



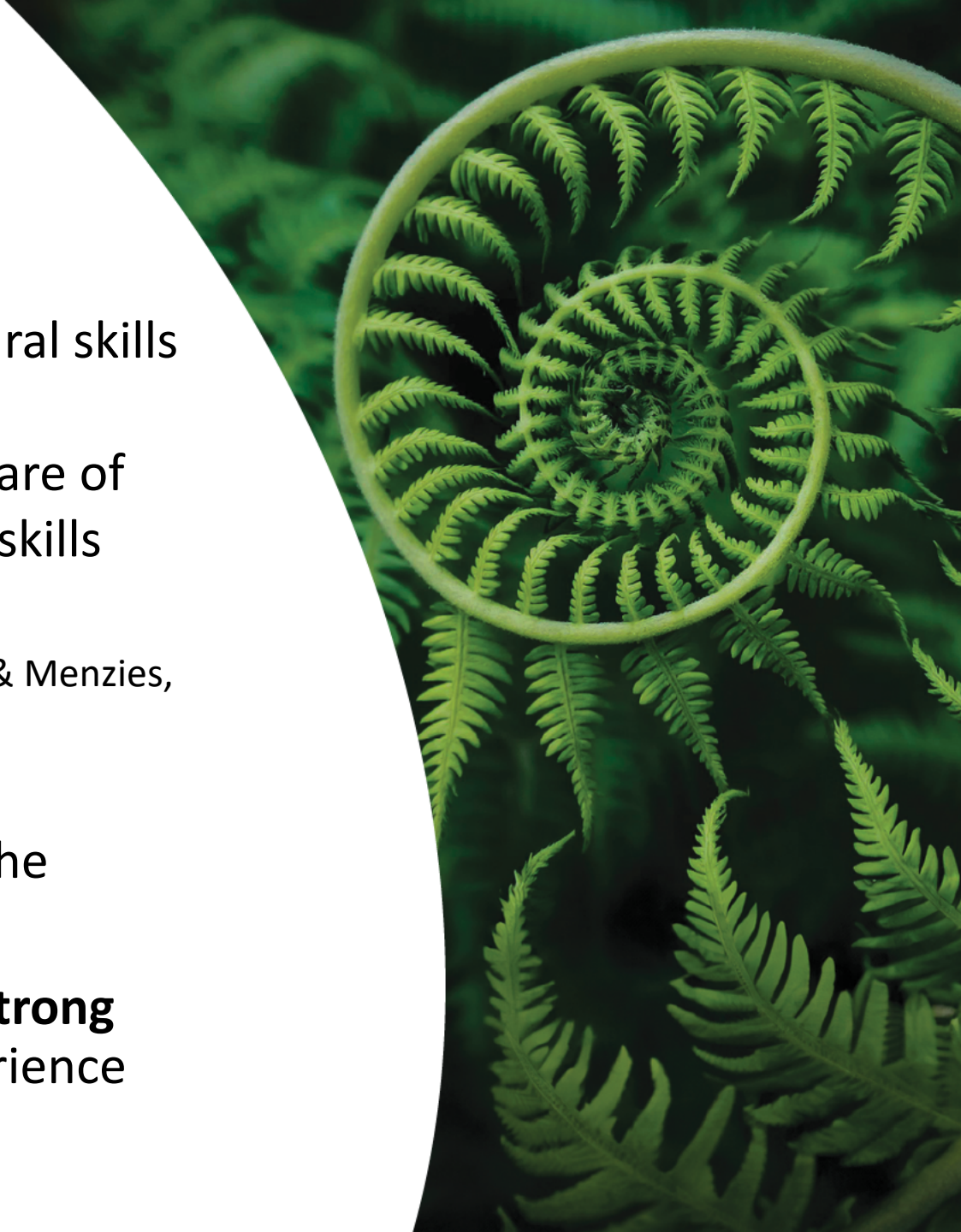
Distance Learning: An Asset for International Students' Accessibility to Higher Education ?

