

# Global Competency Development for Graduate Students from the Perspective of Internationalization at Home

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**Abstract:** With the advancement of economic globalization, cultivating globally competent international talents has become a key task for domestic universities. As international exchanges gradually return to pre-pandemic levels, the post-pandemic era has introduced challenges due to reduced cross-border movement, making cross-border educational exchanges more difficult to implement. In this context, “internalization at home” becomes crucial for developing internationalized talent. It offers a cost-effective approach and is particularly important as global competence is a core quality for such talents. This study aims to review and analyze relevant practices both domestically and internationally, using specific cases from various universities to discuss global competency training programs for postgraduates and to provide recommendations for advancing internationalization in China’s higher education sector.

**Keywords:** Global competence; Internationalization at home; Graduate students

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## 1. Introduction

Currently, the world is experiencing accelerated changes, with the ongoing pandemic having a profound impact. International unilateralism and anti-globalization trends have reemerged <sup>[1]</sup>. The global economic recovery is weak, and economic globalization faces significant challenges. This weakened recovery and the backlash against globalization represent a new reality that must be addressed, profoundly altering the landscape and processes of global educational openness. Major global powers and educationally advanced countries are increasingly emphasizing the promotion of educational openness, continuously adjusting and improving their policies to respond to global changes. They aim to cultivate and attract top-notch innovative talents and develop internationally competent individuals.

Highly developed economies view internationalized human resources as crucial strategic assets for their economic and social advancement. China, which has become more interconnected with the world in recent years, needs to attract and utilize global talent. However, the post-pandemic era has intensified

global talent competition, presenting unprecedented challenges for talent acquisition in China and revealing a shortage of internationalized talent. As international exchanges and cooperation resume, the reduction in cross-border movement has created difficulties for cross-border educational exchanges, making cross-border internationalization challenging. In this context, “internationalization at home” (IaH) becomes particularly important for developing internationalized talents.

## **2. Concept of internationalization at home**

The concept of internationalization at home has its origins in Europe, where the process of European integration accelerated as the region lost its world dominance after World War II and sought economic recovery. The European Union (EU) was created to “promote peace, pursue a prosperous life for its citizens, achieve sustainable socio-economic development, ensure fundamental values, and strengthen international cooperation.” In this process, collaboration and exchanges among EU Member States have been strengthened to promote the common economic and social development of each country. To support this process, there is a growing demand for internationally competent human resources, and the development of internationalized education has become a major trend. After a long time of internationalized curriculum and unified institutionalization in Europe, the development of internationalized education is becoming more mature. In 1998, the Swedish scholar Nilsson first put forward the concept of internationalization at home, and defined it as “all activities related to international affairs in the field of education, except for students’ overseas mobility” [2]. Beelen and Jones have further enriched the concept by describing in situ internationalization as “the process of consciously incorporating international, cross-cultural content into formal and informal curricula for all students in domestic learning environments” [3]. The concept is also rapidly moving into national practice with the wide dissemination and professional support of the European Association for International Education (EAIE).

Since the introduction of the concept of in situ internationalization in China in this century, China’s in situ internationalization has gradually developed, but the overall development is in the stage of fragmentation and lacks systematicity. The impact of the pandemic has provided a significant impetus for the development of China’s internationalization at home, serving as a crucial catalyst for its progress. Following the spread of the pandemic and its eventual decline, the number of Chinese students studying abroad has dropped significantly, with nearly half deciding to postpone their study plans and some opting to change their study destinations. The internationalization of higher education in China has been accelerated by the rise of anti-globalization trends brought about by the pandemic, leading to international embargoes and restrictions. In reality, with China’s economic and social development, the internationalization of higher education is an issues that would have needed to be addressed sooner or later. The pandemic has significantly advanced the timeline for the internationalization of higher education in China. China is now entering a crucial stage in the development of higher education internationalization.

