

ATTITUDES, INVOLVEMENT, AND EXPECTATIONS OF ACADEMIC STAFF TOWARDS THE PROCESS OF UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONALIZATION

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Purpose: Internationalization can be a process of improving a university's operations in educational, scientific, and organizational dimensions. It enhances university's attractiveness offering opportunities for staff mobility and career development on an international level. The aim of this article is to assess attitudes, behaviors, and needs of academic teachers regarding internationalization and to provide recommendations for university authorities on actions that support international exchange.

Design/methodology/approach: Research was conducted using diagnostic survey method carried out with CAWI technique and secondary research, including analysis of existing materials, literature queries, and desk research.

Findings: Research results showed that academic teachers assess level of internationalization as low or average, particularly in the area of education. Positive evaluations accounted for 16% in the area of research and collaboration, and 11% in education, alongside a high percentage of negative assessments. Predominance of average ratings and lack of opinion among some respondents may indicate low effectiveness and limited visibility of university's current internationalization efforts. This leads to conclusion that internationalization targeted at academic staff requires further action.

Research limitations/implications: Research was conducted among employees of a selected higher education institution. Conducting research on a broader sample of respondents from various universities would provide more comprehensive picture of the phenomena and help identify relationships and conditions beyond those presented in the article. Similar studies could also be conducted among administrative employees, to make a complete diagnosis.

Practical implications: Research results may be source of insight for university authorities and units responsible for internationalization processes.

Social implications: Process of internationalizing universities in Poland can create opportunities for development and increase competitiveness of higher education institutions and contribute to deepening inequalities in access to professional development opportunities among academic staff. Pressure placed on research and teaching staff to be mobile, participate

in international internships and research projects, and publish in English affects their working conditions and professional identity.

Originality/value: Subject of the study is the scope of university internationalization and its impact on improving quality of education and scientific research.

Keywords: internationalization, universities, higher education institutions, scientific research, internationalization strategy.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Among European higher education institutions, the issue of internationalization gained importance in the early 1990s. Initially, this was connected to the idea of the establishment of the European Union in 1993, whose treaties introduced, among other things, close cross-border cooperation between the institutions of the member states. At first, the programs supporting internationalization processes were designed for institutions located in the member states of the European Union. Over the time, their scope and reach expanded to include organizations and institutions from candidate or associated countries.

The first program supporting internationalization processes was launched in 1990 under the name Tempus (European Commission, 1990). It was an initiative aimed at supporting cross-border cooperation between the then-member states of the European Union and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The goal of the program was to modernize curricula, university management, and to support internationalization. Therefore, this form of support was available to Polish universities from the moment of its launch.

Since 1998, Polish universities could participate in academic exchange under the Socrates program (European Commission, 1989) and its Erasmus component (European Commission, 1998), which was targeted at higher education institutions. This program effectively supported academic exchange processes in the form of student exchanges, academic staff mobility, the development of the European Credit Transfer System, support for the creation of new curricula in cooperation with partner institutions, organization of intensive courses, and participation in thematic networks.

The launch of these initiatives began a process among Polish universities of identifying needs related to internationalization and, over the time, also developing and implementing appropriate strategies aimed at the internationalization of education, scientific research, and administrative support activities.

Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, which was preceded by joining the Bologna Process (Polish Government, 1999), significantly accelerated the internationalization efforts of Polish universities. Academic exchange programs enjoyed great popularity at the time. The number of Polish students and academic staff going abroad increased year by year.

The implementation of this form of internationalization allowed Polish universities to assess their own resources and led them to develop complete study programs addressed to foreign students and offered in English. An initiative supporting the promotion of Polish universities abroad and encouraging foreigners to study in Poland was the launch as the "Study in Poland" program in 2005 (Conference of Rectors..., 2005).

In 2018, the Act on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws 1668, 2018) was introduced which emphasized the importance of internationalization as one of the key indicators of university quality. Despite the already well-developed international cooperation activities of Polish universities, the establishment of the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA, 2017) and the launch of numerous programs supporting international activity significantly intensified the international presence of Polish higher education institutions.

At present Polish universities have access to many other forms of support for internationalization. These include the aforementioned Erasmus+ program, the CEEPUS program (now under NAWA, 1995), funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD, 1925), the Polish-U.S. Fulbright Commission (Fulbright Poland, 1990), and European Universities (European Commission, 2017), among others. Support for research cooperation with international centers is also an element of many programs launched by the National Science Centre (NCN, 2010) and the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR, 2007).

Technological progress, increasing competition in the educational and scientific market, globalization, as well as international initiatives and support from organizations and institutions in this area are factors that compel higher education institutions to undertake internationalization activities. This process is multidimensional and consists of numerous initiatives, including academic mobility, study programs in foreign languages, international research and publication cooperation, joint degree programs, and the integration of an international perspective into curricula, also known as "internationalization at home".

Internationalization in itself is not a value per se, however, the direct exchange of scientific thought, knowledge, and experience supports technological progress and the implementation of innovations. Considering the complexity of the actions taken by universities, it is also important to bear in mind the many challenges arising from organizational, technical, financial, and social constraints.

The aim of this article is to assess the attitudes, behaviors, and needs of academic staff regarding internationalization, and to provide recommendations for university authorities on actions that support international exchange. The article is divided into five sections. It begins with an introduction discussing the rationale behind the development of the internationalization process in Polish higher education. The second section presents a literature review, including the findings of a desk search and an analysis of previous research on university internationalization. This is followed by a detailed description of the research methodology. The subsequent section presents the study results and discussion. The article concludes with

key findings, a discussion of the study's limitations, and recommendations for future research on the internationalization of higher education institutions.

The article presents an innovative perspective on the internationalization of universities, perceiving it as a tool for institutional development. It moves away from focusing solely on the reputational and ranking-related effects of internationalization, offering instead a functional view of the process as a mean to enhance the university's overall performance.

This approach is illustrated through research that highlights the perspective of academic staff, focusing on their attitudes, involvement, expectations and the barriers they experience. While the literature often emphasizes institutional or systemic approaches, this study examines internationalization from the individual's point of view.

Another novel element is the identification of limitations specific to the Polish context, which are rarely addressed in the literature largely dominated by analyses based on Western or global models. Additionally, the authors provide concrete recommendations for university authorities on how to support internationalization. This application-oriented approach may offer an original contribution to the development of university policies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Review of Research on the Internationalization of Universities

Internationalization in higher education has been the subject of discussion in numerous academic articles and studies. This issue is not new, but over the years its definition has evolved, taking on various forms and meanings. As J. Knight (2003) states, in the early 21st century, the internationalization of higher education institutions referred to transnational education, education without borders, and cross-border education. At the national, sectoral, and institutional levels, it was defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education. Although the definition and importance of internationalization in higher education have changed and gained prominence over time, for the purpose of this article, the above definition is adopted as appropriate and reflective of the essence of internationalization. A year later, J. Knight (2004) emphasized that a clear understanding of the definition and motivations is crucial for effectively planning and implementing internationalization strategies.