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Context

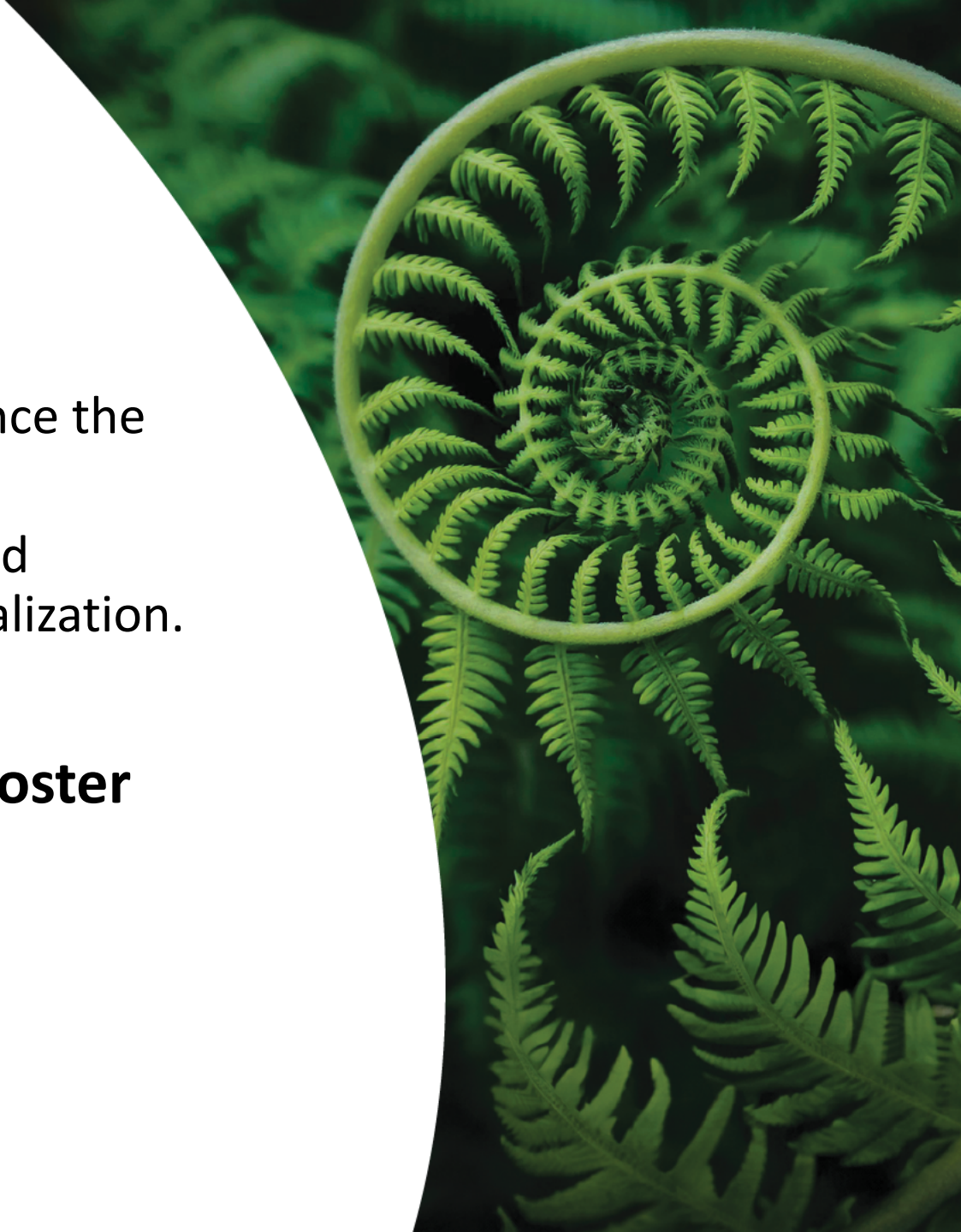
- **Globalization of economies:** essential intercultural skills (Gertsen, 1990).
- **Studying abroad:** an opportunity to become aware of cultural differences, develop new interpersonal skills and ideas, and be better prepared for one's professional future (Christoffersen, 2013; Ogden-Barnes & Menzies, 2016).
- **In practice:** lack of preparation for the stay and difficulties integrating with local students limit the expected benefits (Papic, 2015).
- Only a **minority of students (often those with strong economic and cultural capital)** are able to experience physical international mobility (Ballatore, 2017).



Questioning

- Development of distance education accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Distance learning promotes access to education and therefore potentially contributes to its internationalization.

⇒ **To what extent does distance education foster the international mobility of students?**



Project Presentation

VIRMOBS

Virtual mobilities of international students:
toward a new model of internationalization in
higher education ?

AN INTERNATIONAL TEAM
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TARGET AUDIENCE

Students who are not permanent residents of their host academic country and who study primarily online using digital technologies, with the goal of obtaining degrees (degree mobility) or academic credits (credit mobility).