## **3. Current status of China’s internationalization at home development**

However, internationalization at home in higher education refers to the fact that as the internationalization of higher education is becoming more obvious, universities are making full use of the existing international education resources (international scholars, international students, international books, international programs, diversified courses, and international academic conferences, etc.) to build campuses with internationalization at home characteristics, providing opportunities for teachers and students to come into contact with cross-cultural and international elements in their localities, and thus realizing the goal of cultivating high-level

internationalized talents. This is to realize the goal of cultivating high-level internationalized talents. According to Yuhao Cen, “internationalization at home of higher education” refers to all educational activities related to international affairs that take place in higher education institutions, except for the overseas mobility of faculty and students <sup>[3]</sup>. “Internationalization in the field is not just another study program, but an integrated and systematic practice of international education.”

In recent years, China has made new historic achievements in economic and social development, realized new historic leaps and bounds, comprehensively enhanced its status as a major world economic power, and significantly increased its international influence. The conditions for internationalization at home are becoming increasingly mature.

China will become the third largest study abroad country in the world and the largest in Asia even before the onset of the pandemic in 2020. In the post-pandemic era, the flow pattern of international study will be reorganized, and the status of China and other East Asian countries in international education will be further enhanced. International students and foreign scholars from various countries will help establish a local internationalized academic environment in China. International students and scholars come from various countries, and they use different languages in daily life, and their cultures are also different. Their arrival in China will firstly help local students to improve their language and communication skills, and secondly promote cultural diversity in China and help students to get in touch with the world’s outstanding cultures.

The development of information technology and online education also provides a realistic guarantee for internationalization at home. With the recent economic and technological upgrading in recent years, China’s institutions can actively explore and broaden the mode of cooperation with foreign institutions of higher learning, open up the learning channels of foreign online courses, jointly develop online courses, and launch a new mode of international education cooperation based on localization. To sum up, the implementation of internationalization at home in China already has considerable conditions and a realistic foundation.

## **4. Main forms of internationalization at home**

The development of internationalization in the field is mainly divided into three main forms: firstly, it is necessary to build an international exchange platform as the basis for international exchanges, and secondly, it is necessary to establish a scientific and internationalized curriculum system, which is an important carrier for the development of the program in the empire and plays an important role in the development of internationalization in the field. Simultaneously, the majority of teachers and students create an international academic atmosphere, and more academic exchanges, to participate in international academic conferences. In this way, the development of internationalization at home is achieved.

### **4.1. International exchange platform building**

The construction of an international exchange platform is the foundation of internationalization at home development. International exchange platform is an important carrier of international academic exchanges and scientific research cooperation. When the construction of the international exchange platform is complete, the teachers and students have the basic conditions for international exchanges. Colleges and universities need to expand channels in their schools and build exchange and cooperation platforms with other top colleges and research institutions in the world, combining online teaching with offline lectures. Build international exchange platforms, provide international exchange programs, build talent training bases, give students opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges, connect with the world, contact with the world’s top science and technology, and cultivate students’ international vision.

For example, Tsinghua University closely integrates global competency development with students' intercultural communication skills<sup>[4]</sup>. It is believed that mastering proficient foreign language communication skills, understanding the history of internationalization in other countries, and having an open international mindset. This is the core skill of global competence. To this end, China offers nearly 1,000 English-language courses and a series of general knowledge courses. It has also developed online teaching platforms in collaboration with top universities and research institutes worldwide to share teaching resources and provide students with access to internationalized courses in science, technology, culture, and other areas.

Zhejiang University builds international exchange platforms, provides international exchange programs, and establishes "Zhejiang University Internationalized Specialized Talent Cultivation Bases" which give students opportunities for cross-cultural exchanges, connect them with the world, expose them to the world's top science and technology, and cultivates their international outlook<sup>[5]</sup>. The university has formulated a scientific international student enrollment plan, continuously optimized the structure of international student sources, expanded cooperation globally, and created an open, inclusive, and harmonious international atmosphere for its institution.

## **4.2. Internationalized curriculum development**

Curriculum is an important vehicle for the implementation of internationalization in the field, and curriculum development is the core of achieving educational goals. Internationalization of the curriculum is an important part of and a core initiative to promote "internationalization in the field." This includes reading foreign literature and taking courses in English. Internationalization of the curriculum requires a comprehensive and systematic reform of the content, language, materials, and methods of teaching. Teachers need to integrate cross-cultural and global dimensions into the teaching content and learning outcomes of the courses, place the courses in the context of global development, incorporate the enhancement of students' global competence into the learning objectives of the courses, and incorporate elements of internationalized content into the design of the courses. Based on the different aspects of the role of the curriculum in talent cultivation, curriculum development is a multidimensional breakthrough.