The use of student mobility numbers as a criterion for measuring the degree of internationalization in higher education has been critically assessed by U. Brandenburg and H. de Wit (2011). The authors argue for the development of a new definition of the goals and methods of internationalization that takes into account the quality and educational value of the process. J. Knight (2015) also points to the need for updating the definition of

internationalization, explaining that such an update is necessary for a better understanding of the process's implementation in the changing global context.

H. de Wit (1999), in turn, analyzes the internationalization of universities from the perspective of shifting motivations—from academic cooperation to market competition. In his publication, he argues that internationalization is evolving toward a more strategic approach, which requires the adaptation of institutional policies. Three years later, in 2002, he conducts a historical analysis of the internationalization of higher education in the U.S. and Europe, taking into account cultural and political differences.

Similarly, S. Robson (2011), studying internationalization as a transformational agenda for higher education, highlights the need for a conscious and critical approach to the process. At the same time, S. Marginson and M. van der Wende (2007) observe that globalization significantly affects higher education and that internationalization is one of the main adaptive mechanisms for institutions.

The global dimension of internationalization is discussed by M. Tight (2021), who notes that the role of higher education institutions as initiators of globalization and internationalization should not be overlooked. He also suggests that researchers themselves must step outside their national comfort zones and think and conduct research in a more global manner.

Challenges related to the process are examined by R. Mbachi (2025), who provides a decade-long analysis of internationalization efforts at the Department of Health and Care Sciences at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. The analysis of student mobility, research collaboration, and international partnerships results in strategic recommendations aimed at improving global educational practices. The findings offer valuable insights into education, research, policy, and practice that go beyond the context of the study. The article also identifies challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, financial constraints, and the need for cultural competencies and adaptive strategic planning. As a result, the author proposes concrete solutions, including flexible exchange programs, the use of virtual technologies, and increased international collaboration to develop higher education in a globalized world. Meanwhile, E. Jones, B. Leask, U. Brandenburg, and H. de Wit (2021) additionally recognize the urgent need to align internationalization strategies with universities' missions of social responsibility. The authors point out that this "third mission" of higher education institutions—contributing to the social, economic, and cultural development of communities—has long been a core function of universities, alongside teaching and research. Similar conclusions are drawn by B. Leask and A. Gayardon (2021), who emphasize that much of the literature published on internationalization has primarily focused inward, on how students and institutions experience and benefit from internationalization. However, it is also important to consider the real and potential impact of these actions on local and global communities. N. Healey (2023) also highlights internationalization as a process driven by social values, not just economic ones, stressing the need to pursue social justice and sustainable development.

Internationalisation cannot have the same meaning for all involved institutions. As noted by J. Knight (2021), any study of this phenomenon must take into account the differences between countries and regions of the world, recognising that the goals, rationales, approaches, risks, and benefits vary between East and West, North and South, sending and receiving countries, developed and developing nations. At the same time, she emphasises that recognising the significance and uniqueness of the local context is crucial, suggesting that internationalisation must be adapted to local circumstances and that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is not appropriate.

The European approach to internationalisation, characterised by diversity and the need to adjust to local contexts, is described by H. de Wit and F. Hunter (2015). The authors analyse the specific features of internationalisation in the European context, taking into account the diversity of educational systems.

P.G. Altbach and J. Knight (2007) analyze the motivations behind the internationalization of higher education, such as globalization, student mobility, and the need to enhance institutional competitiveness. According to the authors, both academic and economic factors are driving forces behind internationalization.

H. de Wit (2013) notes that the phenomenon of internationalisation requires rethinking, as universities have become increasingly aware that the notion of "internationalisation" is not solely related to relations between nations but, more importantly, to the relationships between cultures and between the global and the local. He adds that the internationalisation of higher education is often perceived as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end. Therefore, internationalisation should be an element of strategies aimed at enhancing the quality of education and research, which institutions too often forget in their pursuit of quantitative goals. In the same year, J. Knight (2013) discusses the evolution of university internationalisation, highlighting both its positive and negative aspects. She considers maintaining a balance between the benefits and threats resulting from this process as essential.

Changing priorities and challenges in internationalization are observed by U. Teichler (2004), who points out that beyond student mobility, issues of quality and the impact of internationalization are becoming increasingly significant. J. Stier (2004) highlights the need to understand the different ideologies underlying internationalization, enabling a more conscious and balanced approach to the process. He identifies three main approaches: idealism, instrumentalism, and educationalism.

In 2015, S. Guri-Rosenblit analyzes five pairs of opposing trends that higher education institutions must navigate in the process of internationalization. She emphasizes the need for universities to balance national priorities with global engagement, government steering with institutional autonomy, increased diversity with harmonization policies, competition with cooperation, and intellectual property with intellectual philanthropy. J.K. Hudzik (2011) presents the concept of a comprehensive approach to internationalization that encompasses all aspects of a university's operations, stressing that the internationalization process should be an integral part of an institution's mission.

Internationalisation in the context of research is addressed by T. Shih (2024). Meanwhile, issues concerning cross-organisational and cross-cultural collaboration that enhance the potential for scientific discovery, as well as international research projects based on cooperation—often delivering insights beyond what a single team could achieve—are explored in the work of J. Dusdal and J.W. Powell (2021). An approach to internationalisation based on modern technologies was described by J. Mittelmeier, B. Rienties, A. Gunter, and P. Raghuram (2021). In their study, they introduced the concept of distance internationalisation using the University of South Africa as an example of a large-scale education provider.

Student satisfaction and their perception of the quality of education on international campuses in the UAE are explored by S. Wilkins and J. Huisman (2012). They describe both criteria as crucial to maintaining a positive image of home institutions. a balance between the benefits and threats resulting from this process as essential.

Critical perspectives on internationalising curricula across various disciplinary, institutional, and geographical contexts—and how scholars reimagine curriculum internationalisation in novel ways—are presented in the book by W. Green and C. Whitsed (2015).

Among the factors limiting the internationalisation process is insufficient academic staff engagement, as discussed by F. van den Hende and J. Riezebos (2023). Young scholars—PhD candidates—are also participants in the internationalisation process. K. Chen, Y. Ding, B. Zhao, R. Guo, and L. Ning (2025) describe the transnational academic ties maintained by domestic collaborators, which constitute a vital form of academic social capital that facilitates the integration of early-career researchers into global academic networks, ultimately boosting their research output. S. Bedenlier and O. Zawacki-Richter (2025) conducted an analysis of how changes associated with internationalisation have affected universities—particularly academic staff. They examined the impacts of internationalisation on this stakeholder group and presented 25 different effects of this process at the individual, institutional, and global levels.

The competencies of academic teachers in the context of university internationalisation are analysed by A. Zelenkova (2019). Based on a case study, she highlights the need for training teachers in intercultural competencies, especially in English-taught programmes.

Internationalisation as an institutional phenomenon of strategic significance was analysed by F. van den Hende, C. Whitsed, and R.J. Coelen (2022). Their research resulted in the development of a comprehensive framework aimed at enhancing staff engagement in implementing internationalised curricula in higher education. The perception of the internationalisation process and the engagement of academic teachers is discussed by T. Bradshaw and M. Curtis (2023), emphasising that such engagement should include involvement in institutional decision-making processes.