For more information :

virmobs.omeka.net

4 SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVES

1

Provide new theoretical perspectives to understand the dynamics of virtual mobility

2

Analyze the implementation of virtual mobility policies at the institutional level in the three countries

3

Identify the stakeholders involved in the development of virtual mobility programs

4

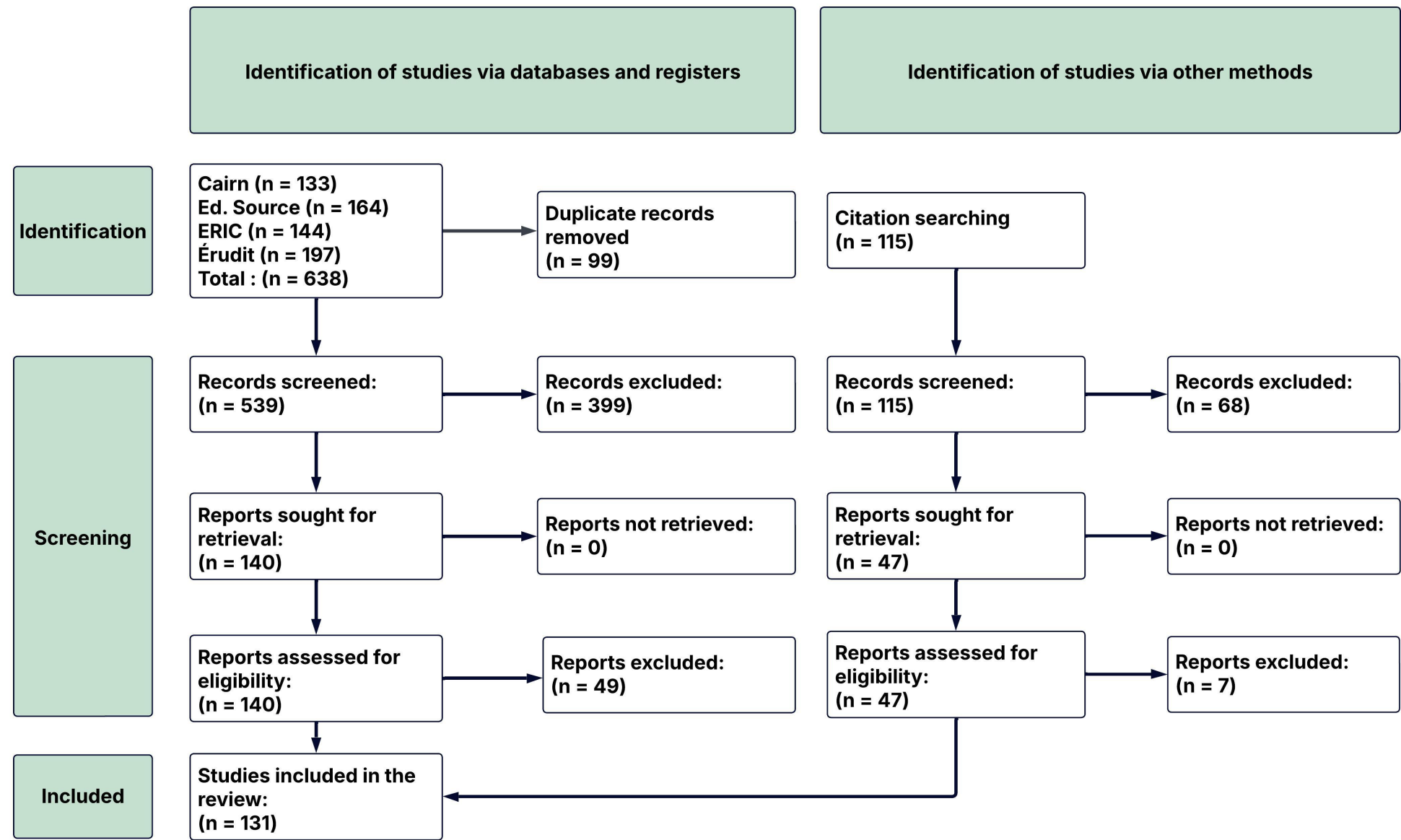
Examine the characteristics and experiences of international students enrolled in online programs

Sustainability and inclusion of educational innovations
Impact on inequalities (gender, race, social, North–South)
Digital divides

