

Message from the Editor-in-Chief

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It is with pleasure I introduce Volume 15, Number 4 of the International Journal of Higher Education. As we move further into the final half of this decade, the global higher education sector is navigating a period of global transition. The articles in this issue reflect a collective move away from rigid governance models toward more agile, practice-focused ecosystems that prioritise student success and pedagogical excellence. The researchers from Japan, the UK, Canada, Thailand, and the USA in this volume challenge us to rethink how we define inclusion, engagement and institutional belonging. In a year marked by rapid digital transformation and evolving expectations of academic work, these contributions provide a necessary scholarly anchor.

This issue presents a diverse range of investigations into contemporary challenges. The first article by Qinpeng and Ishii employs a dual-lens analysis to identify shifting motivations and priorities for students choosing to study in Japan in the current climate. They found that international students applying to Japanese universities face challenges such as restricted mobility, changes in the information environment, and increased economic uncertainty. Their study examined whether these conditions were associated with changes in within-Japan university choice and applicant composition. Their results indicate that Japanese universities should consider to provide clearer information, more targeted applicant support, and more flexible admission opportunities for international students.

The second article by Farhan Qureshi offers a critical literature review that helps university leaders align their offshore delivery models with broader institutional goals for global engagement. Qureshi argues that despite the growing volume of literature on the subject, there remains a need for a comprehensive and critical synthesis of how Trans National Education (TNE) simultaneously influences institutional internationalisation strategies and affects the educational systems and economies of host countries, particularly within developing nation contexts. The findings reveal that while TNE offers considerable opportunities including expanded access to higher education, enhanced graduate employability, and increased institutional competitiveness, it also presents significant challenges, among them quality assurance concerns, Western-centric curriculum design, financial dependency, and the risk of educational decline in host countries.

The third article by Natalia Diamond and colleagues outlines their investigation at the relationship between flexible assessment design and the digital habits of modern students. They investigated the effect of offering flexible mid-term exam date options on students' mid-term exam grade, any perceived associated stress, and studying-associated emotions. Their findings concluded that there was a positive impact of flexible examination date options on academic performance and identify how other factors i.e., stress and studying-associated multitasking behaviours, can further impact academic outcomes, highlighting the need for comprehensive student learning supports beyond academic stress.

The fourth article by Yeon Mi Lee proposes a new framework for transforming international student exchange into a deeper form of global citizenship and learning, specifically the application and practice of global learning across higher education institutions. To-date they remain challenged by its conceptual ambiguity and unclear requirements across individual institutions. The findings argue that the three pillars of citizen diplomacy – reciprocity, relationship-building, and the search for common ground – offer a more cohesive framework given their relevance, utility, and best practices for global learning in HEIs.

The fifth article by Pongsak Boonkear explores the impact of digital professional development on the critical thinking skills of education leaders in Thailand. The research and development study designed and evaluated a Google Classroom-based program intended to strengthen critical-thinking-oriented learning activity management among doctoral students in educational administration who were also practicing school administrators. The findings indicate that a structured blend of online study, guided workplace practice, supervision, feedback, and reflection can support advanced professional learning in educational administration. As the study used one intact cohort without a control group, causal claims should be interpreted with caution.

The sixth article by Matthew Derrick discusses the efficacy of seminar structures in building a sense of belonging and academic community for commencing students. He considered that while learning communities are widely recognised as high-impact practices, less attention had been paid to how their curricular, co-curricular, and support components are intentionally integrated in practice. The findings suggest that integration in learning communities is both structural and relational, involving the coordination of courses, resources, and the students, faculty, and staff who participate in them.

It has been my absolute pleasure to represent the IJHE as its Editor-in-Chief. Due to health reasons, I have made the difficult decision to explore retirement and my other academic roles. It is with sincere sadness that this will be my last note as IJHE Editor-in-Chief. I encourage all of you to continue exploring and pushing the boundaries of academia in your research areas, as without your motivation and practice, avenues such as the IJHE would cease to exist. I would like to thank our authors and editorial board for their continued dedication to excellence. These contributions ensure that the IJHE remains a leading engine for transformation in the higher education sector.

With appreciation and anticipation for the work ahead,

Associate Professor Ingrid Harrington

Editor-in-Chief

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