The awareness of academic staff regarding their role in university internationalisation, as well as their expectations toward the development of international initiatives, is discussed by F. Karaferye (2019). The author stresses the need to raise academic staff awareness about their role in the internationalisation process and the importance of providing appropriate support and training prior to international mobility.

A practical guide for researchers, research managers, faculty heads, and university administrators on evaluating cooperation and structuring discussions about how a university, department, or research group should approach international collaboration was published by T. Shih, A. Gaunt, and S. Ostlung (2020). At the same time, Universities UK (2022) released a guide outlining key themes from guidelines for the higher education sector concerning the management of security issues in international research and innovation.

Over the years, both the definition and the purpose of the internationalisation of higher education institutions have evolved. The approach to this process has undergone a transformation—from an inward organisational focus, through the development of internationalisation strategies, to a response to globalisation and societal expectations. Internationalisation has thus become a factor supporting the development of innovation, competitiveness, and, ultimately, contributing to the growth of the economy. Regardless of how institutions perceive the process of internationalisation, those involved in it recognise the benefits it brings.

2.2. University Activities in the Area of Internationalization

The Law on Higher Education and Science of 2018 (Journal of Laws of 2018, item 1669) distinguishes three areas of activity for academic staff: teaching, research, and organisational work. The scope of activity is determined based on the academic position held. A research academic is obliged to conduct research activities; a research and teaching academic is expected to carry out research and conduct teaching; whereas a teaching academic is required to deliver classes to students. Regardless of the position group, all academic staff members are obligated to participate in organisational activities for the benefit of the university and to continuously improve their professional competencies. Each of these areas of activity can also be related to tasks undertaken in the context of the university's international activities (Fig. 1).

The involvement of academic staff in processes related to internationalization is essential. This involvement can be direct, such as conducting teaching activities or scientific research, but also indirect, for example through participation in committees that develop internationalization strategies or in the role of advisors in building structures that support cooperation with foreign partners. The initiatives undertaken by Polish universities in the context of internationalization include a range of activities. These have been described, among others, by M. Popowska (2016) and by G. Marinori and S.B. Pina Cordona (2024).



Figure 1. Examples of tasks carried out in the area of university internationalization.

Source: own elaboration.

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The most frequently mentioned activities are: student mobility (statistics reported in the annual reports of the Perspektywy Foundation), doctoral student mobility, academic staff and administrative personnel mobility (e.g., Erasmus+ and CEEPUS programs), organization of international conferences (University of Warsaw, 2024), double degree programs (University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw, 2023), membership in international organizations and cooperation networks such as the European University Association (EUA), organization of summer schools (WSB Academy), conducting studies in foreign languages (Kozłowski University, 2025) (Fig. 2).

Moreover organization of international staff weeks (Medical University of Gdańsk, 2019), research collaboration in international teams and consortia (Gdańsk University of Technology, 2024), organization of international workshops and training sessions (Poznań University of Economics and Business, 2025), conducting MBA programs in cooperation with foreign universities (SGH Warsaw School of Economics, 2025), organization of international academic competitions or cultural festivals (Wrocław University of Science and Technology, 2025), organization of international mentoring programs (WSB Academy, 2025), international cooperation in doctoral education (University of Gdańsk Doctoral School, 2025), as well as numerous smaller initiatives aimed at integrating and promoting inclusiveness within the international academic community, which are initiated by individual universities in the form of courses or training sessions (University of Gdańsk, 2025). These activities are also the ones in which the academic teachers are involved (Fig. 2).

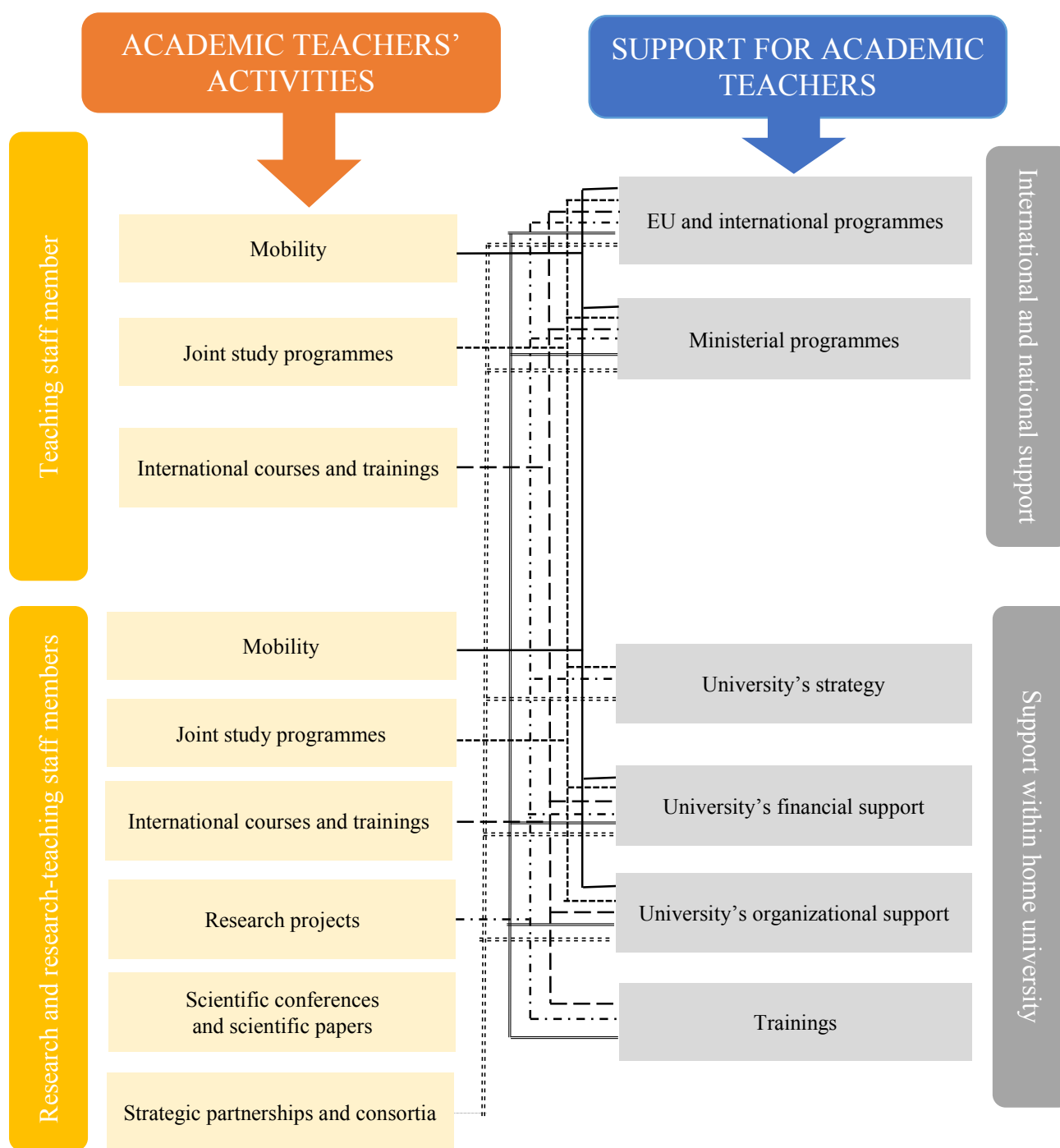


Figure 2. Academic staff activity and institutional support in the field of internationalization.