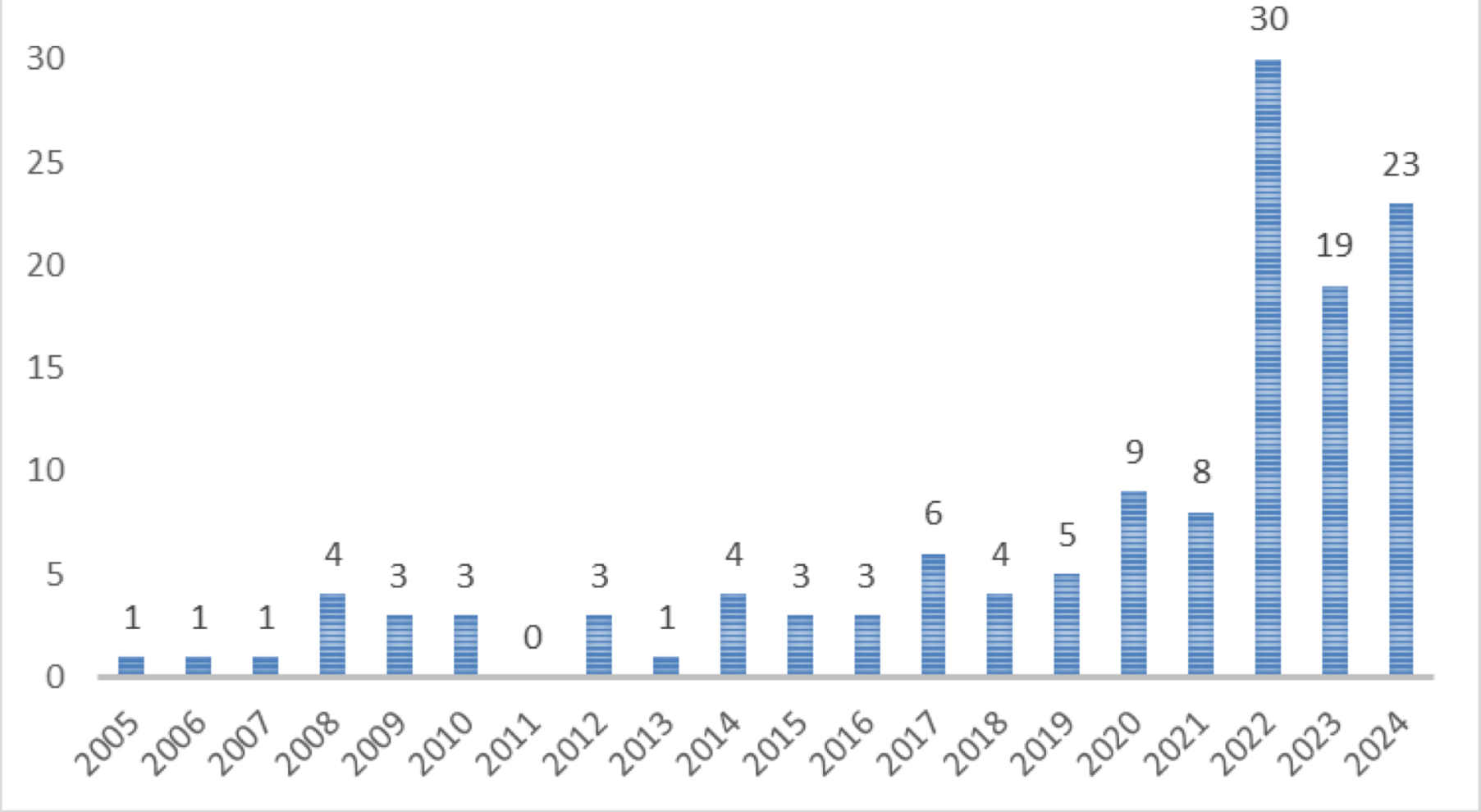
Contributions to debates on Eurocentrism and cultural imperialism in higher education

Methodology: Systematic Review Approach

- Protocol: EPPI Centre + PRISMA flowchart. Cross-analysis with social justice and pedagogical frameworks.



The Rise of Research on Internationalization in Higher Education





Accessibility Gains

- Virtual mobility significantly broadens access to higher education enhancing equity of opportunity for students facing financial, geographic, or caregiving constraint (Breaden et al., 2024; Çalıkoğlu et al., 2024; Rajagopal et al., 2020).

“The various continents and countries are much more accessible now”
(Baralt et al., 2022, p. 180)

- Asynchronous and low-cost formats support flexibility and inclusion, especially for women, first-generation, and racialized students (Aquino et al., 2023; Baralt et al., 2022; J. Lee et al., 2022).

👉 *Virtual mobility increases access, but access alone does not equal inclusion.*



Persistent Inequalities

- Digital and structural inequalities persist.

“In Ghana, we often experience bad Internet connections... electricity outages affect my participation.” (Kumi-Yeboah et al., 2024, p. 900)

- Connectivity costs, unstable electricity, and lack of institutional support limit participation across Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia.