Firstly, develop a Chinese culture curriculum to enhance students' self-confidence through learning culture and understanding the long history of Chinese civilization. Culture is the soul of a country and a nation, and only by achieving cultural self-confidence and self-improvement can we better disseminate our own cultural values to the world. Thereby fully demonstrating to the world the eternal charm and contemporary value of the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Secondly, the International Exchange Program is designed to cultivate students' international outlook, global vision, and open-mindedness in response to the times. The content of the program takes students to learn about the diversified cultural contents of countries around the world and to understand and learn about the world's outstanding cultures. The aim is to cultivate high-level internationalized talents with a global perspective.

Thirdly, set up foreign language communication improvement courses. Global discourse ability is the core of outstanding talents with global vision and world vision<sup>[6]</sup>. And language serves as a bridge of communication. To become an internationalized talent, cross-cultural communication ability is the core. Effective expression is based on an effective understanding of other cultures, the ability to put forward one's own opinions on global issues, and participation in global governance.

For example, Zhejiang University has a unified all-English course system taught by international teachers, which is a good way to train students' language ability and enhance their international communication skills. To



lay the foundation for participation in globalized governance, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, South China University of Technology, and Xi'an Jiaotong University have all proposed to build several basic, cutting-edge, cross-cutting, and widely benefited all-English courses. This will enhance the internationalization level of talent cultivation of the whole university.

### **4.3. Internationalized academic environment creation**

The creation of an internationalized academic environment is equally indispensable to the development of internationalization at home, including participation in international academic conferences and cross-border cooperation projects. At present, most of the universities in China do not pay much attention to internationalization at home, and the means of cultivating internationalized talents is mainly limited to sending a few students to study abroad or exchange programs. There is a lack of internationalization at home education resources on campus. Colleges and universities need to prepare complete internationalization resources, hold online or offline international academic conferences, and undertake cross-border cooperation projects.

Tsinghua University offers a large number of full English degree programs, attracting a large number of international students to study for their master's degrees, and the increase in the number of international students has also created an academic atmosphere on campus. Additionally, Tsinghua University employs a large number of overseas scholars to give lectures at the university, and these lectures provide excellent opportunities for students and faculty members to realize that they can have access to a lot of international cutting-edge scientific knowledge without having to leave their country.

To optimize the layout of the global cooperation network, Zhejiang University has developed a special global cooperation network. It allows students and faculty members to engage with the international frontiers through online forms. The university also takes the initiative to build an exchange and cooperation platform with the world's top universities and research institutions, so that teachers and students on campus can jointly participate in research and development of relevant science and technology. Concurrently, focusing on the community of human destiny, the university has cooperated with universities in countries along the "Belt and Road" to create a model university for international education in China.

South China University of Technology, on the other hand, makes full use of its location advantages and vigorously invests in international cooperation to build an international scientific research platform. In recent years, South China University of Technology has constructed joint laboratories for science and technology research centers with America, France, Hong Kong, and many other countries, and dispatched excellent research teams from the university to participate in research and development. Through the establishment of numerous laboratories and research centers on campus, the international academic atmosphere is brought directly into the campus.

## **5. Relevant practices in domestic and international universities**

### **5.1. Europe and America**

In 2014, internationalization in the field was included for the first time in the EU's comprehensive strategy for the internationalization of higher education, European Higher Education in the World, making Europe a top priority for internationalization. Today, more than half of European universities have included internationalization at home in their strategic plans and are taking concrete actions to develop it <sup>[7]</sup>. In 2018, the "Erasmus +" program funded the research project "Approaches and Tools for IaH" which developed a self-assessment tool, a curriculum, and a framework for communicating the progress of internationalization in the field <sup>[2]</sup>. The research project has now been applied on a large scale in Europe, which is now the most mature

region for internationalization at home in the world.