Source: own elaboration.

Polish universities also participate in programs supporting the promotion of higher education in Poland among potential international applicants within the frameworks of the Study in Poland, Study in Pomorskie, and NAWA programs.

2.3. Limitations to University Internationalization

Internationalization, like any process, can encounter various types of limitations. Among the most common organizational and technical constraints, described by authors such as A. Płoszaj (2023) and M.E. Bakay (2023), are language barriers resulting from an insufficient number of administrative staff and lecturers fluent in English, an inadequate offer of courses taught in foreign languages, insufficient institutional support for foreigners manifested in the lack or poor quality of international offices, complex administrative procedures, as well as infrastructural problems related to limited dormitory spaces and inadequate digital infrastructure supporting, for example, e-learning. The amendment to the Act on Foreigners and certain other laws introduced in May 2025 imposes additional administrative duties on universities related to servicing students and academic staff coming to Polish universities, as well as limits on the number of foreign students admitted.

The second group of limitations includes financial barriers, as mentioned by the Scientific Policy Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science (2021) and J. Mananay, J.M.P. Sanchez, H. Boholano, and M.Y. Beltran (2024). These include insufficient funding from the state budget, lack of stable financing sources such as foreign projects, higher costs of teaching in a foreign language due to the need to translate materials, double degree programs, or the necessity to hire foreign staff, which entails additional expenses. Moreover, high living costs for international students may discourage them from studying in Poland despite relatively low tuition fees.

Socio-cultural barriers, discussed by authors like J.J. Prieto-Gutierrez (2024), may relate to the low openness of academic communities to cultural diversity, lack of interest among some lecturers in teaching courses in a foreign language, or the significant workload of academic staff in research or organizational duties. On the student side, limiting factors may include integration difficulties stemming from cultural or language barriers, isolation, as well as the relatively low attractiveness of Poland as a study destination. The experiences of international students in this area have been described by E. Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, A. Szczapaniak-Kozak, and H. Lankiewicz (2022). An analysis of the internationalization of higher education in Europe identifying challenges such as cultural differences, language barriers, and tensions between economic and educational goals was conducted by S. Robson and M. Wihlborg (2019). The authors emphasize the need for a meaningful approach to internationalization that promotes intercultural dialogue and social engagement.

A comprehensive analysis of the limitations faced by Polish universities in the internationalization process was carried out by ECORYS Sp. z o.o. (2020) in a report commissioned by the National Centre for Research and Development. This report summarized the implementation of Priority Axis III of the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development (PO WER) – Higher Education for Economy and Development.

However, as mentioned earlier, individual universities demonstrate varying levels of internationalization and may identify different factors limiting their international functioning. R.H. Neale, A. Spark, and J. Carter (2018) pointed out that regardless of the limitations, a high level of internationalization results from the commitment to key strategic priorities such as curriculum and student mobility programs, the European Union and international staff and students, cooperation with international organizations, academic and social integration of students and staff, as well as coordination of practices and processes.

The implementation of the internationalization process at universities should be subject to continuous monitoring, especially regarding limitations that pose barriers to the planned activities. Proper identification of these barriers may enable timely and appropriate steps to eliminate them. Additionally, it can serve as a starting point for reviewing the entire internationalization strategy and the resources allocated to its implementation.

3. Research Methodology

The aim of this article is to assess the attitudes, behaviors, and needs of academic teachers regarding internationalization and to provide recommendations for university authorities on actions that support international exchange. At the same time, several research questions were posed: 1) To what extent are academic teachers interested in participating in various forms of international exchange? 2) What needs do academic teachers report in the area of internationalization? 3) What limitations affect the level of internationalization? And 4) What is the level of academic teachers' engagement in internationalization activities? The research findings may serve as a valuable source of insight for university authorities and units responsible for internationalization processes.

This article employs a triangulation of research methods, including a critical literature review, the desk research method, and the diagnostic survey method. The literature review drew upon the Direct Science and Web of Science databases, resulting in the identification of 76 academic articles and reports related to the internationalization of higher education institutions. The primary research was conducted in January 2023 using a diagnostic survey administered via the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) technique.

A questionnaire was prepared, consisting of 9 closed-ended questions that addressed, among other things: the assessment of the general level of internationalization; the current level of internationalization at the university in the areas of education and scientific activity; the evaluation of actions undertaken by the university in various functional areas to support internationalization; the identification of internationalization activities in which academic staff had participated over the past ten years or would be willing to participate in the near future; and the factors limiting their involvement in internationalization.

Some questions in the survey used a 5-point Likert scale to allow respondents to more precisely express their attitudes and opinions on the topics examined. Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate the perceived benefits of increasing the level of internationalization at their university, as well as their expectations in this regard. They were also given the opportunity to provide open-ended comments concerning the internationalization of the institution at which they are employed.

The collected data were subjected to both qualitative (descriptive) and quantitative (statistical) analysis using MS Excel and Statistica 13.0 software.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 315 individuals were invited to participate in the study—that is, all employees holding research, research-and-teaching, or teaching positions at the examined higher education institution (Tab. 1). Ultimately, 148 respondents took part in the survey, representing 47% of the total invited. Among them, 9% held the title of professor, 22% had a postdoctoral degree (doktor habilitowany), the largest group—50%—held a PhD, and 19% held a master's or engineering degree (Tab. 2). The identity of the institution has been anonymized, as the research was not intended as a dedicated report or expert analysis, but rather focused on assessing the attitudes and engagement of academic staff toward the process of internationalization.

Table 1.

Respondent structure by academic qualifications and professional titles

Academic degree or title	Number	Percentage
Professor	13	9%
Associate professor	32	22%
Assistant professor	74	50%
Master's degree/engineer	29	19%

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2.

Respondent structure by employment group

Position	Number	Percentage
Research	13	9%
Research and teaching	113	76%
Teaching	22	15%

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the survey conducted among academic teachers showed that their highest level of activity concerns participation in international scientific conferences as a speaker presenting a paper in English, as indicated by 69% of respondents, and conducting classes in English in Poland for students (e.g., Erasmus+ program), confirmed by 45% of respondents. Academic staff activity is also evident in participation in expert activities for foreign entities (40% of all respondents), participation in the preparation of R&D offers in English (34%), and participation in the implementation of scientific and research projects (31%). Additionally, 32% of respondents indicated their internationalization activity in the area of co-authorship of scientific publications with researchers from abroad (Fig. 3).

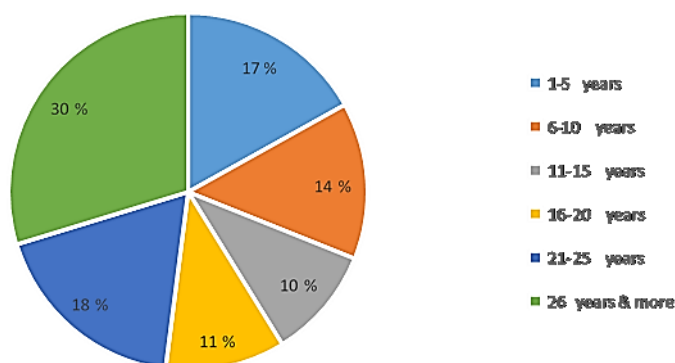


Figure 3. Respondent structure by years of professional experience.