“Leveraging ICT integration must go hand in hand with institutional commitment to enable digital equity.” (Ferreira Santos, 2024, p. 819)

👉 *Material access is available, but not equally usable.*

Intercultural Inclusion

- COIL experiences can effectively **enhance intercultural sensitivity and competencies**. BUT:
- Are such benefits specific to COIL programs or extend to other forms of virtual mobility ?
- **Linguistic barriers** can significantly limit participation and interaction in virtual exchanges (Helm, 2020, Poe, 2022).
- **Difficulty of fostering a genuine sense of belonging and community** among participants remains a persistent challenge in online intercultural learning contexts.



Limits of Intercultural Inclusion

- Many students gain awareness but report limited reciprocity or superficial exchanges.

“Interactions were appreciated but felt superficial or imbalanced.”
(Appiah-Kubi & Annan, 2020)

- Students from non-Western contexts often face linguistic hierarchies and epistemic marginalization + Lack of institutional coordination.

“We feel like guests in Northern-led online classrooms.” (Lee & Mao, 2024)

- Without embodied or intentionally designed interaction, belonging and agency remain weak.

“Students were not provided with the same advising or support services.” (Enkhtur & Li, 2024, pp. 84–85)

👉 *Inclusion without recognition becomes symbolic rather than transformative.*



Discussion: Emerging alternatives

- **Two Modalities, Different Logics** (Brassier-Rodrigues, 2022)
 - Virtual mobility: immediacy, compressed interaction, digital proximity.
 - Physical mobility: immersion, sensory engagement, embodied experience.
 - 📍 Each format meets different pedagogical, economic, and personal needs. Scholars call for a complementary model (Ashida & Ishizaka, 2022, Alami et al., 2022)
- 🌐 **Promising practices include:**
 - North–South co-teaching and shared curricula foster reciprocity and shared leadership (Bégin-Caouette et al., 2023)
 - Bilingual COIL programs and VR-based exchanges promote collaborative and reflexive learning (Baralt et al., 2022)
 - Participatory, decolonial pedagogy integrating local knowledges strengthens the legitimacy of other epistemologies (Ferreira Santos, 2024)



Concluding Remarks

- Virtual mobility enhances access but without recognition and agency, inclusion remains symbolic.
- Transformation requires converting access into capabilities and agency.

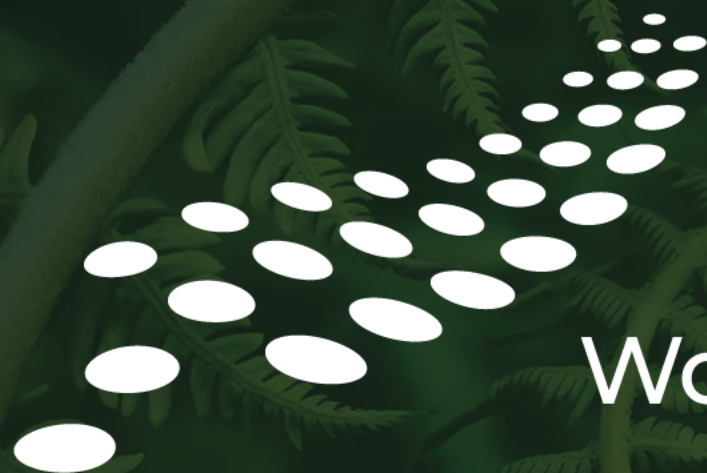
Closing question

How can IaD move from symbolic participation to genuine equity ?

Pathways forward ?

- Institutional equity audits.
- Inclusive technologies and targeted support.
- Better recognition of non-Western knowledge/culture.





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Discussion: From Redistribution to Recognition

- Redistributive measures such as subsidized technologies are important but seem insufficient.
 - Drawing on Fraser (2009) and Sen (1999):
 - Redistribution: equal access to infrastructure and technology
 - Recognition: valuing diverse epistemologies and languages
 - Representation: equitable participation in governance and curriculum
- “Representation cannot be reduced to mere presence but must entail substantive voice.” (Pitkin, 1972; Lombardo & Meier, 2018)*
- Students often remain visible yet peripheral, highlighting the need for structural recognition and agency (Aquino et al., 2023).

👉 *Equity requires both access and recognition.*

Discussion: Emerging alternatives

- Promising practices include:
 - North–South co-teaching and shared curricula (Bégin-Caouette et al., 2023)
 - Bilingual COIL programs and VR-based exchanges fostering reciprocal learning (Baralt et al., 2022)
 - Participatory, decolonial pedagogy integrating local knowledges (Ferreira Santos, 2024)
- *Virtualization should be seen not as a workaround but as a legitimate modality of global learning.*
- Institutional responsibility, through equity audits, co-design, and faculty training, remains central (Alami et al., 2022).

👉 *How can Internationalization at a Distance move from symbolic participation to genuine equity and justice?*