In America, people recognize the benefits of multicultural interaction for personal growth and social development during social interactions and identify with these benefits. This identification in turn makes colleges and universities regard locally accessible cultural diversity as a kind of educational resource, which is mainly manifested in the emphasis on the recruitment of students and teachers of different colors from different countries and cultures. Also, the fact that students of different cultures can live together in mixed housing, attend classes, participate in on-campus and off-campus activities, and multilingualism coexists in public spaces, thus integrating multicultural elements into daily teaching and learning. The main manifestations of this are the importance of recruiting students from different countries and cultures of different colors, the integration of multicultural elements into daily teaching and learning, and the development of internationalization in the local context by allowing students to not only learn about their own cultures in the course of their studies but also to engage in intercultural exchange.

In addition to the differences mentioned above, one of the commonalities between universities in Europe and America regarding the development of internationalization at home is that they attach great importance to the online development of internationalized education. The University of Bradford, United Kingdom (UK) has developed international exchange initiatives to support students in international exchange and cross-border study life<sup>[8]</sup>. These include the Bridges Academic Transition Program, which provides exchange students with an understanding of the learning and teaching environments of other UK higher education institutions, and helps them to develop the academic and interpersonal skills that will lead to a successful experience. Enabling students to participate in activities including outdoor activities, sports, training, campaigning, volunteering, and initiating social change. As well as being exposed to international seminars where students can enhance their employability skills as they participate.

Internationalization has been a growing focus at the University of Leeds Business School (LUBS)<sup>[8]</sup>. While the School has an established and vibrant undergraduate study abroad program, postgraduate teaching has historically had few opportunities to engage in internationalization. After beginning to expand opportunities for postgraduate students through study tours, the University of Leeds developed the 2020VIP program to respond to the pandemic and develop on-the-ground internationalization. The program is essentially virtual meetings held online and is designed so that the university can continue to provide students with global business experiences, cultural insights, and professional development opportunities.

The University of Kentucky in the United States has introduced plans to transform short-term global health experiences into virtual global health experiences for globalization and currently plans to offer virtual experiences annually after the pandemic for students who cannot travel<sup>[8]</sup>. This online experience has opened the door to internationalized education for many economically disadvantaged students. It reduces the cost of international education, improves the effectiveness of international learning, and expands the scope of cultural exchanges while vigorously pursuing local nationalization.

## **5.2. Asia**

The development of internationalization at home in Asian countries is more government-led, with Japan and India serving as typical examples. There are two core ways to develop internationalization in Japan through English Medium Instruction (EMI) and international co-curricular programs. Japan attaches great importance to the construction of an internationalized curriculum system, and one of the important means is the construction of an all-English curriculum system. Japan regards language ability as the core quality of internationalized talents. To enhance the cultivation of internationalized talents, the Japanese government has particularly

emphasized the importance of English as an international common language, and this recognition has triggered an emphasis on the development of the EMI curriculum.

Nowadays, Japan's EMI programs are fully open to local students, and national students are encouraged to minor in all English specialized courses. In 2021, the Japanese government launched the "Project for Acceleration and Globalization of Internationalization at Home in University Education through the World Network of Shared Education" to establish international shared education programs that enable students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to collaborate and promote mutual support, thereby contributing to the development of internationalization at home in Japan and the cultivation of more internationalized human resources <sup>[7]</sup>. The Japan International Exchange Program integrates and utilizes the resources of international students and the internationalized curriculum system to promote the rapid development of internationalization at home in Japan.

As a developing country in Asia, India, like China, relies on significant attention and coordination at the national government level to implement internationalization at home. Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government came to power, there has been a shift in approach. India has moved away from its previous conservative and closed attitude, actively opening access to international universities and institutions. Additionally, the government has set clear goals for internationalization at home, integrating it into the national strategic objectives for international education. Secondly, national policy support. With a major push towards an internationalization agenda for higher education, India has embarked on a process of re-engineering the domestic education landscape.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly stated to society and the public that he wants to build India into a global center of higher education. The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), the most important education policy in India in the 21st century, demonstrates the Indian government's ambition to become a "global knowledge superpower" and a "global learning destination" and for the first time, it includes the concept of "internationalization at home" <sup>[9]</sup>. It also incorporates for the first time the concept of "internationalization at home" into the national macro-policy level, which provides policy guidance for the shift of strategic focus on the internationalization of higher education in India in the future.