Source: own elaboration.

Unfortunately, still relatively few academic teachers (14%) take part in the preparation of externally funded scientific or research, development, or teaching projects in partnership with external stakeholders, as well as in scientific and research internships at universities or research institutions abroad (14%). Furthermore, only 11% declared participation in Erasmus+ Staff Teaching Mobility, and just 2% reported mobility to foreign universities to conduct classes in English (outside the Erasmus+ program). Only a small percentage of academic teachers (7%) are involved in development or teaching projects financed from external sources in partnership with foreign entities. Other forms of activity, such as providing services for foreign guests visiting the university, training in multiculturalism, intercultural communication, and cultural differences, are rather incidental. Nearly 5% of respondents stated that they had not undertaken any internationalization-related activity at their place of employment (Fig. 4).

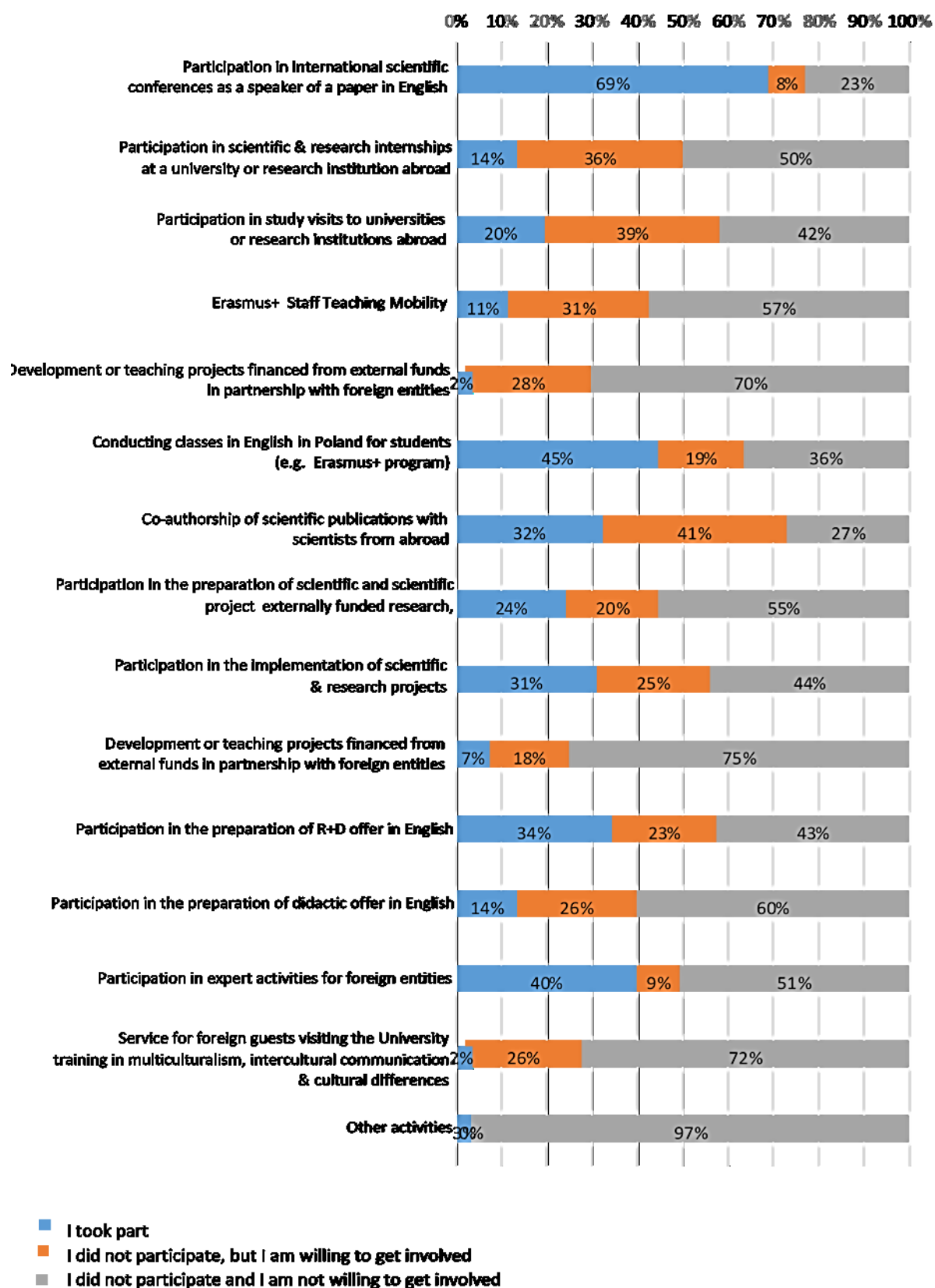


Figure 4. Internationalization activities of University in which respondents have been involved over the past 10 years.

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents were also asked about their expectations toward university authorities regarding support for internationalization efforts. The majority indicated the need for language courses for staff (71%), which confirms the existence of language barriers. A significant portion also emphasized the necessity of greater financial support for international mobility (62% of all respondents) and the introduction of a motivation system. Another important aspect identified by respondents was the need for the university to offer educational programs in English (51%) and to develop double-degree programmes (26%).

Moreover, respondents believed that the university's promotion on international markets is insufficient and that efforts in this area should be strengthened (48%), including the preparation of professional promotional materials in English (36%) (Fig. 5).

Most respondents indicated that the key to advancing internationalization is the development of an attractive educational offer in English by the university, along with the simplification of admission procedures for international students. Equally important is the provision of appropriate support for foreigners, for example through the establishment of a Welcome Center (as indicated by 37% of respondents), as well as through language and cultural support and the creation of favorable employment conditions for international staff, including streamlined administrative procedures. These measures are intended to enhance the university's appeal to both international students and academic staff.

