND "Sosyoekonomik düzey" OR yoksulluk OR "sosyoekonomik sınıf" OR "toplumsal sınıf" OR dezavantaj OR ayrıcalık
		("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği") AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite) AND Irk OR etnik köken OR Irksallaşma OR azınlık OR azınlıklar
		("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği") AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite) AND Engellilik
		("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği") AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite) AND Cinsiyet
		("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği") AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite) AND din OR dindar
		("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği") AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite) AND cinsel yönelim OR LBGTQIA+ OR LBGT OR LGB OR queer
	Google Scholar	8. ("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası

		öğrenci hareketliliği") AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite) AND "geleneksel olmayan öğrenci"
		9. ("uluslararası öğrenci" OR "hareketlilik" OR "uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği") AND ("yükseköğretim" OR üniversite) AND Göçmen OR "mülteci" OR "sığınmacı'