## **6. Challenges in the development of China's internationalization at home**

The development of internationalization at home in China faces significant challenges. Although many domestic universities have introduced internationalization courses and academic lectures to meet standard internationalization indices, surveys indicate that most students do not participate. Additionally, there are issues with the alignment between the evaluation standards for internationalization at home and actual practices. The Opinions of the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Strengthening and Improving the Ideological and Political Work of Colleges and Universities in the New Situation lists "international exchanges and cooperation" as one of the important missions of universities, along with "cultivation of human resources, scientific research, social service, and cultural inheritance and innovation" which is also understood as the fifth function of universities.

Many domestic universities have included internationalization in their evaluation criteria. The evaluation criteria primarily include the number of Chinese-international cooperative schools and international collaborations. Consequently, many colleges and universities focus mainly on foreign cooperation as their primary direction for internationalization development. This emphasis on increasing the number of foreign partnerships often leads to a superficial approach to internationalization, where students' internationalization

skills are not effectively cultivated, making it challenging to meet the practical needs of internationalization in China.

The investment in internationalization academic lectures often results in many of these lectures being superficial. A significant number of students attend these lectures merely to fulfill university requirements, without genuine interest in academic exchange. Scholars observe that interactions between international and local students are infrequent and often deemed ineffective. Students tend to prefer homogeneous social circles rather than engaging with cross-cultural groups. This tendency is also evident in the management of international student communities. Some institutions manage international students in a closed and isolated manner, fearing that integration might introduce risks. This approach reflects a lack of experience in managing international affairs and results in a waste of resources intended for internationalization.

Currently, online learning has become a key component of China's internationalization efforts, allowing students to engage in international academic exchanges from home or school via the Internet. This method breaks down time and space barriers. However, it also presents several challenges. Communication between teachers and students is limited to audio and video, and online meeting functions are relatively basic. This results in insufficient interaction and makes it difficult to supervise students effectively, thereby affecting the overall learning outcomes.<sup>[10]</sup>

Insufficient synergy in the development of internationalization within universities is a significant issue. Many Chinese colleges and universities are eager to advance internationalized education. However, due to constraints such as limited funding and insufficient expertise, their efforts often remain superficial. Most institutions merely establish international exchange offices or international education institutes, and some universities only address internationalization in policy documents without practical implementation. As a result, internationalization efforts are often treated as cosmetic projects rather than integrated into the core functions of the institution. This lack of coordination and collaborative effort between departments and colleges hinders the effective development of internationalization in universities.

## **7. Recommendations**

### **7.1. Development of a scientific institutional system**

The development of internationalization in universities requires a well-structured institutional system. Colleges and universities must create comprehensive regulations to enhance students' global competence, tailored to their specific development conditions. This includes setting clear cultivation objectives, establishing a global competence framework, and implementing a long-term working mechanism to develop students' global skills.

For instance, in 2016, Tsinghua University introduced its Global Strategy to attract global talents and foster a new generation of globally competent and innovative leaders. This strategy is grounded in "high-end positioning, Chinese perspective, and Tsinghua characteristics" to support national strategy and the creation of top-tier universities. In 2021, Tsinghua University updated its global strategic plan with the Tsinghua University Global Strategy 2030. This plan addresses the broader context of national rejuvenation and global changes, proposing a three-pillar strategy: developing a globally competent student body, building an outstanding international faculty, and enhancing the university's internationalization capacity to serve national needs and contribute to a global community.

### **7.2. Improvement of the relevant curriculum system**

The scientific curriculum system is crucial for advancing internationalization in higher education. To enhance students' international communication skills, universities offer full English courses focusing on listening and

speaking skills to prepare students for cross-cultural exchanges <sup>[11]</sup>. Additionally, other languages, particularly those of countries along the “Belt and Road,” are offered as minors to align with national development strategies. Universities also encourage students to engage in international academic exchanges and conferences to improve both their professional skills and foreign language proficiency. For example, Zhejiang University’s 2018 “Global Open Development Strategy” aims to enhance the university’s international profile and development. The strategy focuses on the following main areas.