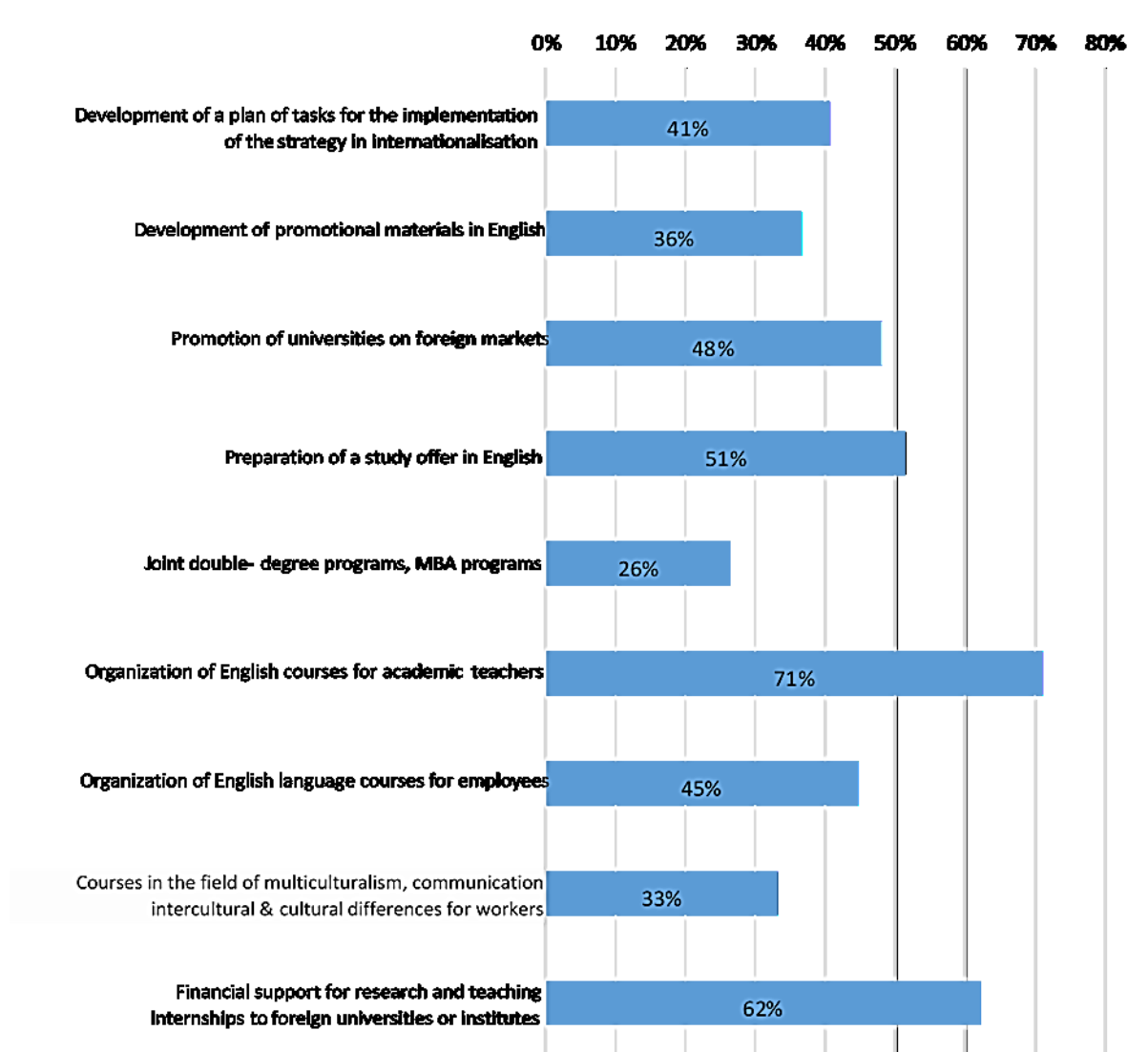


Figure 5. University actions expected by respondents in the area of internationalization – Part 1.

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents also emphasized the need for project support in securing international grants (mentioned by 53% of respondents). Although various activities are being carried out at most universities under the ERASMUS+ program, respondents noted that the existing offerings fall short of actual needs (as indicated by 45% of respondents), since the demand for mobility opportunities often exceeds the number of available placements (Fig. 6).

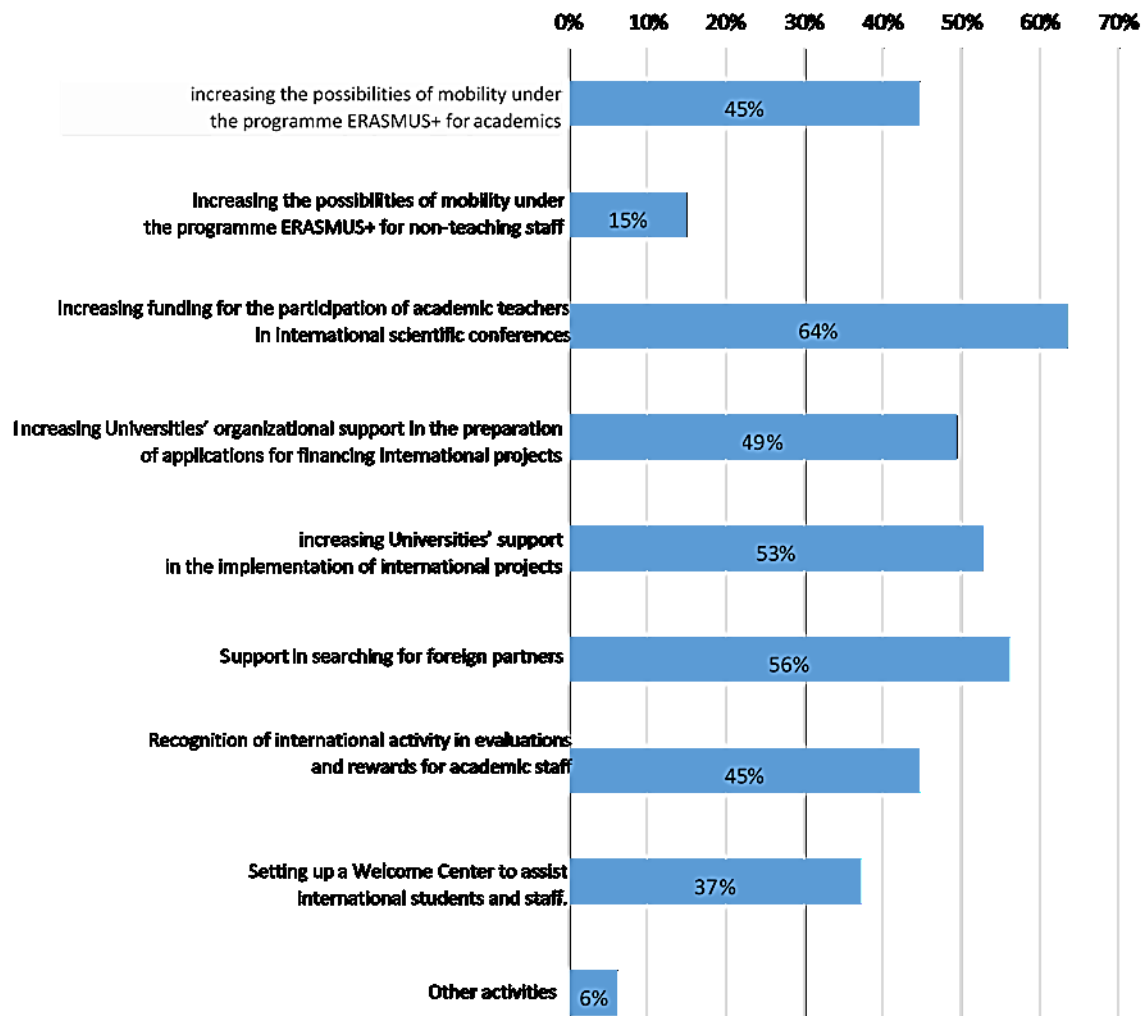


Figure 6. University actions expected by respondents in the area of internationalization – Part 2.

Source: own elaboration.