Firstly, academic innovation system (research). Zhejiang University is building an international innovation platform through partnerships with top universities and research institutions. This includes collaborative research and development, university-enterprise cooperation, and projects related to the “Belt and Road Initiative.” These efforts are intended to enhance the university’s global influence and foster collaboration with leading institutions worldwide.

Secondly, infrastructure and institutional environment (culture). To support the strategy, Zhejiang University has developed a university-wide collaborative system and a global open school system. This includes establishing special funds to support exchanges and cooperation and providing financial aid for master’s and doctoral students to train at top international institutions.

Similarly, the South China University of Technology (SCUT) prioritizes internationalization through its curriculum. SCUT integrates internationalized courses into its talent cultivation plan, focusing on foreign language instruction and cross-cultural communication. The university offers bilingual and all-English courses across various majors, ensuring that students are well-prepared for global engagement.

### **7.3. Establishment of a sound teaching staff**

Faculty development is crucial for advancing internationalization in higher education, including fostering exchanges with foreign scholars and international students. Both graduate education and in-situ internationalization rely heavily on teachers, scholars, and strong research teams. Teachers play a central role in enhancing students’ global competency and are key participants and beneficiaries in this process.

To support this, universities can introduce outstanding foreign scholars to complement their existing faculty. Local teachers should also enhance their global competencies through international training and collaboration with global research institutions. They should focus on incorporating international perspectives and concepts into their teaching.

For instance, Zhejiang University has implemented several initiatives to build a world-class faculty and globally competitive talent team. The university’s strategies include, firstly, talent acquisition. Zhejiang University has enhanced its talent introduction system, including a program to attract high-tech talents and a convergence plan for overseas academic masters. This approach aims to optimize the faculty structure and bring in young international talents.

Secondly, talent cultivation. The university has developed a special program focused on cultivating exceptional talents, aiming to improve students’ research and innovation skills. This includes recruiting outstanding doctorates and postdoctoral fellows in collaboration with leading foreign universities and sending top faculty members abroad for exchange and further study. These initiatives are designed to create a supportive environment for talent development and foster global competence and international competitiveness among students.

### **7.4. Provision of relevant infrastructure**

In addition to the core strategies, other fundamental measures are also essential. Universities should implement

relevant exchange policies based on their specific needs and provide opportunities for eligible teachers and students to participate in international exchanges and training. Collaborating with leading global universities and research institutions to jointly establish research platforms is crucial. Universities should also equip their libraries with international literature, create large-scale international academic exchange platforms, and integrate global resources to continuously advance the development of internationalization at home.

For example, South China University of Technology (SCUT) has leveraged its location to significantly invest in international cooperation, establishing joint laboratories and research centers with institutions from the United States, France, Hong Kong, and other countries. SCUT has also partnered with many renowned foreign universities and research organizations to build comprehensive research platforms. Moreover, SCUT actively promotes its international exchange student program, sending students abroad during the summer to engage with cutting-edge science and technology, access the latest academic information, and broaden their international perspectives. The university has developed the “South China University of Technology Full-Time Undergraduate International Joint Cultivation Student Management Measures” to support these activities, offering financial assistance and institutional backing for students’ international training.

Zhejiang University has also established a support system to enhance internationalization, focusing on promoting multicultural exchange and communication. The university has implemented measures such as creating an information database for foreign faculty and students, improving multilingual signage on campus, and organizing a series of cultural exchange activities with second-level colleges. These initiatives aim to foster a community where international and local students and faculty can engage, spread cultural knowledge, and build an internationalized academic environment on campus, thereby advancing the university’s internationalization efforts.

## **8. Concluding remarks**

Internationalized talents are an important foundation for China’s participation in globalized governance, and China’s economy has shifted from high-speed development to high-quality development and is gradually toward the center of the world stage. Cultivating internationalized talents with global competence has become an important task for universities. From the perspective of further development of internationalization at home, universities should formulate a scientific system, establish a sound faculty, improve the construction of relevant courses, and coordinate the cooperation of all functional departments to provide relevant basic guarantees for the development of internationalization at home, and provide assistance for the cultivation of internationalized talents <sup>[12]</sup>.

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