Respondents were also asked to share their views on the factors that hinder or limit their involvement in the university's internationalization process. In their responses, participants emphasized the lack of a systemic approach to internationalization at the institution, which they attributed to insufficient organizational and financial support from university authorities for international activities (as noted by 64% of respondents), as well as a lack of genuine engagement from unit leadership in international efforts. According to the respondents, most initiatives are typically bottom-up, driven by individual academic staff members themselves.

The only exception identified was the ERASMUS+ program, in which the university provides administrative and financial support for teaching mobility. The situation appears less favorable when it comes to other forms of international activity, as the university reportedly lacks a structured offer for international collaboration. Respondents also highlighted the insufficient financial support for international engagement, particularly in the areas of participation in research fellowships or visiting professorships.

Furthermore, a lack of financial incentives for engaging in international activities—including teaching in English—was pointed out as a major barrier. Another serious issue identified by the respondents was the logistical burden and heavy teaching loads borne by academic staff. Internationalization is often perceived as an additional, unpaid responsibility rather than an integral part of academic work.

In addition, many staff members struggle with English proficiency, and the support offered by the university in this regard is sporadic and short-term, whereas a more systemic approach is needed. Respondents also cited administrative difficulties and excessive bureaucracy related to the process of concluding international cooperation agreements. Finally, it was noted that a significant portion of academic staff is of advanced age, which also poses a barrier to the development of internationalization due to limited mobility (Fig. 7).

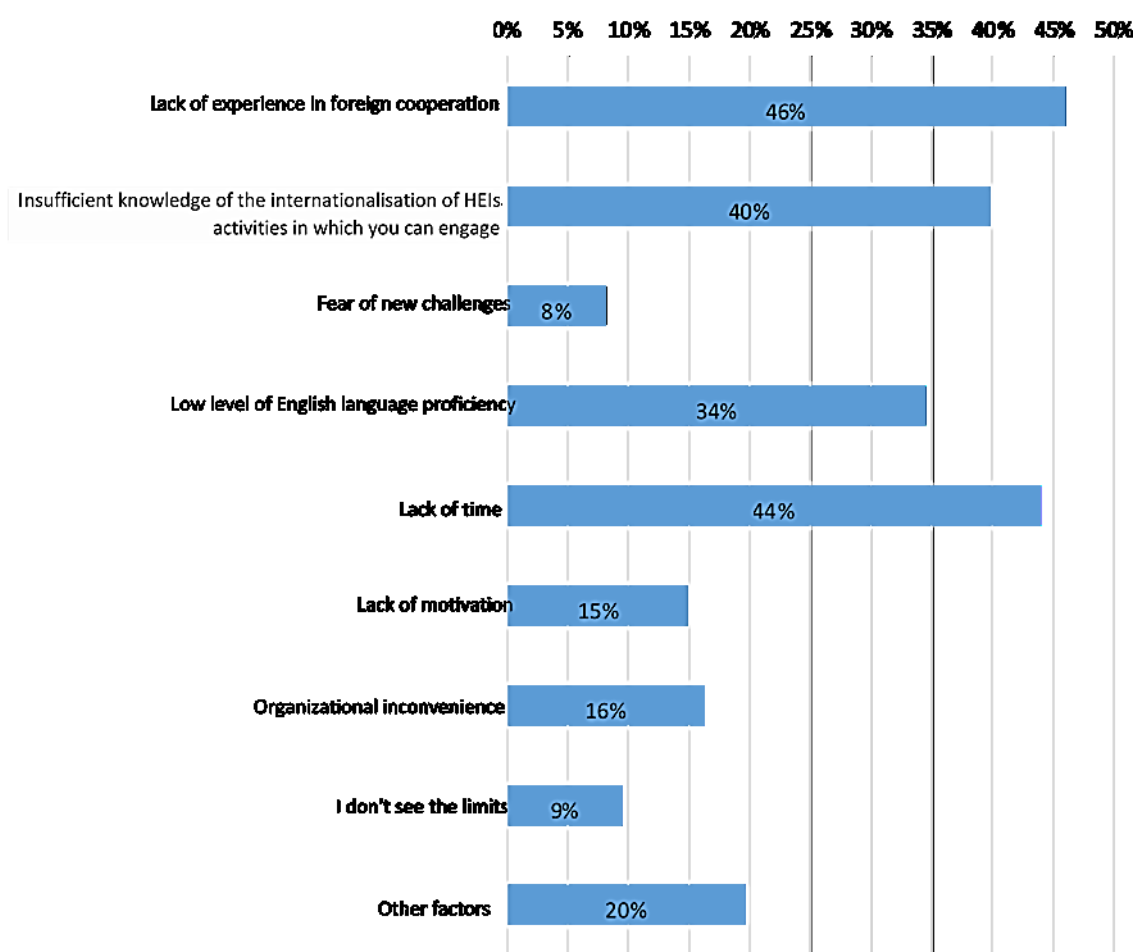


Figure 7. Factors limiting the involvement of respondents in activities related to internationalization.

Source: own elaboration.

An important research question concerned the level of interest among academic staff in participating in various forms of international exchange. The study results revealed that over 50% of all respondents reported a lack of engagement and reluctance to participate in different internationalization activities. The highest levels of inactivity were observed in the areas of establishing cooperation in the development or implementation of teaching projects with

foreign entities (75%) and in participating in services for foreign guests, intercultural communication, and similar activities (72%).

Surprisingly, more than half of the respondents (57%) also expressed little interest in participating in Erasmus+ Staff Teaching Mobility, as well as in externally funded research or teaching projects (55%). Few respondents reported involvement in internships at foreign universities (50%). Slightly lower levels of reluctance were observed regarding participation in the implementation of scientific projects (44%), conducting classes in English in Poland (36%), and taking part in study visits abroad (42%). The least reluctance was shown in relation to participation in international conferences as a speaker in English—only 23% of respondents were disengaged or uninterested—as well as in co-authorship with foreign scientists (27%).

Respondents were also asked to assess the overall level of internationalization in scientific and research activities within their unit, using a five-point Likert scale. The results showed that only 16% of all respondents rated the level of internationalization as high or very high, while as many as 33% assessed it as low or very low. This may point to a general shortfall in international collaboration in research and development. Notably, a significant portion of respondents (15%) had no opinion on the matter, which may reflect either a lack of personal experience or limited awareness of such activities.

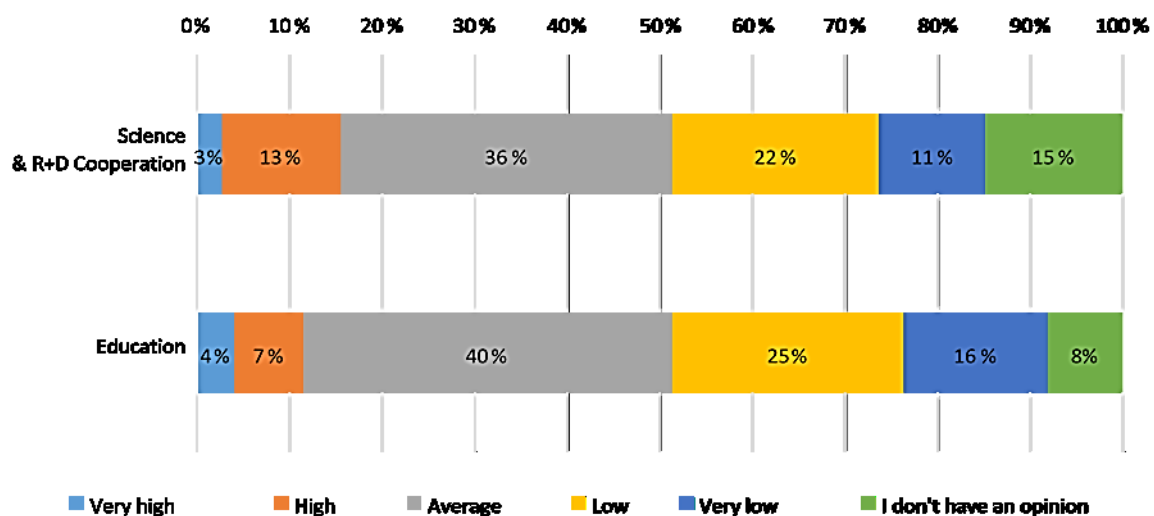


Figure 8. Assessment of the level of internationalization at the university where respondents are employed.

Source: own elaboration.

In turn, when asked to evaluate the level of internationalization in educational activities, only 11% of respondents rated it as high or very high, whereas over 41% assessed it as low or very low. This may be due to a limited number of courses offered in English, a low proportion of international students, or limited teaching mobility. A considerable share of respondents (40%) evaluated the level of educational internationalization as average (Fig. 8).

5. Conclusions

The barriers identified by the respondents also concerned the university as an organizational context. Interestingly, the persistence of old operational patterns - such as a lack of experience in international collaboration or lack of time - was among the most frequently mentioned barriers to the internationalization process, alongside the financial constraints.

Although limited proficiency in English was not cited as one of the leading barriers, it ranked first on the list of expectations, indicating a strong demand for language support. Also relatively high on the list was the insufficient knowledge among academic staff about the internationalization of higher education institutions and the types of activities they could engage in. This may reflect a lack of involvement in internationalization processes, which are crucial to the long-term development of the university, but also a perceived lack of adequate administrative support. The limited engagement of staff may, in turn, result from insufficient communication, a lack of clear explanation of the benefits and risks, as well as real obstacles - such as excessive workloads.

The study was conducted among academic teachers at only one university. Its results should not be generalized or applied to all Polish higher education institutions. Moreover, at the institution under study, faculty members participated in only a portion of the internationalization activities identified in the cited literature. Only slightly under half of the individuals targeted by the study participated in it.

At the same time, the presented results made it possible to identify areas whose strengthening and development could enable university authorities to intensify the internationalization process and engage a larger group of academic teachers in its implementation. Eliminating the described limitations would enhance the university's staff potential, which in turn could lead to improved quality of education and research, as well as increased competitiveness of the university as a place to study and conduct scientific research.

The surveyed academic teachers emphasized the average level of internationalization culture at the institutional level. They assessed the degree of internationalization in the areas of research and education as average or low, which should serve as a clear signal to university authorities that more intensive efforts in this area are necessary. University leadership should also consider the relatively high proportion of respondents who have not participated in any form of internationalization and do not intend to do so in the future. This may reflect a lack of motivation, limited awareness of the potential benefits, or concerns related to language, formal procedures, and other challenges. It may also indicate a low sense of agency and insufficient institutional support from the university. Respondents pointed out that the most common forms of international engagement among academic staff are participation in international scientific conferences and publishing in foreign academic journals.

The conducted research allowed for the formulation of the following conclusions:

- The development of university internationalization should begin with the creation of a dedicated internationalization strategy, including specific systemic solutions and clearly defined sources of funding.
- A key stage in the internationalization process is the development of a comprehensive educational and research offer targeted at foreign audiences, along with the planning of promotional campaigns in international markets.
- Another important phase involves formal and administrative preparation, i.e., the establishment of recruitment procedures for international students and academic staff, as well as the simplification of processes related to the signing of cooperation agreements and reception conditions in Poland.
- University authorities should take action to educate staff in order to improve their foreign language proficiency (as indicated by 51% of respondents) and to raise awareness of the available forms of engagement in international exchange (mentioned by 40% of respondents).
- It is essential to introduce motivation systems and provide organizational and financial support, particularly for those staff members who are still inactive in the area of internationalization.
- Universities should address the issue of funding for international mobility of academic staff (as indicated by 71% of respondents), including full or partial funding for participation in research fellowships, study tours, international conferences, and visiting professorships.
- Staff also expect the university to provide support in the preparation of international project applications (as indicated by 62% of respondents).
- Furthermore, respondents emphasized the importance of increasing the number of international students (noted by 56% of respondents) and engaging international faculty in both teaching and research activities (mentioned by 53%) as key elements for strengthening institutional internationalization.
- In order to enhance staff engagement in internationalization efforts, universities should address the issue of work overload and introduce incentive systems, as 44% of respondents identified excessive workload and lack of time as major barriers.

The greatest expectations expressed by the respondents concern the practical presence of internationalization at the university, including a greater number of courses taught in English, as well as an increase in the number of international students and staff.

In summary, the results of the study clearly indicate the need for a range of improvements in the university's approach to internationalization. According to the academic staff, the current state of internationalization is inconsistent, insufficiently supported, and lacking a systemic structure. University authorities should particularly focus on increasing staff interest in participating in international mobility programs by implementing support mechanisms and

introducing appropriate organizational, financial, and administrative solutions. Respondents tend to view internationalization as an additional burden rather than an integral part of academic work. Therefore, it is essential to introduce systematic support and meaningful incentives for academic staff to reduce their sense of isolation in international activities. University leadership should reflect on how to change the perception among academic staff that internationalization efforts are low-reward and carry high organizational risk. Support for researchers should focus on facilitating mobility, encouraging participation in international projects, and recognizing their efforts in performance evaluations and incentive systems.

6. Recommendations

In order to effectively support the internationalization process at universities, a set of coordinated actions may be implemented across three key areas: policy changes, training programs, and administrative reforms.

First of all it is recommended to develop and implement a comprehensive internationalization strategy which would be closely aligned with the institution's development goals. Such a strategy must include clearly defined performance indicators, quantitative and qualitative targets as well as designated sources of funding.

It is also important to introduce motivation systems and to include international engagement as a component of the academic staff performance evaluation and promotion criteria.

The university should launch regular training programs. These should include the development of language competencies - particularly in academic English, as well as training on intercultural communication and teaching in international environments.

Worth considering is also the introduction of changes in administrative support area. In particular, procedures related to international cooperation, such as signing agreements, recruiting international students and staff, and supporting foreign guests. These processes shall be simplified and carried out with significant support from administrative staff. A recommended solution would be to establish a Welcome Center that provides comprehensive support to both staff and students.

Moreover, it is important to strengthen organizational and substantive support for employees planning to participate in international projects, especially in the preparation and submission of grant applications. Staff also pointed to the need to increase the number of international students and to involve more international faculty members in both research and teaching activities.

Finally, it should be emphasized that reducing excessive workload and better communication regarding the benefits of internationalization can significantly increase academic staff engagement in this area. Therefore, the introduction of effective incentive

systems and improved internal communication should be integral elements of the university's strategy.

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